

I agree and I join each of the gentlemen who has spoken tonight in commending our President and our leadership in saying, the time has come to address this. We have to rein the spending in because we need to know what we are spending, where it is going, and what the American taxpayers' dollars are being used for.

Mr. WICKER. Well, let me just say, and these will be my final remarks and then I will yield back to the two of my colleagues for whatever they might want to say; I just look forward to working with my three fellow Representatives who have spoken on this Special Order tonight, and with the President, to say that we can be more diligent in the way that we spend the taxpayers' money, we can be more efficient, and we can continue in our effort to root out waste, fraud, and abuse in our government.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi for joining us tonight.

I yield to my colleague from Texas for any final remarks that he may have.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the Congress should approach Federal budgeting in a more businesslike manner. I, too, do not understand how underperforming Federal agencies or programs can continue to receive funding year after year without being held to account. In the real world, a business owner who manages his or her own business this way would soon find themselves out of business. Instead, Washington seems to reward that behavior.

Mr. Speaker, our President has proposed a budget that will serve as a good starting point for Members of this Congress as we begin to craft a budget that respects and honors the wishes of the hard-working American taxpayer. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in crafting solutions, and not just blind opposition, to wasteful programs that hamper our Federal Government.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas for joining us this evening.

Mr. Speaker, before I came to Congress, I had the opportunity to represent Tennessee's 23rd State senate district. While I was in that body, I had worked on government reform issues and came up with a plan that would have called for across-the-board spending cuts. I certainly believed that State agencies could get in there and find waste, fraud, and abuse within their operations, and they could cut it and better serve the taxpayers of my State.

Of course, at the time that I came up with my plan, the 5 Percent Solution, it was criticized by so many as being too harsh. The word was, well, people will not accept that kind of accountability. A few years later, many of

those reductions were actually put in place. And do my colleagues know what? Things started working a little bit better in Tennessee.

Today, we see some of that same press in Tennessee calling the taxpayers and the President's plan, Congress' plan far too harsh. I read some of those headlines earlier. But I do not think that some of the media, the liberal media has been paying attention to what has been taking place in some of our States.

According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, in fiscal year 2002, 26 States implemented across-the-board spending cuts, 15 States downsized State government employment, and 13 States streamlined government programs. We hear all the time that our State governments are great laboratories for new programs and new projects and creative government solutions, and this should be a lesson to us here at the Federal level, because it is not impossible to root out waste, fraud, and abuse. It is our responsibility to do so.

□ 2200

Here are some of the headlines that we have found of what is going on in some of the States. In Alaska where Governor McCaskey proposed cutting 21 State programs and 200 jobs; in Colorado where the legislature passed an \$809 million budget-balancing package which eliminated some 200 State employees.

We are looking forward, Mr. Speaker, to working with the leadership in rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 418, REAL ID ACT OF 2005

Mr. SESSIONS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-3) on the resolution (H. Res. 71) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 418) to establish and rapidly implement regulations for State driver's license and identification document security standards, to prevent terrorists from abusing the asylum laws of the United States, to unify terrorism-related grounds for inadmissibility and removal, and to ensure expeditious construction of the San Diego border fence, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

IRAQ WATCH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, for some time now, several of my colleagues and myself have come to the floor of the House to address issues surrounding

our national policy in Iraq, and tonight we intend to have a few comments in that regard, particularly in regard to the budget and how the budget refers to our ongoing efforts in Iraq. And I was thinking about that in combination with the President's suggested budget the other day.

That same day I was looking at the President's budget, I was reading a story about 3 GIs who were walking through a town in central Iraq, and they were trying to alert people about essentially the polling activity and the election activity that was going to go on, but they knew they were in a very hostile environment when they were doing so. And a group of them, about nine soldiers were walking through an area, and they were just sort of handing out leaflets to folks about the election activity to let them know where they could vote and what kind of security was going to be provided, and a shot rang out. The leader of the platoon was shot and went down, and they immediately started to receive fire from all points of the compass.

The thing that struck me is that it said what immediately happened is two of the soldiers who were near the fellow who was shot immediately, instead of taking cover, jumped up and sort of literally sort of shielded the injured GI with themselves as they returned fire. That is just one of the many acts of heroism that our troops have been involved with in Iraq.

What it made me think about was, to ask the question frankly, whether back home we are matching the responsibility and the values and the heroism that are going on in Iraq. Because whatever you think about the Iraq policy, and I voted against the Iraq war. I thought the President's assertion that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction was overstated, that his assertion that Saddam was responsible for September 11 was inaccurate, and I voted against the war. But, nonetheless, all of us respect what our GIs, Marines, and other service personnel are doing in Iraq.

And the question I was just thinking about is whether or not their courage and responsibility and the values, American values they are displaying in Iraq are sort of met on the domestic side here in Washington, D.C., particularly in regard to the budget that this administration has just proposed to the people in the U.S. Congress.

I was thinking about how you would test the budget that the President has proposed against the values that we are seeing by our troops in Iraq. And in thinking about it, it became pretty clear to me that there are some real questions about that, about whether this budget really is up to snuff and up to the level of character that we have seen of our people in Iraq.

Let me give the first example that comes to mind. We now have literally

thousands of our sons and daughters, husband and wives coming home injured from Iraq, some very, very seriously. In fact, one of the most disturbing things about this war is, because of our excellent medical care, we are actually having people come back from Iraq with more devastating injuries than other wars because we have been successful in saving lives. But people are coming back with very, very debilitating injuries. And they are coming back to a system that we would like to see is eminently successful in treating them, the veterans health care system.

The first question I think we ought to ask about the President's budget is does the President's budget in the veterans health care system meet the heroism and the commitment and the sacrifice that our troops have put on the line in Iraq?

So when I looked at the President's budget I was absolutely flabbergasted to see what the budget proposal from this administration has in mind for our injured people coming home from Iraq. Now, one would think that an administration that took our country into war in Iraq, sent our sons and daughters into combat, knew they were coming back by the thousands with missing arms, shattered faces, difficult trauma to deal with, one would sort of think that the budget would rush to their aid and embrace them with the arms of Americans who so much have embraced our troops and their spirits and their prayers since the war began.

One would think that the spirit that I saw at an old car wash being organized in Redmond, Washington that people had to send money and gifts to troops to help them through their trials, one would think that that same spirit would be imbued in the budget put forth by the President. I must sadly report that in looking at the President's budget, this budget stiffs our heroes coming back from Iraq. It cuts their benefits. It increases what veterans have to pay to get medical care they should have for free. It reduces our national commitment to veterans in meaningful ways. And I can reach no other conclusion than that the budget falls well short of our national commitment to our veterans.

This President who started a war in Iraq, a war that has caused such debilitating injuries, has proposed to make our veterans coming home from battle pay more out of their pocket for prescriptions and to get medical care. How is that consistent with the values of America? How is that consistent with what we expect when we want to honor our troops, to dishonor them by cutting the veterans health care system and making veterans pay more out of their pocket, a co-pay for their health care?

Where is the honor, I ask the White House, in cutting the benefits available

for our troops coming home from Iraq? Where is the honor in requiring our veterans to pony up \$250 who are in certain categories even to get their health care? Where is that family value?

It seems to me that there ought to be a bipartisan consensus, that there ought to be family values, that if you send your son or daughter into harm's way for the benefit of your national family, that when they come home, if anything, you ought to increase the benefits that we have available to these folks. But that is not the case in this President's budget, because this President really had to face a choice in this budget. It was pretty clear.

We have over a \$400 billion deficit today, and this President really had to face a choice between two competing values. One value would be to provide for the health care of our veterans. One value would be to preserve the President's favored tax cuts for people who earn over \$400,000 a year.

Now, in order to at least staunch the red ink which, by the way, this does not do because this budget still does not decrease the deficit. It increases it. But one way to do it, this budget had to make a choice; this budget had to choose between two values. It had to choose between the value of honoring our veterans or the value of honoring those folks who earn over \$400,000 a year and to make their tax cuts they got permanent. The President chose to honor that less than half of a percent of Americans to make those tax cuts permanent and abandon the value of honoring and embracing the health care needs of our veterans.

Budgets are not just monetary issues. They are statements of values. They are statements of what we believe in as a country. They are statements of what you hold most dear. And it is clear that this budget says that the most dear value that this budget reflects is the value of keeping those permanent tax cuts for people earning over \$400,000; and the people who are coming home from Iraq with missing eyes and shattered bodies and shattered psyches and missing limbs, who are coming home trying to rebuild their lives, they can just go fish according to this budget because they are going to have to pay more to get basic health care now.

Now, I do not think those are the values of America, the values that my constituents have, my neighbors have, Republicans or Democrats. Because I have to tell you, the Republicans and Democrats that I talk to and I represent in my district in Washington State, I think if you ask people on the street if it comes to a choice between those two things to reduce the deficit, what should you pick, I think it is about 95 percent would pick to give health care to veterans. But that is not a choice this White House made, this administration made; and it is sad.

I hope that we in this Chamber in a bipartisan way can join to preserve, defend, and protect those who preserved, defended, and protected us, which is our veterans. And it is not being done in this budget, and this is a symptom of an illness of this budget in total because it has sacrificed numerous values on the cross of making these President's tax cuts for people who earn over \$400,000 a year, that that value trumps everything. It trumps health care for veterans. It trumps reduction of the deficit. It trumps cleaning up nuclear wastes that are going into the Columbia River in my neck of the woods. It trumps cleaning up other Superfund sites around the country. It trumps enforcing our clean air laws so that our children do not get asthma.

This President puts that value above every other value that we have, Americans now have to have a chance to express in this budget; and it is sad and it is wrong and it is not consistent with the American values, I believe, on a bipartisan basis are held.

Now, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) has joined us, who has been an absolute stalwart talking about the importance of maintaining veterans benefits.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Washington State.

This is a serious time in the history of our Nation. We are facing a lot of problems. We have lost well over 1,440 lives in Iraq. We have had literally thousands, 10,000 or more seriously injured. And yesterday we received the President's budget. And a part of that budget had to do with veterans health care.

Now, at a time when we have lost so much and are continuing to lose soldiers in Iraq, when the death benefit for the family of a lost soldier I think is currently \$12,500, the administration had indicated that they would support increasing that up to \$100,000; there is no mention of that in the President's budget.

□ 2215

There is no mention of that. There is no budgeting for this increased benefit for the families who have lost loved ones in this war. That puzzles me. But there are other things in this budget that puzzle me regarding veterans.

People listening to this, I would say to my friend from Washington State, may interpret this as just partisan bickering, and so I would like to share a press release that came from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. This is not a political group. This is a group devoted solely to trying to advocate for veterans who have participated in foreign wars.

The heading of this press release is "The President's 2006 Budget Disappoints the VFW," and it begins, "The President has delivered a disappointing funding request for the Department of Veterans Affairs," said the

leader of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., in reaction to the administration's fiscal year 2006 budget request that was released today."

I will not read the entire letter, but I will read parts of it. "Two key issues are the proposals to charge a \$250 enrollment fee that would impact approximately 2.2 million veterans and a prescription copayment that would more than double from \$7 a prescription to \$15" a prescription.

It continues, "The VFW is concerned that the enrollment fee and the prescription copayment increases will cost some veterans thousands of extra dollars in health care expenses, while driving others away from the VA.

"The message this budget communicates," the VFW says, "is that part of the Federal Government's deficit will be balanced on the backs of military veterans."

Listen to this. This is amazing. The budget proposal from the President slashes \$351 million from veterans' nursing homes that will result in 28,000 fewer veterans getting nursing home care, and it reduces State grants from \$114 million down to just \$12 million. It cuts \$4 million from medical and prosthetic research. At a time when we are having soldiers getting their arms and legs blown off in Iraq, this President sends us a budget that cuts by \$4 million money for prosthetic research.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask if the experience in Ohio is the same as it is in Washington. The gentleman has just read quite an extensive list of multimillion dollar cuts to the services that the VA system can provide for veterans. That may seem like abstract numbers, but I want to ask my colleague about this.

In Washington State, veterans now, in the existing budget before the cuts, are waiting months and months and months to get in for basic health care because even the existing budget does not allow them to get help. And so I talked to World War II veterans who literally are waiting months, and these are people in their upper 70s, to get basic health care with the existing budget.

This budget purports to cut multiple millions of dollars to reduce that, to increase the waiting line so when a person needs to go in to get various body parts checked, from their urinary tract to their cardiac function, they are in a waiting line. The people who went on the sands of Iwo Jima, they did not want to go to the back of the line. They went out the front of the boat. Now this budget is going to make the waiting longer.

That is the experience in Washington. I just wonder what the experience is in Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, well, I think what the gentleman is describing is true all over the country. It is less problematic in certain areas and much more problematic in other areas.

I just shared a press release from the Veterans of Foreign Wars regarding the President's budget. I have here a second press release from the national commander of the American Legion regarding the President's budget.

It begins, "The leader of the Nation's largest military veterans organization reacted strongly to the effects that President Bush's budget plan will have on veterans. He called it a smokescreen to raise revenue at the expense of veterans.

"'This is not acceptable,' said Thomas P. Cadmus, national commander of the 2.7 million member American Legion. 'It is nothing more than a health care tax designed to increase revenue at the expense of veterans who served their country.'"

This is not the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE), the Democrat, or the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), the Democrat, speaking. This is the national commander of the American Legion.

The fact is that when the President first came into office, most veterans were required to pay \$2 for a 30-day prescription. The President increased that almost immediately after coming to office from \$2 to \$7, and in this budget, he is asking that the price to veterans be increased from \$7 to \$15.

As I have said before on the floor of this House, many of our veterans take 10 or more prescriptions per month, and so the President wants to increase their burden. The President's budget also calls for an annual \$250 user fee that many veterans would have to pay just to use a VA facility. This is unconscionable.

Here is what we have: Young Americans fighting this war, many losing their lives, many more being terribly injured, coming back home; and what they are going to find is a VA health care system that is being woefully underfunded by the President who chose to send them to war. That is a serious matter, but it is not just my opinion. It is the opinion of the major veterans organizations in this Nation.

I do not think this is an accident. I think this is a planned effort on the part of the administration to significantly reduce the money they are putting into VA health care.

I want to share with my friend from Washington State something that he may already know, but for 24 years one of our colleagues, a Republican Member, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), has been a member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs. For 24 years he has served on that committee. For the last 4 years, he was the Chair of that committee.

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) is, in my judgment, the most prolific Member of this body. I do not always agree with the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), but I admire him as a man of principle and character and courage.

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) was recently removed, not only as the Chair of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, he was taken off the committee altogether after years of service. What had he done wrong? Well, apparently it was because he was an advocate for veterans. He wanted this President and this leadership in the House of Representatives to give adequate funding for VA health care, and so he was stripped of his Chair's position and he was removed from the committee.

Think about that. He had been on that committee for almost a quarter of a century, and 10 national veterans organizations wrote the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT) a letter, urging the Speaker to keep CHRIS SMITH as the Chair of the Committee on Veterans Affairs.

I just want to tell my colleague who those people were and the organizations they represent: The executive director of the American Legion; the executive director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars; the national adjutant of the Military Order of the Purple Heart; the executive director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America; the national president of the Vietnam Veterans of America; the executive director of the Disabled American Veterans; the national executive director of AMVETS; the executive director of the Blinded Veterans Association; the executive director of the Jewish War Veterans; and the executive director of the Non-commissioned Officers.

They all signed this letter to Speaker HASTERT, and they said in this letter, among other things, "In our view, it would be a tragedy if CHRIS SMITH left the chairmanship."

They went on to say that "The unnecessary loss of his leadership, knowledge, skill, honesty, passion and work ethic would be a deeply disturbing development, not just to us, but to the millions of veterans across the country whose lives he has touched."

What did Speaker HASTERT do? He ignored the plea from these 10 national veterans organizations. He removed the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) from the chairmanship of the Committee on Veterans Affairs because he was an advocate for veterans.

So I am not surprised that the President's budget woefully underfunds VA health care, because I think it was part of the plan; and in my judgment, they had to get rid of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) so that they would not have one of their own being critical of the President's budget in the VA Committee.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, this is a bit of an unusual thing that a Democrat is praising the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the former Republican Chair of this committee in the House, and I want to just ask this:

My perception of this is that here we had a Republican Member who is stalwart in attempting to preserve and improve the veterans' health care in our country, who was willing to rock the boat to do that, had the moral fiber to do that, and was in a sense excommunicated because he had the willingness to stand up to people who stood up at Guadalcanal and the people who stood up in all of those places whom we have had harmed, and he was a bit of hero I believe myself, and I am just going to ask my colleague to categorize this.

I think what the Republican leadership and, by extension, the White House, which I have to believe had some knowledge of this, was a slap in the face of every veteran in this country. Do you think that is a fair characterization?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I think it is. In fact, if I could just share something else with my colleague, this is a letter to the Wall Street Journal that was written also by Mr. Thomas P. Cadmus, who is the national commander of the American Legion, from the national American Legion's headquarters, and it criticizes a statement that was made by an administration official, Mr. David Chu.

Who is Mr. David Chu? He is the Pentagon Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness. And Mr. David Chu was quoted as saying that "Veterans' pay and benefits are," and I am using this word from his statement, "hurtful, hurtful," and are, quote, "taking away from the Nation's ability to defend itself."

Here is a member of this administration blaming veterans, saying that because of their benefits they are somehow interfering or taking away from this Nation's ability to defend itself. I mean, that is really pathetic. It is pathetic. And the national commander of the American Legion wrote this letter to the Wall Street Journal complaining about David Chu's statement.

So what I think we are seeing here is a calculated effort to reduce funding for veterans' health care and veterans' benefits, and the President, quite frankly, has got to be responsible for this. I mean, he is the commander in chief.

And let me point out something else to my colleague. Right now, when a serviceperson loses their life, there is a \$12,500 gratuity or compensation made available to the survivor, the survivor's spouse or to the family.

Now, we are in the process right now of offering bonuses of up to \$15,000 for many of our soldiers to get them to enlist.

□ 2230

In some cases, for Special Operations Forces, we are told they are being offered a bonus of up to \$150,000 to remain active in the military. So a suggestion has been made, and I have

signed on to legislation, I think probably my friend from Washington State has as well, that would increase this death benefit to \$100,000. That is certainly not enough, but it at least is a reasonable effort on the part of this Congress to increase those funds from \$12,500.

I have gone to several funerals in my district, for soldiers who have been lost in Iraq. We have lost from the Ohio Sixth Congressional District six soldiers already. Two of those men were in their late 30s and the others were in their early 20s. So it is quite pathetic, I think, that this country would offer the survivors \$12,500. And if we can increase it up to \$100,000, that may be more helpful to the families left behind.

The fact is, there is no mention of this in the President's budget, and that really puzzles me. Why is this not accounted for in the President's budget that he just released to us?

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I think what is disappointing about the President not putting it in his budget, is that we probably have over 160 or 180 cosponsors of this bill to raise that benefit for the families, yet it is still not there. And it is really just one of a whole suite of insults for the people coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Do not forget the contributions of our people in Afghanistan who are suffering and still dying in Afghanistan.

What is so troubling to me, and I think a lot of my constituents, are two aspects. You have to ask yourself: How could an administration in the middle of two wars even think about cutting benefits to veterans? How could you possibly do that? I am trying to think, how could there be any possible rationale to do that when you have these people coming home in such dire straits?

I think there are two things going on here: One, I suspect that the people who are coming up with these cockamamie, unfair, inequitable, I am going to call them un-American ideas, maybe that is a stretch but I am going to say that, when we are talking about heroes of the American Nation? How can you deign to raise copayments, charge them \$250, make them stand in line longer, make them wait longer to get cardiac care? How can you even think about doing that?

I think one of the things is that these folks who are making a pretty good salary, who are in the agencies and working at the White House, who are driving a decent car, kind of think, Oh, it is \$250. Big deal. What is \$25 extra for a prescription? Big deal. That is just pocket change. Falls out of crumbs or tips at lunch around here in Washington, D.C. On K Street, where lobbyists hang out, that is just tip money.

I think people forget when they try to stick injured GIs with this, they forget these folks are just absolutely scraping when they come back.

I saw a story about a family who lost a young father and husband in Washington State, and they interviewed the widow, who had four children, and they were living in the basement of their parents' house. She was trying to get enough to get back to community college to try to earn a living to support these four children. It was really a matter of feeding and clothing these kids. And \$250 is the difference between making it and not making it to these folks.

I think people making these decisions forget that. They just are not in touch with that, number one.

Number two, and this is the basic flaw of the entire budget, I think, is that the folks who drafted this budget have a view about our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their view is that there are only a certain very small percentage of Americans who should bear all of the burden of these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is the view of this administration that only those select individuals should take the entire weight of this conflict, not only in their physical health and whether they live or die but in their fiscal burden as well, and those are the people actually serving in the military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nobody else in America should have any bit of sacrifice associated with this war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I do not think that is the American way. And I do not think Americans really expect that. Americans believe that it is not only the GIs who should be the ones bearing some sacrifice from this endeavor. Yet the President wants to take every single dollar we spend there and make it deficit spending.

The part he will not make deficit spending, that he is too embarrassed to put on his debt on our grandchildren because he has a deficit that has blown through the roof, and it is terribly embarrassing, the part he will not make a deficit to put on his debt on our grandchildren, he will put on our veterans by cutting their health care.

These are the very people who lost their limbs. He wants them to bear all the burden. He does not want to ask anybody else in America to be associated with this. And that is wrong.

Mr. STRICKLAND. If my colleague will yield, what the President and what the administration will say is that they are increasing funding for VA health care, and on the books it looks as if they are. But much of that increase is coming from the veterans themselves because they are calculating as a part of their budgeting process the \$250 annual user fee that they are going to charge veterans. They are calculating the increase that they are going to get from charging veterans more for their prescription drugs, so that will go into the till; and they count that as increased funding for VA health care. So, quite frankly,

they are asking veterans to fund their own health care.

Now, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), as I said earlier, was replaced as Chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and we have a new Chair who has been quoted as saying that he thinks the VA should focus on the core constituency, those with service-connected disabilities and the very poor. But, quite frankly, the people that they are referring to as higher income can be making as little as \$22,000 and be considered higher income and be expected to pay this \$250 annual user fee and the increased cost for medications.

Now, if you are making as little as \$22,000 a year and you have expenses and you have a lot of medical needs and you need a lot of prescription drugs, then you are not high income.

Folks in this Chamber, I do not know exactly how much we make, quite frankly, but it is over \$150,000 a year. We are pretty well paid here. The American people need to know that. We are pretty well paid. But what about the veteran who is making a little over \$20,000 a year? And the people in this Chamber have the gall to say that those veterans ought to pay more? They ought to pay more?

It is, quite frankly, shameful. And that is why we are here. That is why we are talking about this. Because the veterans of this country need to know what the truth is.

Now, the President said in his State of the Union address not many days ago, standing at that podium right up there, he said, "Society is measured by how it treats the weak and the vulnerable." We have an aging veteran population in this country. More and more veterans are in need of nursing home care, and what does this budget do, the President's budget? It cuts funding for veterans' nursing home care. At a time when the need is increasing, there is less money for it.

It is, quite frankly, shameful. There is no other word that is adequate to describe it. It is a shameful set of circumstances that we are facing. I would hope that the veterans of this country would understand what is being done to their health care system.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, let me add that it is not just the veterans of this country that we think should be rightfully outraged about this insult to veterans. It is also those of us who have our liberty because of veterans.

I did something a little unusual for me; I actually watched the Super Bowl this year. It turned out to be a good game. It was very, very unique in Super Bowl history. I think the wrong team won, but still a good game. And the most telling commercial to me, which they always talk a lot about, the Super Bowl commercials, was the scene where you are like in a train station

waiting room or an airport waiting room and you see people milling about, and then they all of a sudden somebody started clapping. You cannot see what they are clapping at, at first. Then the clapping rolls and pretty soon everybody in the room is clapping. Then you see these troops coming by, we assume coming back from Iraq or Afghanistan, and pretty soon the whole group is clapping.

I think that commercial really did encapsulate how Americans feel about our sons and daughters and husbands and wives who serve there. This is really deep and touching and it is good for America.

During Vietnam, there were a lot of disagreements. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) and I had enormous disagreements with the President about Iraq, and a lot of my constituents, a big majority of my constituents had a lot of disagreements. But to a person they felt the same way about our GIs coming home; the Marines, soldiers and sailors. That commercial showed people wanting to applaud them as they came home.

That is the spirit of America, yet this administration draws a budget that reduces the protection that these folks ought to have after coming home from the front line. That is just totally out of touch.

The veterans are a very uncomplaining group. I find veterans to be the least demanding group, perhaps, of any people I work with. It is just not in touch with the spirit of America of wanting to embrace these people.

It is denigrating their contribution. It is not understanding how deep people feel about the sacrifices that these folks have made in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is why we will have a very vigorous effort to restore this funding.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I would tell my colleague from Washington that a gentleman by the name of J.P. Brown, who has a weekly radio show where he talks about veterans' issues, had me as a guest on that show recently. I talked about what happened to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and what was going on with VA health care funding. Mr. BROWN has said that he has gotten more calls from listeners than he has ever received before.

I suspect that what we are talking about here tonight will be changed, because I do believe the veterans of this country and those who care about them are going to speak up and speak out.

I shared part of a press release from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I would like to share a few more comments from that press release. This press release from the Veterans of Foreign Wars says, "This budget will cause veterans' health care to be delayed and may result in the return of 6-month-long waiting periods. That is especially shameful during a time of war."

Then it continues: "The VFW national commander is now calling on all 2.4 million members of the VFW and its auxiliaries, as well as all service members and their families, to urge their congressional Members to correct the shortfalls in this budget."

Then the press release concludes with this statement. "Without the American soldier, there would not have been a United States of America, and I shudder to imagine the rest of the world. Our Nation must honor its commitment to care for those who are ultimately responsible for every liberty we enjoy today."

So my sense is that the leadership of the various veterans' organizations in this country are going to mobilize their members to descend upon this Capitol, at least through e-mails and letters and phone calls, faxes, and so on, to demand of their Representatives, our colleagues in this Chamber, that this shameful budget, especially the parts that deal specifically with veterans' health care, be rejected by this Congress, and that we do what we should do, which is to provide adequate funding so that those who are in need of health care, those who have served the country and are in need of health care, have the ability to receive it in a timely manner.

Mr. INSLEE. If my colleague will yield once again, it seems to me our goal ought to be a policy that we can be proud of. This is not a budget to be proud of on behalf of our veterans.

I just want to reiterate, and continuing along the same vein that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) has, I want to read from what Mr. Thomas Cadmus, Director of the American Legion, said in questioning this budget. He said, "Is the goal of these legislative initiatives to drive those veterans paying for their health care away from the system designed to serve veterans? The President is asking Congress to make health care poaching legal in the world's largest health care delivery system."

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Health care poaching, instead of assisting the veterans, is not a budget America can be proud of. That is why we are going to continue this effort, and we hope others will join us to make sure that the sacrifices of our men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan are honored with a budget that America can be proud of and can stand up and defend. This President's budget falls way short and it must be changed.

THE BUDGET AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOUSTANY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO) is recognized for 60 minutes.