

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 14, 2005

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, February 10, 2005, I was unavoidably detained due to a prior obligation.

I request that the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD reflect that had I been present and voting, I would have voted as follows:

(1) Rollcall No. 31: "no" (Final Passage of H.R. 418); (2) rollcall No. 30: "yes" (Motion to Recommit H.R. 418); (3) rollcall No. 29: "yes" (Farr amendment to H.R. 418); (4) rollcall No. 28: "yes" (Nadler amendment to H.R. 418).

LEGISLATION IN SUPPORT OF DESIGNATION AND GOALS OF HIRE-A-VETERAN WEEK

HON. RUSH D. HOLT

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 14, 2005

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, as our Nation honors and supports the ongoing efforts of our troops in Iraq and prays for the safety of all of our uniformed men and women still in the Gulf, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, now is also an opportune time for Congress to do more to help our Nation's new and old veterans in need. To this end, I am joined by my distinguished colleague, U.S. Representative HENRY BROWN, in introducing bipartisan legislation to urge the establishment of a "National Hire-A-Veteran Week." Our legislation also urges a presidential proclamation calling upon employers, labor organizations, veterans' service organizations, and Federal, State, and local governmental agencies to employ more veterans.

In spite of the best efforts of the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, imposing barriers continue to impede many deserving veterans from securing employment and achieving self-sufficiency. Just this week, I read a disturbing article by Alexandra Marks that appeared in the Christian Science Monitor and is entitled "Back From Iraq—And Suddenly Out On The Streets." It should alert all of us to the grim reality that veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are now showing up in our Nation's homeless shelters. I submit this article for entry into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD at the conclusion of my statement.

Sadly, many veterans struggle to find jobs, even with some opportunities for increased training and education offered through government programs. Little more than half of our Nation's veterans are employed today. According to the 2000 census, for example, nearly 20 percent of gulf war veterans are unemployed.

Moreover, it is troubling and shameful that so many of our veterans who risked their own lives in support of our country can't find jobs and must endure homelessness and lives of poverty after they return home. Indeed, American veterans comprise one-third of the homeless male population in America; while an esti-

mated 250,000 veterans live on our city streets. In fact, the number of homeless Vietnam War veterans today exceeds the number of service persons who died during that war.

Mr. Speaker, even as we tend to the well-being of our men and women currently on active duty, we cannot forget those who have already served their country and deserve more assistance in moving to the next phase of their civilian lives. A Presidential proclamation of "National Hire-A-Veteran Week" would provide an effective and more focused way to do more to help all of our veterans find good jobs and ensure better living standards for themselves and their families. I hope that all of my colleagues will support this legislation and will take one more step to help repay the debt we owe to all of our Nation's defenders. I also hope it can be promptly enacted and signed into law during this session of Congress.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 8, 2005]

BACK FROM IRAQ—AND SUDDENLY OUT ON THE STREETS

(By Alexandra Marks)

NEW YORK.—Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are now showing up in the nation's homeless shelters.

While the numbers are still small, they're steadily rising, and raising alarms in both the homeless and veterans' communities. The concern is that these returning veterans—some of whom can't find jobs after leaving the military, others of whom are still struggling psychologically with the war—may be just the beginning of an influx of new veterans in need. Currently, there are 150,000 troops in Iraq and 16,000 in Afghanistan. More than 130,000 have already served and returned home.

So far, dozens of them, like Herold Noel, a married father of three, have found themselves sleeping on the streets, on friends' couches, or in their cars within weeks of returning home. Two years ago, Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ) in the borough of Brooklyn, saw only a handful of recent returnees. Now the group is aiding more than 100 Iraq veterans, 30 of whom are homeless.

"It's horrible to put your life on the line and then come back home to nothing, that's what I came home to: nothing. I didn't know where to go or where to turn," says Mr. Noel. "I thought I was alone, but I found out there are a whole lot of other soldiers in the same situation. Now I want people to know what's really going on."

After the Vietnam War, tens of thousands of veterans came home to a hostile culture that offered little gratitude and inadequate services, particularly to deal with the stresses of war. As a result, tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans still struggle with homelessness and drug addiction.

Veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are coming home to a very different America. While the Iraq war remains controversial, there is almost unanimous support for the soldiers overseas. And in the years since Vietnam, more than 250 non-profit veterans' service organizations have sprouted up, many of them created by people like Peter Cameron, a Vietnam veteran who is determined that what happened to his fellow soldiers will not happen again.

But he and dozens of other veterans' service providers are concerned by the increasing numbers of new veterans ending up on streets and in shelters.

Part of the reason for these new veterans' struggles is that housing costs have sky-

rocketed at the same time real wages have remained relatively stable, often putting rental prices out of reach. And for many, there is a gap of months, sometimes years, between when military benefits end and veterans benefits begin.

"We are very much committed to helping veterans coming back from this war," says Mr. Cameron, executive director of Vietnam Veterans of California. "But the [Department of Veterans Affairs] already has needs it can't meet and there's a lot of fear out there that programs are going to be cut even further."

BEYOND THE YELLOW RIBBONS

Both the Veterans Administration and private veterans service organizations are already stretched, providing services for veterans of previous conflicts. For instance, while an estimated 500,000 veterans were homeless at some time during 2004, the VA had the resources to tend to only 100,000 of them.

"You can have all of the yellow ribbons on cars that say 'Support Our Troops' that you want, but it's when they take off the uniform and transition back to civilian life that they need support the most," says Linda Boone, executive director of The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

After the Vietnam conflict, it was nine to 12 years before veterans began showing up at homeless shelters in large numbers. In part, that's because the trauma they experienced during combat took time to surface, according to one Vietnam veteran who's now a service provider. Doctors refer to the phenomenon as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

A recent study published by the New England Journal of Medicine found that 15 to 17 percent of Iraq vets meet "the screening criteria for major depression, generalized anxiety, or PTSD." Of those, only 23 to 40 percent are seeking help—in part because so many others fear the stigma of having a mental disorder.

Many veterans' service providers say they're surprised to see so many Iraq veterans needing help so soon.

"This kind of inner city, urban guerrilla warfare that these veterans are facing probably accelerates mental-health problems," says Yogin Ricardo Singh, director of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program at BVSJ. "And then there's the soldier's mentality: Asking for help is like saying, 'I've failed a mission.' It's very hard for them to do."

Beyond PTSD and high housing costs, many veterans also face an income void, as they search for new jobs or wait for their veterans benefits to kick in.

When Mr. Noel was discharged in December of 2003, he and his family had been living in base housing in Georgia. Since they were no longer eligible to live there, they began the search for a new home. But Noel had trouble landing a job and the family moved to New York, hoping for help from a family member. Eventually, they split up: Noel's wife and infant child moved in with his sister-in-law, and his twins were sent to relatives in Florida. Noel slept in his car, on the streets, and on friend's couches.

Last spring he was diagnosed with PTSD, and though he's currently in treatment, his disability claim is still being processed. Unable to keep a job so far, he's had no steady income, although an anonymous donor provided money for him to take an apartment last week. He expects his family to join him soon.

'NOBODY UNDERSTOOD . . . THE WAY I WAS'

Nicole Goodwin is another vet diagnosed with PTSD who has yet to receive disability