

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, while American troops are fighting over in Iraq, veterans of past wars are fighting a different battle here in the United States. These veterans, who sacrificed a great deal to serve their Nation with great distinction, are now essentially being told by the House Republicans, "thanks for your service, but we are going to have to make major cuts in your health care and other services to pay for our huge tax cut for the wealthiest few."

Last month, House Republicans approved a budget by the slimmest of margins that cuts \$14.2 billion in veterans programs over the next 10 years. Upon hearing that veterans were not a priority of the Republican majority, several leaders of veterans groups sent letters to Republican leaders.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read some excerpts from some of the letters sent to the Speaker, because I think they are so much on point.

The first one is from Edward Heath, the National Commander of Disabled American Veterans. If I could just quote some sections, Mr. Heath writes:

"I write today on behalf of the 2.3 million disabled veterans, including the more than 1.2 million members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to communicate our deep-seated outrage regarding the fiscal year 2004 budget adopted by the House Budget Committee which would cut veterans programs by more than \$15 billion during the next 10 years.

"Has Congress no shame? Is there no honor left in the hallowed halls of our government that you choose to dishonor the sacrifices of our Nation's heroes and rob our programs, health care and disability compensation to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy? You will be reducing benefits and services for disabled veterans at a time when thousands of our servicemen are in harm's way fighting terrorists around the world and thousands more of our sons and daughters are preparing for war against Iraq.

"If you, in your leadership role in your House, allow this budget proposal to pass the House without exempting VA programs from the massive cuts, it could mean the loss of 19,000 nurses, equating to the loss of 6.6 million outpatient visits or more than three-quarters of a million hospital bed days. But that is not all of the devastation that will be caused by the proposed cuts. You will be reaching into the pockets of our Nation's service-connected veterans, including combat disabled veterans, and robbing them and their survivors of a portion of their compensation.

"Mr. Speaker, this budget dishonors the service of millions of service-connected disabled veterans, including combat disabled veterans, and seriously erodes the Nation's commitment to care for its defenders."

Mr. Edward Heath, the National Commander of Disabled American Veterans, goes on to talk about the really

negative impacts that these cuts will have.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to read sections from a letter that was sent to the chairman of the Committee on the Budget by Steve Robertson, Director, National Legislative Commission for the American Legion.

He says, "Dear Mr. Chairman: The American Legion is deeply troubled by the impact H. Con. Res. 95, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget, would have on veterans, especially severely service-connected disabled veterans and their families.

"Veterans did not cause the budgetary shortfalls and should not be financially penalized in the name of fiscal responsibility. Much has been said that all Americans must be willing to make sacrifices to eliminate the budget deficit. Severely service-connected disabled veterans have already made significant personal sacrifices for their earned entitlements."

Mr. Speaker, last is a letter to Speaker HASTERT from Joseph L. Fox, Sr., National President of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

He says in part, "Dear Mr. Speaker: The proposal, if implemented, would have a shocking effect on VA health care services and would be an affront to millions of veterans facing reductions in their health care, compensation, pension and education benefits.

"The House Budget Committee proposal also calls for cutting \$15 billion over 10 years, \$463 million in fiscal year 2004 alone, in VA mandatory spending under the guise of eliminating fraud, waste and abuse. We do not consider payments to war-disabled veterans, pensions for the poorest disabled veterans and GI Bill benefits for soldiers returning from Afghanistan to be "fraud, waste and abuse." Ninety percent of the spending for VA entitlements goes in monthly payments to these veterans and their survivors. The House Budget Committee plan, if approved, would force cuts in each of these programs."

Mr. Speaker, I am only mentioning these letters because I think it is much better to quote from some of the people who are involved as veterans, from veterans organizations, rather than speaking myself, in terms of the real impact of the cuts in the budgets on veterans programs.

I think the Republicans clearly were not listening to veterans last month when they approved the fiscal year 2004 budget. I hope today they will keep veterans' voices in when they have a chance to instruct budget conferees to restore the funds that they so callously took away last month.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is, we are in the middle of a war, and to cut veterans' programs at this time is definitely not the way we should go.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair

declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 4 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon today.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO) at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

I am grateful to the Members of the House of Representatives and all those who work here on Capitol Hill because they exist and because they are who they are. They do what they do and try as they may to make a difference in this place, in this Nation, and in this world.

I am grateful to You, O God, for having placed me among them and for having told me to be their father, their minister, their rabbi, a spiritual seeker with them in troublesome times.

Finally, I am grateful to You, O Lord, because in the midst of such public hearing and so much activity, I can find the solitude of prayer that shuts off the TV wars and simply questions the times in which we live and the priorities which set our motion.

In this most significant place, I find myself in them and with them, wondering what is the human dimension to government, to power, to war, and to life. I wonder, and I wonder further, and I wonder, until I come to You, our wonderful God. I wonder if You still recognize Yourself in us, for we were once made in Your image and likeness.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House her approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. KLINE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. KLINE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

U.S. WILL NOT EXCUSE WAR CRIMES OF IRAQI REGIME

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

Mr. REHBERG. Madam Speaker, some of Saddam Hussein's paramilitary monsters hanged a teenage girl last week for waving at coalition troops. In the same week, Iraqi military, pretending to surrender, fired upon our people who had offered them safety. This week we learned Saddam's desperate soldiers have taken to shielding themselves with women and children when confronting our advancing troops. His paramilitary forces rule by terror, lodging military stockpiles in schools and hospitals, firing at villagers who try to flee, and exterminating townspeople who refuse to fight for Saddam's terrorist state.

Perhaps the signature statement of the abhorrent and despicable nature of the enemy is its treatment of our young people in uniform taken captive. Some have been humiliated and paraded in front of television cameras. Others, we now know, were brutally executed or, should I say murdered, by Iraqi soldiers.

Can there be any doubt about the vile and inhumane character of Saddam's dying regime?

As President Bush has correctly noted, "Given the nature of this regime, we expect such war crimes, but we will not excuse them." Our brave men and women in uniform deserve our support, both for what they are doing and for why they are there.

OPPOSING BUDGET CUTS FOR VETERANS

(Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to call attention to the actions taken by the Republicans in this House to drastically cut the funding for veterans programs.

While thousands of brave men and women are fighting for our country and risking their lives every single day, the House majority party voted for the GOP budget resolution which would cut veterans programs by \$28.8 billion. This cut in programs includes money for health care, for disability compensation, pensions, and other benefits. The Disabled American Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the American Legion have all issued statements opposing this budget.

We cannot in good conscience commit men and women to defend this Nation while at the same time reducing the benefits they are entitled to and deserve, because after all, what message, what message does this send to those that have and those that are serving our country?

I am appalled at the actions of the Republican House. While brave men and women are defending our freedom, we must defend their right to receive their benefits.

HONORING AND SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS IN IRAQ

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

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of our brave military men and women fighting for our freedom here at home and to take the yoke of oppression off the Iraqi people.

I also want to thank the military families and let them know that these soldiers are doing the best job in the world.

Madam Speaker, there are some awful stories out there. Iraqis were shown on TV voicing support for Saddam Hussein. When asked why they were doing that, they replied that they were afraid if they did not show support for Saddam and he did win, then he would remember them as enemies, and he would kill or torture their family members. That is just wrong.

Now our servicemen and women are implementing a precise military plan that will put an end to Saddam Hussein's reign of terror and his ruthless regime forever. We in the Congress are going to do all in our power to make sure that our troops remain the best trained and equipped in the world and are paid as veterans. To the brave men and women in uniform, I thank you and we salute you.

TRIBUTE TO PAUL WALDEN

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Madam Speaker, I am sad to report to the House today the passing of Paul Walden of Hood River, Oregon, the father of our colleague, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN).

It was my pleasure to serve in the Oregon House of Representatives with Paul where he was a distinguished member in the 1970s. By the time he became a legislator, he was already an established community leader, active in his church and many civic organizations.

Paul was a successful businessman whose ready wit and deep melodious voice made him a natural for a career in radio. He served a half century in the broadcast industry, ultimately owning his own radio stations.

This Oregonian of pioneer stock made his community better as he brightened people's lives. He was the obvious choice for the community for major responsibilities, like serving as chair and master of ceremonies for the opening of the massive Dallas's Dam featuring Vice President Richard Nixon.

I will remember him as a friend who served his community with honor, with humor, and with insight.

Our thoughts are with our colleague, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WAL-

DEN); his wife, Maylene; son, Anthony; and the entire Walden family.

APRIL IS THE MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD

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

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, the Department of Defense has designated April as the Month of the Military Child.

Today, thousands of fathers and mothers are halfway around the world from their children making tremendous sacrifices to defend freedom and liberty. Some sons and daughters will see their parent come home wounded and, in some cases, the military parent will not return at all.

Military families make enormous sacrifices on a daily basis so that our soldiers have the support they need. It is up to Americans and communities throughout our great Nation to support these families, even by simple food, clothes and toy donations for the children.

I urge all Americans to reach out to military families in their communities by contacting their local military base, National Guard and Reserve armory, and public affairs offices to find out how they can best help.

In conclusion, God bless our troops.

OPPOSING BUDGET CUTS TO VETERANS PROGRAMS

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

Mr. MICHAUD. Madam Speaker, I rise today out of deep concern about the budget that was passed last week. The Committee on the Budget resolution cut mandatory spending in many areas, but one of the most unconscionable cuts is the \$15 billion reduction for veterans programs like service disability compensation, pension for low-income wartime veterans, and veterans housing programs. At a time of war, how can we vote to neglect our veterans like this?

In recent days we have heard from the American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans, all strongly opposed to these cuts.

I will continue to stand with them and to oppose this dishonorable treatment of our most honorable men and women. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

HIGHER EDUCATION RELIEF OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS ACT OF 2003

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