missing child through the AMBER Alert Network Plan. I believe it is important that the federal government send a clear message to child abductors that their actions will not go unpunished, and that we will take the appropriate measures to ensure the protection of our children.

I am disappointed, however, that the Republican majority chose to add a number of provisions to this legislation that I oppose, including an expansion of the death penalty, making it easier to authorize wiretaps against criminal suspects, and establishing mandatory life sentences for certain crimes. It is unfortunate that these failed, controversial provisions were added to such an important piece of legislation.

I will continue to support measures designed to keep child abductors off the street, and increase security for the children in our neighborhoods and communities. Furthermore, I remain opposed to the death penalty, expanded surveillance measures that violate our civil liberties, and mandatory sentencing guidelines that take away the discretion of a judge to decide a case fairly and justly. It's regrettable we could not pass a clean bill that reflects all of these ideas.

DENYING DEMOCRATS THE OPPORTUNITY TO OFFER AMENDMENTS ON H.R. 1559

HON. SHEILA JACKSON-LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this rule. The rule waives all points of order against the Majority's bill, while denying Democrats the opportunity to offer amendments.

Yesterday, during the meeting of the Rules Committee, my Democratic colleagues offered thoughtful amendments ranging from increasing funds for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to adding $1.7 billion for health care, education, and infrastructure in the United States; yet none of my Democratic colleagues were granted waivers. I offered five amendments addressing our homeland security needs and mental health services. None of these amendments were granted waivers.

I believe that our domestic priorities and our first responders must not be overlooked as we consider this supplemental appropriations bill. The Ranking Member of the Appropriations Committee offered an amendment to increase funding by $2.5 billion to Homeland Security programs. This was not accepted for a waiver.

These increases would have provided an additional $197 million to protect military facilities; $241 million for nuclear security (nuclear cargo detection, nuclear detection equipment, securing nuclear materials abroad and in the U.S.); $722 million for port and infrastructure security (Coast Guard personnel, port security grants, dam and bridge security, water and chemical plant security, rail tunnel security); and $1.2 billion for state and local first responders (state and local civil defense teams, first responder equipment, firefighter grants, state and local biotechnical response, military guard and reserves).

The Obey amendment, which I support, provides critical funding to Homeland Security programs. Under Article I, section 7, of the U.S. Constitution, Congress has the power of the purse. We have an obligation to have an open and democratic debate on this supplemental.

With the United States now at war to disarm Saddam Hussein, some Republicans continue to question the patriotism of anyone who has the audacity to challenge the Bush administration's foreign policy. All of us pray for a quick, successful conclusion to this war and for our troops' safe return.

However, it is our duty as members of this august body of Congress to consider fully any funding that involves our military forces and funding that could help our domestic priorities.

With the Republicans denying essential debate on this bill, we will not have full consideration of the supplemental, and this is an abomination on what should be a fair and open process.

This is a process far from what our Founding Fathers envisioned when granting Congress spending authority. I regret that we cannot have a serious Open Rule process and waivers for amendments that address this nation's needs.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ERNIE FLETCHER

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. FLETCHER. Mr. Speaker, on Monday, March 31, 2003, despite all my efforts, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present for Roll Call Vote Nos. 93 and 94 I would have voted the following way:

Roll Call Vote No. 93,—''Aye''.

Roll Call Vote No. 94,—''Aye''.

OUR MILITARY SURVIVORS DESERVE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 3, 2003

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I rise today to speak about a bill to restore equity to the survivors of our nation's veterans, the Military Survivors' Equity Act (H.R. 1592).

It is hard to believe that we continue to condone a system that penalizes the aging survivors, mostly widows, of the veterans of our country, but that is exactly what the Military Survivors' Benefit Plan does! When a member of the military retires, he or she may join the Survivors' Benefits Plan, known as the SBP. After paying a premium for many, many years, the retiree expects that his or her spouse will receive 55 percent of the retired military pay if the veteran dies. But this is not the case!

As I said, most of the survivors who receive SBP benefits are military widows. You may not realize that when these widows who are receiving SBP benefits turn 62, a Social Security offset causes their benefits to be reduced from 55 percent to 35 percent of their husband's military retired pay. This occurs even when the Social Security comes from the wife's employment!

What does this reduction mean to our nation's military widows? I have received many, many letters on this topic. Let me read from two:

My husband, who served in the Army for 20 years, was on Social Security disability because of heart problems and could no longer work. He died when I was 61 years old. I was doing okay, paying my monthly bills and having enough left for groceries, but when I turned 62, I was notified that my SBP was reduced from $476 to $302. What a shock! This was my grocery money that they took away from me.

And a second—

While my husband was alive, we worked out a budget for me in case he died. I felt secure in the knowledge that he had provided for me by joining the Survivors Benefits Plan. I could not believe it when I learned that I was not going to get the amount we were promised. I cannot believe that our government would do this to the widow of a veteran.

It is past time to change this misleading and unfair law. We must provide equity to the surviving spouses of our military retirees. My bill would fix this problem by eliminating the callous and absurd reduction in benefits and give what is expected and what is deserved: 55 percent of the military retired pay. To put it simply, no offset. A simple solution to a difficult problem, as equitable solution to a mean-spirited practice.

Colleagues, please join me in co-sponsoring H.R. 1592, the Military Survivors' Equity Act. Let us do this for our veterans and for their surviving spouses. Let us stop the pain and anguish that we are causing them.