

break down old barriers between agencies. While no legislation is perfect and I believe the Collins/Lieberman version of Intelligence Reform legislation passed in the Senate this week is a better solution, I stand in support of H.R. 10 and vote for this bill today. These reforms move us towards a safer and stronger America.

In the course of the House debate of H.R. 10, many concerns have been raised about immigration and I would like to speak about this particular component of the bill. I remain convinced that illegal immigration is a serious issue that needs to be addressed by the Congress. People who circumvent our Nation's laws and enter this country illegally should not be here. I believe this is central to our national and economic security for hard working Americans and others who come to this country legally.

But I also believe it is important that we remember the purpose of this bill and what brought us to this historic point in time. The purpose of this bill is to reform our Intelligence Community; to lay the foundation we need to protect Americans today. The 9/11 Commission specifically addressed Intelligence Reform. With five Republicans and five Democrats, the Commission spent 20 months on an exhaustive examination of millions of pages of documents, countless interviews and hearings, and hundreds of hours of debate—and produced a bipartisan, unanimous list of 41 recommendations. This report provided the Congress with a real, workable and effective blueprint that became the foundation of the Collins/Lieberman bill that passed the Senate 96–2 on October 6, 2004.

So while I applaud some of the measures in H.R. 10 and have ultimately chosen to vote for this bill because it provides many measures to protect all Americans and our communities, I remain concerned about some of the extraneous provisions it includes like immigration. There are enormous differences between illegal aliens and legal immigrants. There are enormous differences between immigration and terrorism. All of these issues are incredibly important to the fabric of our Nation and deserve to be considered in full and separately.

CORRECTING THE WASHINGTON POST RECORD ON THE VA

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 8, 2004

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to set the record straight on what is happening to recently-separated veterans who seek benefits and services from the Department of Veterans Affairs. There has been significant progress made in the last 3 years; some of that progress was reported correctly in a Washington Times article this past Sunday, but the headline in a piece from the Washington Post that appeared on the same day and was quoted by one of my colleagues on Monday made it seem that VA is totally unprepared to provide disability, compensation, rehabilitation and other benefit to America's veterans.

It is inaccurate to describe the current inventory of 323,000 claims for VA benefits as

a "backlog," if by that term you mean to imply that veterans are waiting unnecessarily for an answer from VA. The truth is that at any given time, the VA is actively processing more than 250,000 claims while receiving more than 70,000 new and reopened claims each month. It's normal for the VA to have a working inventory of at least 250,000 claims.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, at the request of this President, Congress provided additional funding to increase the number of VA claims processors by more than 1,300 since he took office. When we authorized these new employees, we effectively overstaffed the VA so that experienced employees would be available to train these new employees without an adverse effect on the timeliness of claims processing. These new employees are now fully trained and productive, and there should be no reduction in services to veterans.

With respect to meeting veterans' benefits needs, the Washington Post article cited recently one of my colleagues failed to mention any of the documented improvements in VA claims processing. In the past four years, the VA has reduced the average time to decide disability claims from a high of 233 days to 160 days, reduced the percentage of pending claims for over six months from 48% in 2002 to 21% now, reduced rating-related claims from 432,000 in 2002 to 323,000 currently and is on track to meet the VA goal of 250,000.

Most importantly, VA has increased the number of claims decisions from an average of 40,000 per month in 2001 to nearly 70,000 in 2004. These are significant accomplishments by the Bush Administration on behalf of veterans, and all of us should be proud to have supported the increased funding which the Administration requested to make this possible.

Mr. Speaker, the Washington Post article lead readers to believe that there was some delay in providing benefits to a soldier on active duty, and that the VA is unresponsive to America's veterans. In fact, I am advised that VA has already evaluated this particular soldier's disabilities and will begin awarding benefits on the first the day he is discharged from the Army. As all of my colleagues should know, VA cannot provide veterans benefits to a soldier until he or she is discharged from active duty.

The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense are working hard to ensure that military members have a "seamless transition" from active duty; this means prompt decisions on claims for disability benefits and quality health care when needed. Even before servicemembers are discharged, VA provides transition services at 136 military bases so that servicemembers can ask questions and be briefed about their VA benefits and how to file for those benefits as they approach discharge. The VA has even assigned its own professional staff to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda and the Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany to ensure our wounded American heroes will be aware of their VA health care and benefits long before they are discharged.

Mr. Speaker it is often said that you shouldn't argue with an entity that buys ink by the barrel, but the Washington Post has its facts wrong in this case. This is not that surprising since the Post has not reported on any of the hearings—and we've had many—on

these issues held by either the House Committee on Veterans Affairs which I chair and the House Armed Service Committee during the past year. Had they done so, their readers could have learned about the problems which have faced separating service members in the past and what is being done today to prevent those problems from occurring in the future.

Both the Armed Forces and VA are working more closely together than in any previous conflict to ensure that the benefits which service members earned by their faithful service are delivered in a timely and compassionate manner. Members who attended those hearings learned that while mistakes have occurred, no one is more dedicated to ensuring that these deserving veterans than the current VA Secretary Anthony Principi and his able staff. The VA, the Congress and the President are all working together to make sure that our newest generation of combat veterans are taken care of. They deserve nothing less.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DARRELL E. ISSA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 8, 2004

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, if I had been present for the vote on the conference report for H.R. 4200, "The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2005," and conference report for H.R. 4567, "The Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for FY 2005," I would have voted "yea" on both.

H.R. 1047, MISCELLANEOUS TRADE AND TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS ACT

HON. PHILIP M. CRANE

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 8, 2004

Mr. CRANE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 1047, the Miscellaneous Trade and Technical Corrections Act of 2004. This important, bipartisan legislation is long overdue, and I am pleased we have the opportunity to consider the conference report this evening.

H.R. 1047 is a compendium of trade provisions drawn largely from legislation introduced by individual Members. The bill contains provisions involving the temporary suspension of duties on narrowly defined products, miscellaneous trade items, and technical corrections to the Trade and Development Act of 2000.

There are a number of provisions in this bill that are noteworthy, including several that I have long championed. For instance, I am pleased that the legislation follows in the tradition of both the 2000 and 2002 Trade Acts, by including a reduction of the tariff for certain types of wool used in the production of men's suits.

This reduction in tariffs is important not only as a matter of trade policy, but also to suitmakers across the country, who not too long ago saw their industry decimated by high tariffs. Reducing these tariffs has stabilized the domestic industry, and nowhere is this more apparent than at Hart Marx, the only publicly-

traded company manufacturing suits in America today.

I had the opportunity to tour the wonderful Hart Marx facility in Des Plaines, IL, this past August, and saw firsthand how important that tariff reduction is for the nearly 600 employees at Hart Marx, many of whom are my constituents.

I am therefore most pleased that this legislation will further reduce the tariff on worsted wool. History shows us that this will not only save jobs, but even add to jobs, in Illinois and throughout the country.

I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

HAITI SMOLDERING ON THE EDGE OF CHAOS

HON. MAXINE WATERS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 8, 2004

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, on February 29 of this year, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically elected President of Haiti, was overthrown in a coup d'etat. This coup d'etat was led by heavily armed thugs and killers, many of whom are former members of the Haitian Armed Forces which were disbanded in 1995 and are notorious for their history of human rights violations. These thugs and killers have refused to disarm and now control several Haitian towns and cities, where they terrorize the local population. They are demanding the reestablishment of the Haitian Armed Forces, and they even had the gall to claim that the Haitian Government owes them more than 10 years of back pay.

The following research paper, entitled "Haiti: Smoldering on the Edge of Chaos," is an insightful analysis of the crisis in Haiti brought about by these thugs and killers. The paper was written by Jessica Leight, a research fellow at the Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization. I hope my colleagues find Ms. Leight's analysis informative.

HAITI: SMOLDERING ON THE EDGE OF CHAOS

Six months after the abrupt and violence-laced departure of constitutionally-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and over three months after the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping units which were hailed as an instrument for order and stability for this long-troubled Caribbean island, Haiti remains poised on the edge of chaos. Just as nature in the form of a tropical storm that has managed to kill as many as 3,000 Haitians, thousands more have died over the past decade, victims of right-wing military and paramilitary forces. Today, ruled by a bumptious, ineffectual and illegitimate cabal whose only validity is supplied by U.S. fiat, Haiti now faces the imminent de facto reconstitution of its brutal Haitian Armed Forces (FADH), dissolved by Aristide in 1995. Across the island, bands of former soldiers are seizing police stations and establishing themselves as the de facto local power, at times displacing the remnants of the national police and placing large swaths of the country under what is effectively outlaw rebel jurisdiction. Meanwhile these soldiers demand the restitution of unpaid wages over the past ten years for such services as torturing and murdering civilian victims.

These soldiers of ill-fortune have met little, if any, resistance from the rump Wash-

ington-imposed interim government of Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, and at times they have received open encouragement from Latortue's "cabinet members," most notably Interior Minister (and former general) Herard Abraham and the island's notorious justice minister Bernard Gousse, both of whom have suggested that former soldiers—some of the most prominent among whom have already been convicted in absentia for human rights violations committed during the military government of 1991-1994—could simply be integrated into the police force.

AN ARMY REBORN

In the face of these developments, FADH leaders are gathering strength in a bid to retake political power and restore the repression for which the army could always be counted to provide throughout most of Haiti's turbulent twentieth-century history, the U.N. stabilization force and the international community alike have remained almost deafeningly silent. At the present time, the U.N. presence in Haiti is more myth than fact, while a handful of renegades with a military background, in conjunction with the tiny opposition business and professional Group of 184, have the clearest access to the Latortue regime and its ability to obtrusively impact on the daily lives of the population. Within Haiti, international troops drawn principally from the former rogue armed forces of Brazil, Argentina and Chile, which were better known for the repression of their own citizens during previous eras of military rule than for their nation-building skills, are seemingly paralyzed by inaction. These U.N. forces have made only the paltriest of efforts to preserve order in the face of paramilitary power-grabs by ex-FADH and police figures like Louis-Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe. They have proven better at stalking pro-Aristide Lavalas party's political forces than well-armed renegade former soldiers.

In Washington, a State Department preoccupied by Iraq and North Korea appears to have all but overlooked the island's existence; and in New York, a craven lack of political will is in evidence, accompanied by the kind of Machiavellian plotting by the U.S. and French U.N. Security Council delegations that was witnessed when that body refused to provide an international police force to defend Aristide earlier this year. Nor is U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan any more sensitive to the plight of the Haitian populace than he was just before Aristide's downfall, when he provided cover for the U.S. insistence that the former president deserved to be forced into exile because he was a failed leader.

There has yet to be any kind of clear acknowledgment of the magnitude of the threat that Haiti's already battered democratic institutions face from the military resurgence on the island, much less the strategy which will be used to disarm these illegal militias as well as clearly establish the authority of a trained, professional police force, and bring to justice the same former soldiers accused of human rights abuses who are now making outrageous demands for compensation. Quite to the contrary, as the exoneration of mass murderer Louis Chamblain by Justice Minister Gousse and the island's tainted courts graphically exemplifies, Haiti is still a very sick country.

Thus as the clock continues to tick on a peacekeeping mission originally authorized for only six months, it seems increasingly likely that the United Nations will exit Haiti much as the United States and Canada precipitously did in 1996: leaving behind a profoundly unstable political situation dominated by heavily armed factions, as thou-

sands of weapons remain in the possession of right-wing vigilantes as well as some in the hands of pro-Aristide supporters. The situation is made even more volatile today by the former military leadership's aspirations to restore both the army and the same reign of terror it applied during the decades-long Duvalier and post-Duvalier military dictatorships, as well as under the brutal 1991-1994 military junta led by the brute General Raoul Cedras.

THE HAITIAN MILITARY: RISING FROM THE ASHES?

Among the most alarming signs of military resurgence within the last sixty days was the acquittal on August 17, in a show trial, of former army captain and paramilitary leader Louis-Jodel Chamblain, previously convicted in absentia for the 1993 murder of prominent Aristide supporter Antoine Izmerly. This outrageous verdict, achieved under the aegis of Latortue's disreputable justice minister, Bernard Gousse, was reached after a ludicrously brief overnight trial in which the prosecution called only one witness who proved to be entirely irrelevant to the case. This earned for the interim government opprobrious remarks on the editorial pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post, as well as widespread denunciations from human rights organizations, and even from the State Department, which bears much of the blame for the current dysfunctional rule of the island. However, the subsequent rash of self-serving individual power plays on the part of the ex-soldiers, and the government's utter unwillingness to confront or even denounce such challenges to state authority, has received virtually no attention outside of Haiti. This development has to be rightfully considered part of the same dangerous phenomenon which includes the growing power of former military figures like Chamblain, as well as sly ideologues like the grinning Justice Minister Gousse, who was clearly complicit in orchestrating Chamblain's acquittal.

For example, only six days after the conclusion of the Chamblain trial, the Haitian Times reported on August 18 that the interim government had appointed Winter Etienne—a leader of the bloody armed uprising in Gonaives that preceded Aristide's exile, who is also the coordinator of the National Reconstruction Front, a party headed by former army officers, including rebel leader Guy Philippe. The last named became the director of the National Port Authority in Gonaives, the very city he earlier had helped sack. At the Ministry of Interior, former ranking military figure Minister Herard Abraham continues to add former high-ranking military cronies to his staff; among the recent arrivals is former colonel Williams Regala, a particularly sinister aide to former dictator General Henri Namphy and undoubtedly a main plotter of the massacre of voters during Haiti's aborted November 29, 1987 election. Regala joins another former colleague, Colonel Henri-Robert Marc-Charles, a member of the Cedras-led military junta that overthrew democratically-elected President Aristide 1991, who currently is the target of a (as yet unenforced) judicial order requiring his imprisonment prior to trial for alleged involvement in a peasant massacre in Piatre in March 1990.

EROSION OF AUTHORITY OF THE MOST PATHETIC GOVERNMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

Given these pro-military signals on the part of the Latortue government, which consistently has demonstrated its sympathy for former military leaders at the same time it officially rejects the idea of reconstituting the armed forces on the grounds that such a momentous step should be taken only by the