

Mr. Speaker, this will be one of the most important issues on which this House will vote this year, and I ask that this very thoughtful letter by this broad range of groups be printed here for the benefit of the Members who will have to vote on this.

March 22, 2004.

Hon. C. W. BILL YOUNG,  
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN YOUNG: The undersigned groups are writing to express our strong opposition to the severe cut to the Section 8 voucher program in the HUD Fiscal Year 2005 budget. The President's request for the voucher program is more than \$1.6 billion short of fully funding all vouchers in use. At this funding level, approximately 250,000 low income families with children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities could lose their vouchers.

This shortfall comes at a time when a recent analysis of the American Housing Survey reveals 31 percent of all households had housing problems in 2001. Now is not the time to cut the funding for a housing program that has served as the "linchpin" of our federal housing policy for the last two decades.

We also urge you to oppose the proposed Flexible Voucher Program that would make significant changes in the program's structure. The proposed changes would create a block grant program and eliminate many of the long-standing rules that benefit low income families. Under the proposed block grant, PHAs would receive a lump sum that would not be adequate to serve all current voucher holders. The elimination of statutory requirements including targeting the program to the lowest income families and ending the requirement that tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income for their rent could have a devastating effect on families across the nation.

The Administration has expressed concern about the growth in costs of the voucher program. This increase was largely the result of rising utilization rates, expansion of the voucher program by Congress, and the widening gap between rental housing costs and family incomes in recent years. However, a recent study by CBO projects that the growth rate of Section 8 expenditures will slow to 1.8 percent in fiscal year 2005. They also project the costs to continue to level off because of the cooling of the housing market as well as increases in wages as the economy recovers.

The Section 8 voucher program is an effective and critical resource. Housing assistance is needed by the many low income families with children, elderly, people with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence who would not have safe, decent, and affordable housing without it. Housing authorities cannot be expected to do more with inadequate resources. We respectfully urge you to provide the necessary funding for all existing vouchers and reject HUD's plan to dismantle the housing voucher program.

Sincerely,

ACORN  
Alliance for Children and Families  
Alliance for Healthy Homes  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging  
American Association of People with Disabilities  
American Association on Mental Retardation  
American Baptist Churches USA  
American Friends Service Committee  
American Network of Community Options and Resources  
American Society on Aging

Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historical Black Colleges and Universities

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Brain Injury Association of America

Catholic Health Association

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Defense Fund

Church Women United

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Families USA

Generation United

Gray Panthers

International Union, UAW

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Lutheran Services in America

National Advocacy Center of The Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Affordable Housing Management Association

National AIDS Housing Coalition

National Alliance for The Mentally Ill

National Alliance to End Homelessness

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Association of Housing Cooperatives

National Association of Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers

National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

National Coalition for the Homeless

National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council on Independent Living

National Council on the Aging

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Housing Conference

National Housing Trust

National Low Income Housing Coalition

National Mental Health Association

National Network to End Domestic Violence

National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness

National Rural Housing Coalition

National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness

Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty and Law

The Arc of the United States

The Coalition on Human Needs

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force

The Enterprise Foundation

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Union For Reform Judaism

United Cerebral Palsy

United Spinal Association (formerly Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association)

United Way of America

U.S. Jesuit Conference

Volunteers of America

FREEDOM FOR VICTOR ROLANDO  
ARROYO CARMONA

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Mr. DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Victor Rolando Ar-

royo Carmona, a prisoner of conscience in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Arroyo is vice-president of the group Forum for Reform as well as a member of the Union of Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers. Mr. Arroyo is a leading pro-democracy activist and has been a constant target of the totalitarian regime. Because of his peaceful activism for freedom and democracy, Mr. Arroyo has been harassed, beaten, and imprisoned in Castro's abhorrent gulag.

According to Human Rights Watch, in January 1995, Mr. Arroyo was beaten and thrown in prison for nine days after organizing a ceremony to commemorate the birth of José Martí. In 1996, he was sentenced to eighteen months in the totalitarian gulag and held in a "tapiada" cell—a narrow, dark and extremely humid cell—for "disrespecting" the government. In January 2000, Mr. Arroyo was charged with "hoarding" and sentenced to eighteen months in the gulag for organizing a toy drive and distributing toys to needy Cuban children. In October 2000, he was beaten by the dictatorship's goons on three separate occasions. In October 2001, rocks and bottles containing flammable chemicals were thrown at the home where Mr. Arroyo lives with his wife and children.

Despite these horrifically repressive intimidation tactics, despite being locked in the totalitarian gulag for distributing toys to needy children, Mr. Arroyo has never stopped demanding freedom and democracy for the Cuban people. Even with first hand knowledge of the brutal, inhumane, consequences of depicting the true reality of the totalitarian regime, Mr. Arroyo has bravely continued to write the truth about Castro's nightmarish oppression.

In 2002, Human Rights Watch awarded Mr. Arroyo a Hellman-Hammet grant in recognition of his courage in the face of political persecution. This prestigious grant is awarded annually to writers around the world who have been targets of political persecution.

On March 18, 2003, as part of the tyrant's brutal March 2003 crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists, Mr. Arroyo was arrested by Castro's agents of repression. After a sham trial, Mr. Arroyo was sentenced to 26 years in the totalitarian gulag.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Arroyo supports basic human rights for all Cubans. Despite being beaten, harassed, and now, once again, languishing in the grotesque, totalitarian, squalor of Castro's gulag, he is fervently committed to the cause of freedom. My Colleagues, we must demand the immediate release of Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona and every prisoner of conscience suffering in the totalitarian gulags of the nightmare called the Castro regime.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 4032, THE  
VETERANS FIDUCIARY ACT OF 2004

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, during the first session of this Congress, the Subcommittee on Benefits of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing concerning the Department of Veterans Affairs

(VA) fiduciary program. When a veteran has difficulty managing his own finances, the VA appoints a guardian or a "fiduciary" to oversee his benefits. During the hearing, I was surprised to learn that there is no mechanism in place to provide replacement of benefits for VA beneficiaries whose benefits have been misused by a VA recognized fiduciary.

Unfortunately, some of our veterans have lost out on their VA benefits because of fiduciary misuse. According to an investigation by the Inspector General, one woman embezzled over \$60,000 in VA payments from 1997 to 2001 from a disabled veteran under her care. In another case, a fiduciary defrauded his uncle out of nearly \$55,000 in VA payments.

A good number of our veterans must live on limited budgets and rely primarily on their VA payments. When they lose even a portion of their benefits, the impact on the quality of their lives can be significant.

I was also surprised to learn that Congress has not improved on the safeguards for veterans who depend on fiduciaries in over 25 years. It is time we do something to prevent fraud against our veterans and to provide remedies when benefits are misused.

Today, I am introducing legislation, the "Veterans Fiduciary Act of 2004," which would provide veterans and their families new protections and new avenues to recoup their losses. This bill would require the replacement of benefits in cases when the VA has been negligent in failing to investigate or monitor a fiduciary and in certain other circumstances. It will also require the VA to conduct background checks before recognizing a fiduciary and will give the VA new mechanisms to deter misuse, including civil monetary fines.

Again, I strongly believe we should be doing more to protect the VA benefits our veterans rely upon. I am proud to introduce legislation to give our most vulnerable veterans the protection they deserve.

#### TRIBUTE TO YEOMAN SECOND CLASS MONTELL L. GWINN

**HON. C. W. BILL YOUNG**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 25, 2004*

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and pay tribute to an outstanding enlisted sailor, Yeoman Second Class, Montell L. Gwinn, as he prepares to complete his service to our Nation in the United States Navy. It is a great honor for me to take this opportunity to thank YN2 Gwinn and his family for his 7 years of distinguished and dedicated service to our Nation for which he has proudly and selflessly served in the defense of freedom.

I came to know this sailor while he was assigned to the Navy's Appropriations Liaison Office. In this capacity, he served as a liaison for me, for the members of my staff, and for the professional staff of the Appropriations Committee I chair to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. He also accompanied me on several trips as I investigated the health and welfare of our troops stationed here and throughout the world. In all cases, YN2 Gwinn performed his duties in the most professional manner. He was particularly invaluable in providing great personal insight

as an enlisted sailor, giving tremendous input on issues affecting the sailors and their families. His candor, intelligence, and steadfast devotion to duty, was a tremendous asset to me in my deliberations regarding our most prized commodity within our Armed Forces, the men and women of our all-volunteer force.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to recognize YN2 Gwinn for his distinguished service to our Nation. Montell is symbolic of the spirit of our Nation's all volunteer force. My wife Beverly and I have the highest respect for him and all those who serve in uniform in defense of freedom. Without their dedicated service, we would not be "the land of the free" were we not also the "home of the brave." My colleagues and I want to express our thanks and appreciation for the special contribution YN2 Gwinn has made to the United States Navy and the special insight he has provided me and the members of my Committee. We also wish Montell and his family continued success and the traditional naval wish of "fair winds and following seas" as he closes out his distinguished military career.

#### RELATING TO THE LIBERATION OF THE IRAQI PEOPLE AND THE VALIANT SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES AND COALITION FORCES

SPEECH OF

**HON. DIANA DeGETTE**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 17, 2004*

Ms. DeGETTE. Mr. Speaker, war does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity or religion—it is indifferent to background or boundaries, social standing or political affiliation. War impacts all of those involved with an impartial voracity. Honoring our men and women for the sacrifice, strength and courage they have demonstrated while in Iraq should be as unbiased—it should not be mired in partisanship or petty politics.

With a unified voice, the House of Representatives should approve a resolution that acknowledges the bravery of the American men and women in Iraq and the sacrifices they and their families have made for the sake of our nation. It should recognize the 575 American soldiers who have lost their lives in Iraq, soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, as well as the more than 3,000 wounded troops who are struggling to recover from their injuries. We are deeply indebted to these men and women and grateful for the hardships they have endured. We should vote on, and unanimously pass, a resolution that unequivocally communicates this.

However, the Republican majority has presented a resolution that specifically and intentionally prevents unanimous support from this body. The divisive language alleging that the world is a safer place after the Iraqi invasion, is not only a point of great contention, it is a distraction from what should be the sole focus of the resolution: to commend our tireless troops in Iraq. Indeed, the Republican majority has squandered the opportunity to send a message of unwavering support to the American men and women in the field, instead opting to politicize the issue in order to advance its own political agenda.

In good faith, I cannot vote for a resolution that asserts that the world is safer since the U.S. invasion of Iraq when by every account, the world is glaringly even more vulnerable, as partly evidenced by the horrific bombing in Madrid last week. When our country chooses to unilaterally use force before exhausting all diplomatic avenues, we risk alienating ourselves from our allies and emboldening our enemies. Unfortunately, I believe our go-it-alone strategy in Iraq has done just that.

While I cannot vote for this resolution, I am steadfast in my support for the American men and women fighting in Iraq and believe we must support them both by word and action. We must fight to get our troops home quickly and safely while upholding the commitment we have made to the Iraqi people. The best possible way to achieve this is by working with the international community to rebuild Iraq. Additionally, we must ensure that our troops, in the field and once they have returned home, have the benefits they rightfully deserve, including increased access to medical care and deserved increases in the family separation allowance and imminent danger pay.

#### CHILD NUTRITION IMPROVEMENT AND INTEGRITY ACT

SPEECH OF

**HON. SANDER M. LEVIN**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 24, 2004*

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to voice my strong support for the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill, H.R. 3873, which the House approved yesterday. This reauthorization, which only happens every 5 years, provides Congress the opportunity to examine the program, fix problems, and build on past successes. I am greatly disappointed that this year, my colleagues needed to waste valuable energy protecting existing programs from damaging Administration proposals, rather than using what our schools have learned to move forward.

When we started this debate a year ago, President Bush declared that the problem with the nutrition programs was too many children getting lunch. The President imposed burdensome new eligibility verification rules on our local school districts, despite research from his own Department of Agriculture showing his proposal would likely result in a reduction of eligible children participating in the program. I commend my colleagues on the Committee for ensuring that H.R. 3873 does not harm the School Lunch & Breakfast Program, or take food away from children who need it.

I am also pleased that the bill expands pilot programs such as the Luger Summer Food Pilot Program and the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program. In the State of Michigan, 11 percent of our children are considered overweight. Children participating in the Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program not only ate more fruits and vegetables, but actually purchased less high fat vending machine options, had better attention spans in class, and experienced fewer disciplinary problems. This pilot program has shown that, given the resources, schools can create an environment where healthy snack options can be a reality without