

have supported them through the good years and bad ones. They were a source of joy, hope, and inspiration. We admire the Pats for their achievements and look forward to win number three.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the New England Patriots on their thrilling victory in Super Bowl XXXVIII. In a season of tremendous adversity marked by difficult early-season losses and numerous injuries, this team displayed the values of hardwork and determination that so epitomize the region from which they hail. After beginning their season with a heart-breaking defeat at the hands of the intra-division rival Buffalo Bills, the Patriots went on to win all but one of their next fifteen games, including a franchise-record twelve-game winning streak. Ignoring the seemingly relentless skeptics, the Patriots defeated a hard-nosed Tennessee Titan team and halted the high-octane Indianapolis Colts to gain a spot on the world's biggest stage in Super Bowl XXXVIII.

One again relying on the leadership of quarterback Tom Brady and the steady foot of kicker Adam Vinatieri for last-second heroics, the Patriots defeated a stubborn Carolina Panther team to earn their second Super Bowl victory in the past three years. Abiding by the values of teamwork and perseverance instilled by head coach Bill Belichick, the New England Patriots are an example to all Americans of what it means to be a true champion. In addition, I would particularly like to congratulate Mike Cloud, a resident of Rhode Island, on being part of a team that makes all of New England proud.

I hope our colleagues will join me in congratulating the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of Tuesday, February 3, 2004, the resolution is considered read for amendment and previous question is ordered.

The question is on the resolution.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

OVERTIME REGULATIONS AND VETERANS

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

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, as one of the chairmen of the two labor committees here in the House and as a veteran, I am here to denounce an effort by Big Labor to scare our Nation's veterans and service men and women into thinking the Department of Labor is out to take away their overtime. The Department of Labor is working on revisions to the regulations governing overtime pay. These regulations would provide 1.3 million more Americans with overtime and help millions of hard-working people in this country.

Let me be absolutely clear, the Department of Labor's proposed overtime

regulations do not apply to the military, and nothing in existing law or the proposed regulations suggest that being a veteran would have any effect on overtime pay. It is a sad day indeed when the men and women of our forces are exploited for political gain. Opponents of these regulations ought to be ashamed.

SECRETARY OF LABOR,
Washington, January 27, 2004.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: I write to provide you with the facts to correct the record following last week's Senate floor debate on the Consolidated Appropriations Act with regard to the Department of Labor's proposed revision of the Fair Labor Standards Act's overtime exemption regulations. I also would like to thank you for your support and leadership on this important issue.

The recent allegations that military personnel and veterans will lose overtime pay, because of proposed clarifications of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) "white-collar" exemption regulations, are incorrect and harmful to the morale of veterans and of American servicemen and women. I want to assure you that military personnel and veterans are not affected by these proposed rules by virtue of their military duties or training.

First, the Part 541 "white collar exemptions" do not apply to the military. They cover only the civilian workforce.

Second, nothing in the current or proposed regulation makes any mention of veteran status. Despite claims that military training would make veterans ineligible for overtime pay, members of Congress should be clear that the Department of Labor's proposed rules will not strip any veteran of overtime eligibility.

This has been one of many criticisms intended to confuse and frighten workers about our proposal to revise the badly outdated regulations under the FLSA "white collar" exemption regulations. It is disheartening that the debate over modernizing these regulations to meet the needs of the 21st Century workforce has largely ignored the broad consensus that this rule needs substantial revision to strengthen overtime protections.

The growing ambiguities caused by time and workplace advancements have made both employers' compliance with this rule and employees' understanding of their rights increasingly difficult. More and more, employees must resort to class action lawsuits to recover their overtime pay. These workers must wait several years to have their cases adjudicated in order to get the overtime they have already earned. In fact, litigation over these rules drains nearly \$2 billion a year from the economy, costing jobs and better pay.

I hope that this latest concern will be put to rest immediately. Once again, I assure you that military duties and training or veteran status have no bearing on overtime eligibility. We hope that future debate on this important provision is more constructive. If we can provide further assistance in setting the record straight, we would be pleased to do so. The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection from the standpoint of the Administration's program to the presentation of this report.

Sincerely,

ELAINE L. CHAO.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. RENZI). Under the Speaker's announced

policy of January 7, 2003, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ASSOCIATION HEALTH PLANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to come to the House tonight and talk about the Republican agenda for taking care of the uninsured. The uninsured remain a major problem in this country, and I think we have a unique opportunity in front of us this year for actually reducing significantly the number of uninsured in this country.

The President actually gave mention of this in his State of the Union address here a little over a week ago. There are three Republican bills out there right now that would significantly impact downward the number of uninsured of this country.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues recall we passed in this House as part of the Medicare bill the bill that would allow expansion of health savings accounts. This is an issue that is near and dear to my heart because I had an Archer MSA for a number of years back when I was in my private medical practice, and I know the power of these accounts in being able to allow an individual to build wealth and build wealth that is dedicated to their health care needs.

This is the single best way to enhance the consumer aspect of health care in this country, which I believe is an aspect that is absolutely critical.

With a health savings account, an individual can choose their own doctor. There is nothing more fundamental in this country in the private practice of medicine than being able to choose your own physician. One can consult with your physician about services that one needs. One is not consulting with an HMO board somewhere. You are actually making these decisions yourself with your physician in the treatment room. There is no question that health savings accounts allow the

maximum amount of portability because one is not relying upon some program or some insurance benefit. The individual owns the money.

As Republicans, we hear it over and over again: we like to own things. In this case, one keeps control of that money. If a person loses their job, that money stays with them. It is there for the purchase of COBRA benefits should they need it or to tide you over until one obtains health insurance benefits with another job.

This is an important point that I do not think a lot of people understand. I had a medical savings account for my last 5 years in the private sector. I came to Congress. A medical savings account is not available to Members of Congress, or at least it was not last year when we were sworn in. That money that I had in the medical savings account remains for me in that account. It is growing year by year through the miracle of compound interest.

And should I go back to the private sector at some time, I fully would expect to use that money to once again join another medical savings account somewhere else.

Another program that the President spoke to the other night when he was here, and this is an extremely important point, and, realistically, Mr. Speaker, we cannot get this one done fast enough. In fact, the House has already passed association health plans. We did this last June. This proposal would give small businesses the ability to band together across State lines, if need be, to purchase health insurance as part of a larger group. This gives small businesses greater bargaining power when it comes to the health coverage needs of their employees.

In addition to that, it lowers administrative costs. The other body has this bill. Of course, I encourage them to take this up and pass needed relief for Americans working for small businesses.

Association health plans will decrease the number of uninsured and give small businesses the ability to offer health insurance to their employees that they previously might not have been able to afford or in subsequent years would have to abandon because of the cost.

This is a win-win situation for the employee and for the business owner. Finally, the President spoke to the issue of tax credits for the uninsured. This is probably one of the most powerful ways to really reduce the number of uninsured in this country. The gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER) has offered this bill. I am happy to be a cosponsor of this bill. I look forward to us moving this bill forward in the House this year. I was glad the President spoke to that.

Mr. Speaker, one might ask how many people will be helped with these three proposals that are out there now. You get a number of estimates around from different people, some more opti-

mistic, some more pessimistic. I think we would all agree as Republicans one probably could not get a more pessimistic estimate than from Roll Call. Mr. Morton Kondracke in his Pennsylvania Avenue column from January 26, that was a week ago Monday, Mr. Kondracke was actually critical of the President's State of the Union address about not doing more for the uninsured.

But by Mr. Kondracke's own figures, we would reduce the number of uninsured in this country by 10 million over this next year simply by doing these three proposals which are all easily within our grasp.

Medical savings accounts have been done; association health plans have been done in the House awaiting action over in the other body; finally, tax credits for the uninsured, something we can take up and do with a minimum of heavy lifting this year.

Mr. Kondracke goes on to say that the association health plans would provide relief for 2 million workers. Health savings accounts would benefit an additional 4 million people, and the tax credits would benefit another 4 million people. This is 10 million. This is one quarter of the uninsured in this country done in this year.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we have got a message in front of us that is just too powerful to ignore. And I look forward to working with my friends on both sides of the aisle to get these three things done this year and get them working for the American people.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I was truly sad when today in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing I saw the figures in the administration's budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the coming fiscal year.

Last year in an effort that was actually just completed a couple weeks ago, many Members of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, worked with the support of our Nation's veteran service organizations to finally arrive at a budget, while not completely adequate, at least addressing many of the needs of our veterans.

So I was very disheartened to find ourselves in the same place we were a year ago. We were faced with the same tired old proposals to raise the copay-

ments on prescription drugs at the VA, a proposal that Congress soundly defeated probably many times.

We are faced with a proposal for a \$250 annual fee for many veterans, which Congress also has defeated. So we are faced with a VA policy of continuing to suspend enrollments for the so-called priority 8 veterans. These are veterans, but they cannot be enrolled because we cannot handle them.

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And this budget request from the administration cuts the VA nursing home program and cuts funding, if you can believe this, for medical research. Imagine how our veterans must feel. Actually, we know how they feel. The Paralyzed Veterans of America has issued a press release entitled, "Another Year, Another Inadequate Budget Request for Veterans' Health Care."

They go on to point out that this request includes the lowest appropriation request for VA health care made by any administration for a decade. Although the VA Under Secretary for Health has testified that an average yearly medical care increase of 12 to 14 percent is needed to meet the cost of inflation and mandatory salary increases, there is less than 2 percent more than last year's appropriation recommended in the President's budget.

Likewise, the leaders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and other veterans organizations have expressed dismay, if I can say the least, at the proposed VA medical care funding. In fact, I feel I should just pull out the old tapes and old speeches from last year and rerun them, except it is not last year. And since the last budget request from this administration, the Nation has sent our young men and women to a war in Iraq, and they will be coming home as, guess what? Veterans.

Caring for our veterans is one of the costs of war, and the budget request does not take note of this fact.

I have enormous respect for Secretary Principi, who I believe does a great deal with inadequate budgets. But even this Secretary, or should I say especially this Secretary, needs a Congress that will pass a budget that is worthy of our veterans.

So sign me up for the battle again this year. Whatever is needed we will do to fill the budget holes that the President has left in this fiscal year.

Most of all, let us take note that this budget request points out the need for mandatory funding for VA health care. Let me repeat, mandatory funding of VA health care. It is now called discretionary, so we have to go through this battle every single year. Let us pass mandatory funding for VA health care so we will not have to rerun the same tapes next year and the next year and the next year.

CONGRESS MUST DECLARE WARS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Under a previous order of