

justice not only in the State of Mississippi but across this country. The story of Olen Burrage is one of many in Mississippi's plagued past. The State's insistence on justice signals a new day not only for the State of Mississippi, but also for the families of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner.

BOSTON GLOBE SERIES ON FIRE FIGHTER STAFFING ISSUES

HON. EDWARD J. MARKEY

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, today I am inserting in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, excerpts from an excellent series on fire safety by Bill Dedman that ran in the Boston Globe on January 30 and 31, 2005. The series investigates the overwhelming problem of shrinking resources in local fire departments and the resulting threats to public and fire fighter safety. I urge my colleagues to read the entire series on line at: <http://www.boston.com/news/specials/fires/>.

Mr. Dedman conducted what may be the most thorough analysis of the many threats to public safety resulting from understaffed fire houses, tight municipal budgets and ever growing responsibilities. Just this month my staff met with mayors of towns and communities in my congressional district in Massachusetts who are concerned that the fire fighter staffing problems are reaching crisis levels. Since September 2001, Massachusetts has lost 800 paid fire fighters by layoffs and attrition. We have too few fire fighters who are too thinly spread. And the work has essentially doubled.

According to the National Fire Protection Administration, it is critical for fire fighters to arrive at a fire within 6 minutes. But that is not happening. The Globe series revealed that nationwide only 35 percent of fire departments were able to reach 90 percent of building fires in that time. Why? As the chiefs say, "more work, fewer people."

I would like to share the following excerpts from the Globe with my colleagues:

... Lisa Collum was breast-feeding her baby, and her 3-year-old was getting ready for a playdate, when the fire started in the apartment downstairs ... The firehouse a few blocks away was empty. Only three fire-fighters were on duty to cover all 33 square miles of this seaside town, and they were busy with two ambulance calls on this January evening in 2001. One firefighter drove back for the fire engine, then hurried into the chaos at the Collums' home ... It was standing room only at the funeral ...

... Once a day on average in this country, someone dies when firefighters arrive too late, an investigation of fire response times by the Globe has found. America's fire departments are giving fires a longer head-start, arriving later each year, especially in the suburbs around Boston, Atlanta and other cities, where growth is brisk but fire staffing has been cut ...

... In Massachusetts, people waited 10 minutes or more for firefighters to arrive at 214 building fires in 2002, the last year for which data is available. Since 1990, there have been 2,786 such fires, including blazes at jails, mental hospitals, apartment buildings, shopping malls and private homes.

... The fire department budgets are not growing to keep up, but shrinking. As a

share of all municipal budgets across the country, fire spending has slipped, from 6.1 percent in fiscal 1987 to 5.7 percent in fiscal 2003, the Globe calculated from the US Census Bureau's survey of governments ...

Small-town departments are increasingly undertaking aggressive interior assaults on fires. Some of these smaller fire departments do not have the training, equipment, and backup personnel to safely accomplish these dangerous tactics," warned a 1998 report by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health ... After the Worcester fire that killed six firefighters in 1999, federal investigators warned of the need to have a rested crew standing by with safety equipment. But fire chiefs in the Boston suburbs say such a team is usually assembled only after the fire is nearly out.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to visit the web and read this series more closely. We owe it to the public and to our brave fire fighters whose lives are on the line every day.

EXPRESSING THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN IRAQ AND COMMEMORATING SGT SHERWOOD BAKER

HON. PAUL E. KANJORSKI

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. KANJORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with you and my esteemed colleagues in the House of Representatives an op-ed piece written by the brother of one of my constituents who was killed in Iraq. SGT Sherwood Baker of Plymouth, Pennsylvania, served as a member of the Second Battalion, 103rd Armor of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard.

Sergeant Baker was only 30 years old when he died in a warehouse explosion in Baghdad on April 26, 2004, where he was searching for weapons of mass destruction. Sergeant Baker made the ultimate sacrifice while serving his country, searching for weapons our government now concedes cannot be found and most likely did not exist.

Dante Zappala writes with the pain of one who has lost a loved one; more than 1,400 other families are grieving for the loss of their loved ones who died in the service of our country. Dante's heartfelt plea for accountability should resonate among all Americans, especially those of us in Congress who authorized President Bush to lead our Nation into war.

The Bush Administration convinced me that Iraq posed an "imminent threat" to the national security of the United States. I now believe that it was never a threat. Until I have a full understanding of what caused us to be so wrong, I doubt that this Administration can convince me again that they are right in their decisions based on their analysis of intelligence.

Dante is right: We are all accountable. Now that the contentious election of 2004 is behind us and President Bush has been inaugurated to a second term, I hope that we can acknowledge the mistakes we made that led us to war, learn from those mistakes, and avoid making them in the future. Our Nation's security depends on it.

Mr. Speaker, Congress must play a stronger role in holding this Administration accountable

for the innocent lives that have been sacrificed.

I submit the following for entry into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

WHY MY BROTHER DIED

(By Dante Zappala)

This week, the White House announced, with little fanfare, that the two-year search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq had finally ended, and it acknowledged that no such weapons existed there at the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003.

For many, this may be a story of only passing interest. But for me and my family, it resonates with profound depth.

My brother was Sgt. Sherwood Baker. He was a member of the Pennsylvania National Guard deployed a year ago with his unit out of Wilkes-Barre. He said goodbye to his wife and his 9-year-old son, boarded a bus and went to Ft. Dix, N.J., to be hastily retrained. His seven years of Guard training as a forward observer was practically worthless because he would not face combat. All he needed to do was learn how to not die.

He received a crash course in convoy security, including practice in running over cardboard cutouts of children. We bought him a GPS unit and walkie-talkies because he wasn't supplied with them. In Iraq, Sherwood was assigned to the Iraq Survey Group and joined the search for weapons of mass destruction.

David Kay, who led the group until January 2004, had already stated that they did not exist. Former United Nations weapons inspector Hans Blix had expressed serious doubts about their presence during prewar inspections. In fact, a cadre of former U.N. inspectors and U.S. generals had been saying for years that Iraq posed no threat to our country. On April 26, 2004, the Iraq Survey Group, at the behest of the stubborn administration sitting safely in office buildings in Washington, was still on its fruitless but dangerous search. My brother stood atop his Humvee, securing the perimeter in front of a suspect building in Baghdad. But as soldiers entered the building, it exploded; the official cause is still not known. Sherwood was struck by debris in the back of his head and neck, and he was killed.

Since that day, my family and I have lived with the grief of losing a loved one. We have struggled to explain his death to his son. We have gazed at the shards of life scattered at our feet, in wonder of its fragility, in perpetual catharsis with God.

I have moved from frustration to disappointment to anger. And now I have arrived at a place not of understanding but of hope—blind hope that this will change.

The Iraq Survey Group's final report, which was filed in October but revealed only on Wednesday, confirmed what we knew all along. And as my mother cried in the kitchen, the nation barely blinked.

I am left now with a single word seared into my consciousness: accountability. The chance to hold our administration's feet to that flame has passed. But what of our citizenry? We are the ones who truly failed. We shut down our ability to think critically, to listen, to converse and to act. We are to blame.

Even with every prewar assumption having been proved false, today more than 130,000 U.S. soldiers are trying to stay alive in a foreign desert with no clear mission at hand.

At home, the sidelines are overcrowded with patriots. These Americans cower from the fight they instigated in Iraq. In a time of war and record budget deficits, many are loath to even pay their taxes. In the end, however, it is not their family members who are at risk, and they do not sit up at night pleading with fate to spare them.

Change is vital. We must remind ourselves that the war with Iraq was not a mistake but rather a flagrant abuse of power by our leaders—and a case of shameful negligence by the rest of us for letting it happen. The consequence is more than a quagmire. The consequence is the death of our national treasure—our soldiers.

We are all accountable. We all share the responsibility of what has been destroyed in our name. Let us begin to right the wrongs we have done to our country by accepting that responsibility.

TRIBUTE TO OSSIE DAVIS

HON. KENDRICK B. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor a distinguished actor, director, producer, screenwriter, playwright and historian. Ossie Davis was an incredible man whose life's work, both on and off screen, promoted the advancement of civil rights and humanitarian causes.

Mr. Davis' most important role may well have been as husband. He and his wife, also a prominent actor, Ruby Dee, celebrated 50 years of marriage together in 1998. Both were among those selected to receive Kennedy Center Honors in 2004.

The pair met during Davis' Broadway debut in the play *Jeb Turner*. Both promoted the cause of blacks in the entertainment industry and are well known for their portrayals of characters faced with racial injustice.

My thoughts and prayers are with Ms. Dee, for her loss is truly a loss for us all.

TRIBUTE TO THE HEROIC MEN AND WOMEN OF THE 415TH CIVIL AFFAIRS BATTALION OF THE U.S. ARMY RESERVE

HON. FRED UPTON

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. UPTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the heroic men and women of the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion of the U.S. Army Reserve who have recently returned home after serving their country in Iraq. The sacrifices that these heroes made to protect and secure our country will never be forgotten and we are forever in their debt.

The 415th Civil Affairs Battalion is based out of Kalamazoo, Michigan with soldiers coming from throughout the Midwest. Over the last 7 years this battalion has been deployed five times, and is considered to be one of the most deployed battalions in the active or reserve of the Army. During their time in Iraq these selfless individuals rebuilt schools, worked with the creation of water treatment plants and Iraqi hospitals.

I would also like to extend my deepest sympathy for the loss of two of their comrades, SPC Nichole Frye and CPT Paul Cassidy. They will always remain in our memories and their families will be in our thoughts and prayers.

With our forces fighting overseas today, we are vividly reminded of the debt of gratitude

we owe our men and women in uniform who serve our country. The 415th Civil Affairs Battalion is a glowing example of the greatness of our forces and on behalf of the Sixth District of Michigan; I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation for their service.

VETERANS BENEFITS CUTS AND BUDGET PROPOSAL

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, is nothing sacred in this Administration's budget? At a time when our greatest generation is relying more and more on the VA to provide health services and our newest veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the White House is proposing to slash their benefits and force them to pay ever increasing premiums. What happened to keeping promises to our nation's veterans?

With the constantly rising cost of health care, the proposed funding falls well short of what is needed for our veterans. These veterans paid their service to our Nation and they earned a lifetime of health care coverage—we promised it to them. Now, as the President wants to spend trillions of dollars to privatize Social Security, he also wants to break that promise and make veterans pay for their healthcare again!

The absurdity of this would be laughable if it weren't such a serious and disturbing proposal.

Thomas P. Cadmus, the National Commander of the American Legion sees and understands the absurdity of this as well. He said, and I quote:

"It is incomprehensible that our veterans will pay for the shortfall in VA health-care funding from their own pockets as tax dollars flow out the back door of America."

And these tax dollars aren't just flowing out the back door of America in additional foreign aid funding, they are also flowing out the front door in the form of tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent of our Nation.

We have the money to keep our promise to our veterans and I urge the White House to reevaluate the budget and make the changes needed to reinforce the promise to our veterans.

I am also enclosing a press release from The American Legion which I submit for the RECORD to accompany my remarks.

LEGION LEADER SAYS PROPOSED BUDGET REACHES DEEP INTO VETERANS' POCKETS

WASHINGTON, February 7, 2005.—The leader of the nation's largest military veterans organization reacted strongly to the effects that President Bush's budget plan will have on veterans. He called it a smoke screen to raise revenue at the expense of veterans.

"This is not acceptable," said Thomas P. Cadmus, national commander of the 2.7 million-member American Legion. "It's nothing more than a health care tax designed to increase revenue at the expense of veterans who served their country."

Cadmus was referring to the portion of the proposed budget that would double the co-payment charge to many veterans for prescription drugs and would require some to pay a new fee of \$250 a year to use their own their own health care system.

"Is the goal of these legislative initiatives to drive those veterans paying for their health care away from the system designed to serve veterans?" Cadmus asked. "The President is asking Congress to make 'health care poaching' legal in the world's largest health care delivery system."

"When the President first came to Washington, among his first official acts was to triple the prescription co-payment from \$2 to \$7," Cadmus said. "Once again, the President wants to double the co-payment and fortunately, Congress has wisely rejected that proposal. Making veterans pay for timely access to quality health care is wrong."

This is the third year in a row the President has attempted to establish an enrollment fee for those veterans making co-payments and third-party reimbursements to the VA.

"Many of these veterans are Medicare-eligible and already paying the federal government for their part A and B coverage, so why should they have to pay an additional enrollment fee? VA can't even bill Medicare," Cadmus said. "Other veterans with private health insurance make co-payments and then VA is reimbursed for services. Again, why should they be forced to pay an additional \$250 to go to VA medical facilities?"

"During my visits to VA hospitals, I have not run into Bill Gates, Donald Trump, or Ross Perot seeking care. I see mostly veterans—many on small fixed incomes—trying to make ends meet and exercising their very best health care option," Cadmus observed.

"Veterans' health care is an ongoing expense of war," he added. "You don't thank veterans for serving their country and then tell them, 'By the way, better not get wounded or you'll have to pay extra for your health care.' This is offensive to every veteran in America. That is why this government must move VA health care out from under the umbrella of discretionary spending to mandatory spending," Cadmus stressed.

The American Legion has requested a \$3.5 billion increase in health care spending in FY 2006. The President is proposing \$9.5 billion in foreign aid, about \$2.1 billion more than the current level.

"As young Americans in uniform battle terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as 119 other countries, it is incomprehensible that our veterans will pay for the shortfall in VA health care funding from their own pockets as tax dollars flow out the back door of America," Cadmus said.

"We reminded the President of our position on veterans' health care needs during his campaign and I personally testified on the issue on Capitol Hill last September," Cadmus added. "Our budget request is very realistic when you consider the Secretary has slammed the door in the face of hundreds of thousands of veterans eligible, but currently forbidden from seeking quality care from VA."

"The current appropriations process is broken and is not adequately funding VA medical care," Cadmus said. "President George W. Bush's Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans on May 26, 2003, identified the mismatch between demand and funding as a major obstacle in meeting the nation's commitment to veterans. The American Legion and nine other veterans' organizations believe the answer lies in changing VA health care funding from discretionary to mandatory appropriation."

"No active-duty service member in harm's way should ever have to question the nation's commitment to veterans. This is the wrong message at the wrong time to the wrong constituency."