

Maybe they could have Wal-Mart Kids Day, where kids would not get to actually watch the game, because somebody has got to work the concessions.

Or Mug Night: the lucky fan gets to keep his swank Republican leadership job, even if his mugshot is taped to his grand jury's dart board.

Or we could even have at the Washington Nationals baseball game starting Thursday night, we could have Halliburton Gasoline Night: a tank of gas for the first 1,000 fans at the patriotic Halliburton price of \$8.95 a gallon.

Or the Enron Doubleheader: Fans get in early with promises of a big win, but then the team kicks you out and takes your pension away.

In the spirit of Republican Washington, the Washington Lobbyists will not care much about public opinion, making decisions in secret and ignoring criticism from the fans. And to avoid unpatriotic dissent, games will be played in the middle of the night, after sports writers have gone to bed.

□ 1245

If we want to change things and change how things really work in Washington, Mr. Speaker, we are going to have to change pitchers. Until we do, the Washington lobbyists and their friends here in Congress will always win.

MILITARY READINESS NEEDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I join my friend and colleague, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD), this afternoon to address matters of importance to Democrats on the House Committee on Armed Services.

I was fortunate enough to visit our men and women overseas in Iraq about a year-and-a-half ago, and I appreciate the amazing job that they are doing. Despite the complexity of their mission, our troops have performed ably and professionally; and they are, without doubt, the strongest and best-trained fighting force in the world.

However, we must ensure that they have the appropriate equipment to continue their record of success. We often overlook the impact that the high operations tempo in Iraq and Afghanistan have had on our equipment. Though the military has accomplished a great deal with what they have, we have clear indications that we are wearing down our equipment perhaps faster than we can replace it. The frequent use of Humvees, trucks, and aircraft, coupled with the harsh climate conditions, has caused them to wear down faster than expected.

The Army estimates that trucks are being degraded at three to five times

the normal peacetime rate, with the Congressional Budget Office suggesting that it could be as much as 10 times the recent average. We see similar trends in our aircraft and tanks, with wear rates ranging from two to five times the normal. Meanwhile, National Guard and Reserve units that deploy with their own equipment have left it in theater when they return, creating shortages in the United States for training and other purposes.

Mr. Speaker, we simply cannot ignore the potential impact of this trend on the long-term readiness of our military. Our worldwide prepositioned stocks, which are intended to give our troops rapid access to equipment when needed, are severely depleted, with the Army estimating that we would need 3 years to fully restore them. Also, the Department of Defense estimates that it has \$12.8 billion in unfunded maintenance costs, with the CBO projecting the numbers could be as high as \$13 billion to \$18 billion. At the current rate of operations, it will take years to reset the force to where it needs to be.

Now, we make these points, Mr. Speaker, not to be alarmists but to raise awareness of the state of our military and to emphasize that Congress must remain committed to our troops, both in theater now and in the future. We must pledge not to send our men and women into harm's way with substandard equipment, while actively seeking to rebuild our forces to meet future needs.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, our commitment to our troops does not end when they return home. There is growing evidence that the combat stresses on our troops may contribute to higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. We must improve our PTSD counseling programs as well as our veterans' health care system.

I was disappointed that, during consideration of the emergency supplemental appropriations bill, the House voted down the Democratic motion to recommit, which would have provided more funding for veterans' health programs. Mr. Speaker, our veterans' health system is strained as it is, and I can think of no greater disservice to those men and women serving now than having them return to a nation that refuses to provide appropriate support for their needs.

I know many members of our committee have fought to meet our obligations to our service members and our veterans, and I would particularly like to thank and recognize the efforts of our Ranking Member, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), as well as the leadership of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS). Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) for his dedication, and I urge all of my colleagues to remain committed to guaranteeing sufficient military readiness and veterans' services.

SOLEMN DUTY OF CONGRESS TO PROVIDE FOR MILITARY NEEDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN), to talk about the position of House Democrats, particularly those of us on the Committee on Armed Services, regarding an issue of importance to our national defense.

As a new member of the Subcommittee on Readiness, I have been privy to briefings from our combatant commanders and from the Department of Defense. The testimonies provided by these great Americans have led me to the conclusion that our military equipment located in Iraq and Afghanistan has become severely worn and damaged.

The Congress of the United States has a solemn constitutional duty to provide for our military, and the Democratic Members of the Congress take this responsibility very seriously. A sufficient part of our duty is to make sure that our troops have the equipment they need to be successful when they are engaged in war. Whether it is MREs or canteens or desert uniforms or personal protective vests or up-armored Humvees, our troops deserve to have enough equipment in good working condition to get the job done. Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that our troops are on the verge of not having the equipment they need to win these wars, and that is not good.

Many of our briefings, Mr. Speaker, are top secret, and I would not dare to breach that confidence. But, Mr. Speaker, it is not classified that the pace of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is taking its toll on our equipment. We are simply wearing out the equipment at a fast pace.

By the Army's own estimates, trucks are wearing out at three to five times the rate as they would during peacetime operations. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the truck usage is as much as 10 times higher than average during the last 7 years. Our aircraft are aging and wearing out at twice the rate as in peacetime. The Marine Corps reports its CH-46 helicopters are being used at 230 percent of the peacetime rate.

It is not just that our equipment is wearing out, Mr. Speaker; it is that so much of our equipment is wearing out.

Forty percent of the Army's equipment has been deployed since the start of Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Thirty percent of the Marine Corps' equipment is deployed, and 2,300 items require depot maintenance. Twelve percent of the wheeled vehicles in Iraq are so broken down that they will have to be replaced.

We have also depleted a high percentage of our prepositioned equipment.

The Army says that our stocks will not be reset for at least 3 years after the end of the conflicts.

Equipment casualties are significant. During the war in Iraq, the Army has lost 503 pieces of major equipment, including 51 helicopters, 76 heavy trucks, 217 Humvees, and 97 combat vehicle-like tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and Strykers.

The Marine Corps reports that 1,800 pieces of equipment valued at over \$94 million have been destroyed.

Why do I mention all of these statistics? I want my colleagues and the American people to understand that we are coming dangerously close to weakening our military, and we must understand the enormity of the problem. And it must be known that it is going to take a lot of money to fix the problem.

The 2005 supplemental appropriation passed by the House earlier this year includes \$554 million to replace 800 worn out or damaged pieces of equipment. The CBO estimates that the Department of Defense already needs between \$13 billion and \$18 billion to fund maintenance costs not covered in the budget. And the Army will require at least 2 years of supplemental appropriations after the end of the conflict in order to reset the force. I regret that the President's 2006 budget request does not include the money we need to replace and modernize our worn and lost equipment.

Mr. Speaker, the Democratic Members of the Committee on Armed Services deeply care about our troops and about our military. We must fulfill our constitutional duty to ensure that our troops have what they need to succeed wherever they are deployed. They can only succeed and we can only carry out our duty if we provide them sufficient equipment to complete their mission. That is going to be a long and expensive process.

Congress, therefore, needs to take prompt action, and I call on all of my colleagues to provide the needed support to make that happen.

REPUBLICAN BANKRUPTCY BILL MEANS FALSE HOPE AND ENDLESS DEBT BURDEN FOR AMERICANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, the Republican majority today or tomorrow will put before this House and the American people a WMD, a Weapon of Mass Debt. They call it the Bankruptcy Abuse and Consumer Prevention Act of 2005. This legislation is as far away from protecting consumers as a snake oil salesman pitching an elixir to cure all of your ills.

This legislation should be called the Credit Card Company Enslavement Act

of 2005. It does not help the American people. It was conceived by the credit card people for the credit card people and packaged by their Republican surrogates for one reason and one reason only: to entrap low- and middle-income Americans.

As always with this Republican majority, if you are rich, do not worry, they have your back covered. But for every other American, you are the payoff for special interests and corporate greed. Disguise legislation with a phony name and let them clean your clock over and over and over again.

Debt, and pain and suffering associated with economic enslavement, has been a major concern throughout recorded history. The Bible speaks about debt in the books of Exodus, Micah, Amos, Nehemiah, Romans, Kings, and Deuteronomy, among others. I could go on all day long with that. That is a lot of spiritual guidance.

So what is this all about? Economic justice is what the Bible preached, knowing full well that debt bound a person tighter than any chain, enslaving hope as it extracted money. For thousands of years, spiritual leaders, including John Paul, have preached a gospel of economic justice for people throughout the world. Instead, today we are expected to pander to corporate greed while we deny social responsibility.

I personally am not going to go for it. The legislation before us is about grinding people into the dirt. It is not a fresh start, but false hope and an endless debt burden.

The Republican majority today would like us to condone stripping people of all of their worldly possessions and then denying them the right to hope to make a new life for themselves and their loved ones.

Here are some facts behind the fraud the Republican majority has in front of us: Ninety percent of those filing for bankruptcy protection are doing so because of losing a job, a medical emergency, or the breakup of a family. Half the personal bankruptcies in America today are because of illness or unpaid medical bills.

What are the President and Republican majority doing about health care? Nothing, nada, zippo. They have not touched it for the last 4 years, and they will pander to the special interests over the next 4 years. After all, people without health care do not go to those fancy Republican fund-raisers. They go to the emergency room when they cannot avoid illness any longer.

Mr. Speaker, 45 million Americans have no health care and no hope from this administration, and 1.6 million American households filed for bankruptcy last year. That is one measure of the President's economic program he is not talking much about. The rich get richer and the poor get outed.

Divorced women are 300 percent more likely than a single or married woman to file for bankruptcy because of the consequences of divorce, from lower

wages to the financial strain of raising children alone. So much for Republican family values.

African American and Hispanics are 500 percent more likely than white homeowners to end up in bankruptcy court because of discrimination in everything from mortgage costs, to hiring, to wages. It is real, and the Republican majority would like us to look the other way.

More older Americans are filing for bankruptcy because they are being forced out of their jobs, cannot find new ones that pay when they were earning, and they are victims of runaway health costs.

□ 1300

But wait, there is even more. Credit card companies are an equal-opportunity scourge. This environment inundates students, the working poor and middle America with dozen of offers for more credit cards and more debt every week. How many offers have you received in the mail or on the phone this week, 3, 4, 5? The marketing is not aggressive. It is predatory. They tempt you with offers that promise anything and everything. Pre-approved, platinum, gold, silver. The truth is, the credit cards are not made of plastic. They are made out of lead, and they are hung around your neck like a yoke.

Does this so-called consumer protection action do anything to address predatory credit card marketing? Nothing, nada, zippo.

So what exactly are the Republicans proposing? This bill allows millionaires to shelter their assets in bankruptcy by protecting an unlimited amount of value in their residences.

What about child support?

Well, the Republicans have a real deal for you. This bill, their bill, would force women and children who are owed child support to fight with the credit card companies in court for the money. Given the Republican knack for words, they will probably call this a social safety net. And on and on it goes. Vote "no" on this bankruptcy bill. It is bankrupt.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m.

Accordingly (at 1 o'clock and 1 minute p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer: