

IN HONOR OF PRIVATE FIRST
CLASS STEVEN SIRKO

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, it is with the heaviest heart that I rise today to express the heartfelt condolences of a grateful Nation and to honor the life of Private First Class Steven Frederick Sirko, who passed away on April 17 while serving in Iraq.

Steven served our country as a U.S. Army battalion medic. He was scheduled to return to his home in Statesville, North Carolina, in August. Steven was a loving husband, son, and brother. He leaves behind his wife, Virginia Downs Sirko; his mother, Summer Lipford; and stepfather, Steven Lipford; his father, Rick Sirko; and stepmother, Rose Sirko; his sisters; and his brother.

May good bless them and comfort them during this very difficult time. We owe this brave soldier and his family a tremendous debt of gratitude for his selfless service and sacrifice. Our Nation could not maintain its freedom and security without heroes like Steven who make the ultimate sacrifice.

Americans, as well as Iraqis, owe their liberty to Steven and his comrades who came before him. Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring PFC Steven Sirko.

CRISIS IN THE FEDERAL PRISON
SYSTEM

(Mr. CHANDLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CHANDLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight a serious security risk to our communities. Our Federal prison system faces a crisis that we can no longer ignore.

The inmate population continues to reach record highs; yet the administration and Congress failed to provide the funding to keep our prisons secure. This has caused overcrowding and a shortage in correctional staff.

Our prisons are now more dangerous and our communities are being put in jeopardy. For example, last July, Lexington, Kentucky, an inmate escaped from the Lexington Federal Medical Center because there were fewer than 20 staff members supervising almost 2,000 inmates.

He was eventually caught. Thankfully, no one in the community was seriously injured. However, if we do not start funding our Federal prison systems at a level that provides adequate staff, we may not be as fortunate next time.

I urge my colleagues and the administration to provide sufficient funding to the Federal prison system.

SOLVING THE CHALLENGES
FACING SOCIAL SECURITY

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to ad-

dress the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, over the past 70 years, Congress has tried repeatedly to fix the Social Security program. The payroll tax has been raised 22 times, and the amount of Social Security benefits taxed has increased from zero to 85 percent.

Unfortunately, these changes did not solve the real challenges threatening the retirement of millions of Americans. Raising payroll taxes simply postpones the bankruptcy and would not be a permanent solution for Social Security.

On Thursday, President Bush further outlined his proposal to provide a lasting solution for Social Security. Today, the Washington Times reported that the Heritage Foundation and the CATO Institute strongly support President Bush's proposal. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) is correct. Unfortunately, Democrats have yet to offer any positive suggestions that would fix Social Security.

Procrastination will not solve the problem. We must act now to protect benefits for today's retirees and strengthen benefits for future generations.

In conclusion, God bless our troops. We will never forget September 11.

□ 1415

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER
AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 513

Mr. McNULTY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have my name removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 513.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

SOCIAL SECURITY SOLUTIONS

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, last Thursday our President told the Nation that he was willing to listen to any ideas from anyone and was willing to share the credit for a solution to Social Security problems.

Finding a solution requires more than just complaining and my colleagues on the other side would like you to believe that they have a plan, but plans require more than just complaints.

A recent national poll by Harvard University found that 7 out of 10 college students do not believe that Social Security will be there for them. Younger workers know that the government has used their Social Security money for other programs. They also understand voluntary personal accounts offer a better way to provide security for them.

And it is only fair. In past years, retirees received a return of 10 percent and more from Social Security. Today that return is barely 1.5 percent and that is not fair to younger Americans. Younger workers today are much more familiar with investments through 401(k) plans offered which employers, workers know the power of compound interest and how their contributions to these accounts grow steady.

Mr. Speaker, I challenge Members of the House and Senate to have a vision for Social Security one of fairness for all Americans.

ASSOCIATION HEALTH PLANS

(Mr. BURGESS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, this is National Uninsured Week. In my home State of Texas, there are a significant number of people who are uninsured.

The number of uninsured has increased for the third year in a row and that is largely because of the drop of the employer based coverage.

Mr. Speaker, there is a tool, there is a lever we can pull to help stop the drop off in employer based coverage. That lever is called association health plans. In fact, this House passed association health plans several times during the 108th Congress. The problem is it has never been taken up by the other body.

What are association health plans? This is the ability for small businesses of a similar business model to band together and get the purchasing power of a large corporation in order to hold the cost down of providing insurance to their members.

Now, nearly 63 percent of all uninsured workers are employed by small businesses with fewer than 100 employees. It is estimated that association health plans would enable some 8 million currently uninsured individuals to receive coverage.

Mr. Speaker, I was so encouraged because the chairman of the relevant Senate committee said this year they were going to seriously take up association health plans. In fact, he has charged people on both sides of this question to come together and find solutions to finally allow association health plans to be available in this country.

END FILIBUSTERS

(Mr. SMITH of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, since 2003 Senate Democrats have filibustered or threatened to filibuster ten of the President's circuit court nominees. This is unprecedented.

Some believe that applying the filibuster to judicial nominations is a long and revered Senate tradition. Not so.

Never before has a judicial nominee with clear majority support been denied an up or down vote on the Senate floor.

Not until Miguel Estrada's nomination in 2003 has a judicial nominee with clear majority support been blocked by a filibuster.

Fairness in the justice system begins with the confirmation of capable judges. Each time a nominee is denied a vote, the American people are denied justice. The American people deserve better. It is time for every judicial nominee to receive an up or down vote.

Remember, never before has a judicial nominee with clear majority support been denied an up or down vote on the Senate floor.

PENSION FUND BLACKMAIL FROM LABOR UNIONS

(Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, recently the Wall Street Journal highlighted a disturbing trend among labor union boards. They are engaging in pension fund blackmail to bully corporations into agreeing with their partisan political agenda. A top AFL-CIO lobbyist was referring to financial services funds backing the President's personal retirement account proposal and he said, "We have no intention of letting any of these companies get away with this while they manage our workers' funds."

And 3 trustees representing the New York City Employees Retirement System sent a letter to several investment banking companies demanding to know their Social Security stance.

These union boards should be ensuring their members' pensions are being wisely invested in qualified ethical companies.

How can we say that Sarbanes-Oxley has strengthened corporate responsibility if labor unions are investing in and managing corporate boards based on their political interest rather than their fiduciary responsibilities to their members and the corporations for which they represent?

APPOINTMENT AS MEMBER TO COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to Section 2 of the Civil Rights Commission Amendments Act of 1994 (42 USC 1975 NOTE), the order of the House of January 4, 2005, and upon the recommendation of the minority leader, the Chair announces the Speaker's reappointment of the following member on the part of the House to the Commission on Civil Rights for a 6-year term expiring May 3, 2011:

Mr. Michael Yaki, San Francisco, California.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken after 6:30 p.m. today.

CONGRATULATING CHARTER SCHOOLS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 218) congratulating charter schools and their students, parents, teachers, and administrators across the United States for their ongoing contributions to education, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 218

Whereas charter schools deliver high-quality education and challenge our students to reach their potential;

Whereas charter schools provide thousands of our families with diverse and innovative educational options for their children;

Whereas charter schools are public schools authorized by a designated public entity and are responding to the needs of our communities, families, and students and are promoting the principles of quality, choice, and innovation;

Whereas, in exchange for the flexibility and autonomy given to charter schools, they are held accountable by their sponsors for improving student achievement and for their financial and other operations;

Whereas 41 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have passed laws authorizing charter schools;

Whereas nearly 3,300 charter schools are now operating in 40 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and are serving approximately 900,000 students;

Whereas over the last 10 years, Congress has provided more than \$1,500,000,000 in support to the charter school movement through facilities' financing assistance and grants for planning, startup, implementation, and dissemination;

Whereas charter schools improve their students' achievement and stimulate improvement in traditional public schools;

Whereas charter schools must meet the student achievement accountability requirements included by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and contained in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, in the same manner as traditional public schools, and often set higher and additional individual goals, to ensure that they are of high quality and truly accountable to the public;

Whereas charter schools give parents new freedom to choose their public school, charter schools routinely measure parental satisfaction levels, and charter schools must prove their ongoing success to parents, policymakers, and their communities;

Whereas nearly 40 percent of charter schools report having a waiting list, and the total number of students on all such waiting lists is enough to fill over 1,000 average-sized charter schools;

Whereas charter schools nationwide serve a higher percentage of low-income and minority students than the traditional public school system;

Whereas charter schools have enjoyed broad bipartisan support from the Administration, the Congress, State Governors and legislatures, educators, and parents across the United States; and

Whereas the sixth annual National Charter Schools Week, to be held May 1 to 7, 2005, is an event sponsored by charter schools and grassroots charter school organizations across the United States to recognize the significant impacts, achievements, and innovations of charter schools: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) the House of Representatives acknowledges and commends charter schools and their students, parents, teachers, and administrators across the United States for their ongoing contributions to education and improving and strengthening the public school system of the United States;

(2) the House of Representatives supports the sixth annual National Charter Schools Week; and

(3) it is the sense of the House of Representatives that the President should issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to conduct appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities to demonstrate support for charter schools during this week-long celebration in communities throughout the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. PORTER) and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. PORTER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 218.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Nevada?

There was no objection.

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 218. This resolution honors our Nation's charter schools and the students, parents, teachers, administrators and other individuals involved for their hard work and dedication to providing a quality public education.

This week, May 1 through May 7, has been designated National Charter Schools Week. During this week, charter school organizations and others around the United States recognize these schools for their continued contributions to education. The Nation's charter schools deliver high-quality education and challenge students to reach their potential.

Forty-one States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have passed laws authorizing charter schools. Since the first charter school law was passed in 1991, almost 3,300 charter schools now serve nearly 900,000 students in 40 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Specifically, I am pleased to honor the 19 charter schools in the State of