

Mr. Speaker, President Ronald Reagan was correct when he said that "Men cry 'peace, peace,' but there can be no peace as long as there is some American somewhere dying for the rest of us."

Sergeant Williams was one of those Americans. He gave all, dying for the rest of us. It was his devotion that thrust him into battle with his eyes wide open. He knew that there was a chance he wouldn't come home. He told his sister that he was fighting for her so that she could enjoy freedom. His level of devotion meant giving himself after giving his all. His life is the cost of freedom, a freedom and an expense that he embraced proudly.

Every member of the military we remember here on the House floor is described in those remarks as someone who loved his country, a soldier to the bone who believed in what they were doing. And that is tracking terrorists and ripping those terrorists from their roots so people around the world would know the blessings of liberty and the security of self-government that Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence.

We call ourselves patriots, but few of us have the scars to prove it. Few have the courage to face and embrace the darkest unknown, the possibility of not going home.

These few, these volunteers, are a rich testament to the courage they have in their hearts. Now and always we must remember their sacrifice, our men and women who fight, so we can look in the blue skies of liberty and remember them with the flying of every star and every stripe.

So this 4th of July, we remember all of those who served, all of them that gave some and those that gave all.

So Semper Fi, Ben Williams. Semper Fi.

And that's just the way it is.

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

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

VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, last week, the Republican leadership decided to pull the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization legislation from the floor. Debate on this historic civil rights statute had been scheduled for last Wednesday afternoon, and just hours before it was to start, the bill was withdrawn from consideration.

As a cosponsor of this important bill, I am deeply troubled by the majority leadership's willingness to allow extreme members of their party to hijack reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act, a law that has protected minority voters from intimidation and discrimination for 40 years. It was an act unbecoming a party that calls itself the "Party of Lincoln."

The original Voting Rights Act reinforced the Constitution's 15th amendment guarantee that race cannot be a bar to any citizen's right to vote. Although the 15th amendment was ratified in 1870, it took nearly 100 years for Congress to give it teeth with the Voting Rights Act. Until then, the rights of millions of Americans to vote was nullified by poll taxes, literacy tests, voter intimidation, and outright violence. Only in 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, were African Americans finally able to exercise the right to vote. But the path to this legislation was by no means easy.

On March 7, 1965, what has become known as Bloody Sunday, 600 civil rights marchers peacefully protested for the right to vote. Upon reaching the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, the marchers were attacked by State and local police, who tear-gassed them and beat them with batons.

Three years ago, in commemoration of the struggle for civil rights, I joined a pilgrimage led by my colleague Congressman JOHN LEWIS through many of the sites that were part of the fight for true equality here in America. We visited the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and on the wall of my office is a picture of the delegation, black, white, Asian and Latino, standing together in celebration of the sacrifices of those who marched there.

Standing there then and reflecting on the experience now, it is impossible to miss the transcendent importance of the unfettered right to vote. It was powerful enough then to garner the hatred of a mob of segregationists, and it inspires us now to continue to fight for reauthorization of the legislation and the full protections of our sacred franchise. I welcome a debate over the continuing vitality of the Voting Rights Act, but I deplore the delay which the Republican leadership's decision to pull the bill has occasioned.

In the decades since President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law, racial discrimination is still far too prevalent a feature of elections across the Nation from California to Florida. It is very true that significant progress has been made in the past 41 years since the VRA was first passed, and minority voters have a much greater voice in the political process today because of the Voting Rights Act. Despite that, after every election, we still hear stories of voter discrimination and intimidation, and we are reminded that this legislation remains important today, and we cannot let the provisions of the VRA expire.

These expiring provisions, pre-clearance of election law changes for jurisdictions with a history of discrimination, Federal observers at polls, and language assistance for limited English speakers, are still needed to ensure minority voting rights. It is evident to those from my State of California just how critical, for example, language assistance is for those with limited English skills.

We do not make our elections easy on voters. In a State where 135 candidates ran for Governor 3 years ago, it should be no surprise that during the 2004 general election, the California voter guidebook was nearly 200 pages. This guide included information on candidates and ballot measures that helped voters prepare for the election. Even native English speakers struggled to digest the ballot arguments in preparation for voting. For citizens with limited English proficiency, the task was all the more daunting.

I believe all U.S. citizens should learn the English language. It is the key to upward mobility in our society and a powerful common bond. Yet new citizens still learning the English language have the right to vote. Thankfully, due to the VRA, our polling sites provide language assistance so that all citizens can meaningfully participate in the election process, including new citizens still struggling to master the English language.

The right to vote for every American citizen is the foundation of our democracy. Unfortunately, there are still barriers to overcome, and we as a Nation must not give up on the protections that give content to that right. I am proud to support the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and will continue to do my part to ensure that the VRA remains effective and enforced. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I call upon the leadership to take immediate action to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote.

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

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina 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 Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

PLAN FOR IRAQ

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, last week, Army General George Casey, the top American military commander in Iraq, presented civilians leaders here at home with a plan for sharply reducing the number of U.S. troops in Iraq for September of this year.

According to reports, General Casey shared his plan with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace; and even President Bush himself.

The idea of an actual plan for how to end the war in Iraq is something that many of us in Congress have been calling for over the last several months and years. General Casey's plan reportedly suggests reducing our troop presence by as much as 60 percent. But, unfortunately, without a plan about how best to accomplish bringing our troops home, a plan to protect the safety and ensure the safety of 135,000 American soldiers, this could haphazardly actually endanger the remaining 40,000 to 50,000 soldiers and leave them behind as sitting ducks.

Mr. Speaker, I have been calling for the President to present a plan for bringing our troops home since December of 2005; and in May of last year, when we held the first debate on Iraq on the House floor after the beginning of the war itself, 128 Members of the House, more than one-third of the Members of the House of Representatives, agreed that the President needed to come up with a plan for bringing our troops home and share it with the appropriate congressional committees.

Today, more than a year later and with the majority of the American people agreeing that this senseless war needs to end as soon as possible, that number would be surely higher.

The idea that the President invaded a country in the very first place without a strategic goal in mind and without a plan for how to win and how to leave is absolutely incomprehensible. And no one should confuse the Bush administration's tired old line about staying the course for an actual plan or a strategy. Lines like "we will stay in Iraq until the job gets done" are nothing more than trite slogans.

What most Americans and nearly all Iraqis understand is that open-ended U.S. military presence in Iraq does not serve either Americans or Iraqis. The very perception that we plan to stay in Iraq permanently at any level is one of the greatest catalysts spurring the Iraqi insurgency. Just yesterday, 11 Sunni insurgent groups publicly stated that they would immediately halt all terrorist attacks in Iraq, including those against American troops, if the United States would publicly commit to leaving within the next 2 years.

It is clear that the time is long overdue to bring our troops home. For goodness sakes, the American people are for this. The Iraqis are for this. Why can't Congress be for this? Is it not time we caught up with the people we are supposed to be working for?

Every week, every day, every hour we stay in Iraq is costing us dozens of American and Iraqi lives, hundreds of physical and psychological wounds, and billions of dollars. Let us send a message to our troops, let us send a message to the rest of the world that the values of diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and respect for others' freedoms are the paramount American values, the qualities we stand for as a Nation, not endless war and certainly not the occupation of a sovereign people.

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Since the beginning of the war, President Bush has said we would leave Iraq as soon as the military commanders on the ground told him it was time to do so. Well, now the highest-ranking military leader in Iraq has presented a plan for bringing our troops home. For the sake of our soldiers, their families and the people of the United States and Iraq, it is time for the President to keep his end of the bargain, but, Mr. Speaker, not without a plan, one presented to the Congress. He didn't have a plan going into the war, he didn't have a plan to win the war, but he must have a plan leaving the war. Otherwise, our troops will once again be under great danger.

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

(Mr. BURGESS 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 California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

REUNITING MISSING CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand tonight and thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for passing H.R. 4416, a bill I introduced to help missing children be reunited with their families. Let me first begin by thanking Chairman TOM DAVIS and Ranking Member WAXMAN for reporting this measure out of the House Committee on Government Reform. I would also like to thank Chairman Ehlers for the role that he and the Committee on House Administration have played in moving this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, my bill will permanently authorize the use of official franked and penalty mail to assist in the location of missing and exploited children. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita opened many eyes to the undeniable reality that faces so many of America's most vulnerable. In the aftermath of those disasters, TV screens across the country aired photographs and other information about missing children throughout the gulf region. Fortunately, in the days and months since, the children missing as a result of these hurricanes have been reunited with their families, and that is very good news.

However, one thing remains clear. This Congress should take every reasonable step available to help families, not only those from the gulf coast but all across America be reunited with their loved ones that have been missing. My bill represents one step in that effort.

I have reviewed this matter at great length in the course of my work as ranking member of the Committee on House Administration and as a member of the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards. In my judgment, the congressional frank presents an ideal opportunity to distribute information about missing and exploited children in addition to being an effective way for Members to communicate with their constituents about our important work.

Beginning in 1985 and for a period of 3 years, section 3220 of title 39 of the U.S. Code authorized the use of Federal penalty mail to assist in U.S. Department of Justice efforts to locate and recover missing children. Congress subsequently reauthorized this law three times for various lengths of time, but the last reauthorization expired 4 years ago, and unfortunately it has not been renewed or extended.

This program, which is entirely voluntary, has been a joint effort between the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. By permanently authorizing this legislation, we are providing Federal agencies and the United States Congress with the opportunity to help in the recovery of missing and exploited children throughout this country.

Under the provisions of my bill, biographical data and pictures of children featured in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's photo distribution program can be included in various categories of official Federal Government mail.

According to the center, one in six of these featured children is recovered as a direct result of someone in the general public recognizing the child in the picture and notifying authorities. The U.S. Postal Service reports that in fiscal year 2005, U.S. Government agencies mailed over 1.3 billion pieces of penalty mail. If only 50 percent of this mail had included a picture and biographical sketch of one of the more