

after increase for our Nation's veterans. More importantly, the Republican-led Congress made it a priority to pass the VA appropriations bill so that our veterans could continue to receive the care that they deserve.

That, Madam Speaker, cannot be said of this year's VA funding bill. Reports in today's Congressional Quarterly are that the majority is considering holding the vital VA bill hostage as a means of passing a giant omnibus bill to fund government operations. The health and welfare of our veterans is more important to my constituents than it is to score cheap political points here in Washington, D.C.

Madam Speaker, I hope that you can find it in your heart to appoint conferees to the VA-Military Construction appropriations bill and send the President a bill that he can sign. Our veterans deserve nothing less.

MARINES NOT WELCOME HERE

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

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, Oakland Airport officials might as well put a sign: "Welcome to Oakland, but no U.S. military allowed here."

It seems that over 200 marines from the combat fields of Iraq flew into Oakland, California, and were not allowed to deplane into the airport. They were forced off the plane between two runways and had to sit in the grass for 3 hours while waiting to fly to Hawaii. The troops had flown from Iraq via Kuwait, Germany, and JFK Airport. They had already been completely screened by Customs and TSA at JFK, but the officials at Oakland Airport wouldn't let them into the terminal.

One marine said no explanation was ever given. Interestingly enough, reports say this not the first time Oakland banned the U.S. military from its airport.

Most airports welcome our returning troops with patriotism, cheers, flags and enthusiastic applause. But not in Oakland. They should be ashamed. They should apologize to each marine, and Congress needs to find out why the marines were treated so poorly and even consider prohibiting Federal funds from going to this airport if it is shown that the airport is antimilitary. And that's just the way it is.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. CLARKE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

REDEPLOYMENT FROM IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, the American people have been opposed to the occupation of Iraq and they have been demanding the redeployment of our troops for a very long time now, but the word obviously hasn't reached our Nation's leaders.

Last Wednesday, the Secretary of Defense asked Congress to appropriate billions of dollars more to continue the occupation of Iraq. He said that American troops will remain in Iraq for years to come with no end in sight.

The occupation has already cost nearly half a trillion dollars, and what have we gotten for that investment? Even General Petraeus couldn't say for sure that our involvement in Iraq has made us any safer when he testified before Congress last month. And the National Intelligence Estimate warned us in July that al Qaeda is using the occupation to energize extremists, raise money, and to recruit and indoctrinate operatives for attacks on the U.S. homeland.

Madam Speaker, the way to make America truly safer is to end the occupation, restore our moral leadership in the world, and use diplomacy to strengthen the structure and institutions of international cooperation and peace. That's why it is time to tell our leaders in the White House that Congress isn't going to be their friendly neighborhood ATM machine any more. Congress has the power of the purse. We can use it to force the administration to change course. We must refuse to appropriate one more dime for the occupation. Instead, we must fully fund the safe, orderly and responsible redeployment of American troops and military contractors out of Iraq.

Redeployment of our troops is the necessary first step on the road to peace. It is clear that Iraq will never stabilize while American troops and the vast unaccountable army of 180,000 American military contractors are there.

Our occupation of Iraq prevents Iraqis from finding solutions to their own problems, and it delays the regional and international diplomatic efforts needed to jump-start a true peace process.

The administration has said that it plans to redeploy some troops, but this is just a tactic, I believe, to win political favor. The arithmetic proves it. We began this year with 130,000 troops in Iraq. The escalation brought the level to 160,000. Now the administration says it will bring out 30,000 troops so by next summer we will again have 130,000 troops.

So, Madam Speaker, we end up with the same number of troops, but the administration calls it a reduction. I call it fuzzy math. President Bush has created a national mathematics panel to study ways to improve math education in America. That is a really good thing, because the President himself needs help with addition and subtraction.

Actually, Madam Speaker, the only way to make sure that our troops are out of harm's way is to proceed right now with a full redeployment and end the fantasy that there is a military solution to this quagmire.

If we fail to use our power of the purse, if we continue to spend our taxpayer dollars on this occupation instead of ending it, we will have failed politically, we will have failed economically, and we will have failed morally. And we will have failed our brave troops along with all of the American people. It is time to bring our troops home.

GOLD STAR MOTHERS

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

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, yesterday, under the bright sun and blue sky of the Texas Sunday afternoon, American flags flew in the silent breeze over thousands of quiet marble uniform tombstones in the Houston National Cemetery. This is where Texans bury their war dead, men and women who go off to war for America.

In the center of the immaculately kept cemetery, a tribute of sacrifice was being made to the living: Those mothers who lost their children in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mothers of Texas who gave their children that died in their youth so the rest of us could live in safety were honored on this Gold Star Mothers' Day.

I was present along with Congressman GENE GREEN and Congressman NICK LAMPSON and Congressman KEVIN BRADY to honor these special ladies. We, like those present, were emotionally affected.

Gold Star Moms are what we call them, is a mother who lost a child in combat. This concept started in World War II when Grace Seibold learned on Christmas Eve 1918 that her aviator son was killed in aerial combat in France. Grace Seibold directed her grief and sorrow to helping wounded doughboys in local D.C. hospitals. She formed the Gold Star Mothers to give support for other such moms.

During World War I, if a son had gone off to war in the War to End All Wars, as it was called, a banner was hung in front of the home in the window for each son in the military. This banner had a blue star in the center of it. If the son was killed, a gold star was superimposed over the blue one.

During World War II, my Grandmother Poe hung such a banner with a blue star in the front window of her home in the country. My dad went off to war when he was just 18. When my grandmother died, it was one of the few items she had saved. That banner never had to have a gold star placed on it because my dad returned safely.

Madam Speaker, here is a banner of a Gold Star Mother. It has the name of the soldier that was killed, William