

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate had passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 365. An act to provide for a research program for remediation of closed methamphetamine production laboratories, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 793. An act to provide for the expansion and improvement of traumatic brain injury programs.

WELCOMING BISHOP EARL J. WRIGHT, SR.

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. CONYERS. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce Bishop Earl J. Wright, Sr. as the guest chaplain for the day. The bishop is very well known in Detroit, and we have known each other since the 1950s, even before Coleman Young became the first African American mayor of our great city.

He has a number of responsibilities, but the one that I enjoy bringing to the membership's attention is that he is a founding and supporting pastor of Miller Memorial Church of God in Christ Number 2, located in Haiti. And, of course, we are honored to have his lovely and gracious wife, Dr. Robin L. Wright, who is the senior supervisor of the Church of God in Christ's Japanese Jurisdiction. In addition to being an evangelist, she is also a writer and a great help to the bishop.

We have known each other across the years, and I remember coming to him the first time I ran for Congress, and with the late Bishop Bailey, I was able to prevail in my very first election.

The bishop has shown himself as a true disciple of Christ, relying heavily on his favorite scripture, Romans 4:21: "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." He exemplifies service to his fellow man, allowing his words to always bring grace to the hearer. He constantly speaks words of hope, spreading the good news to all. He practices evangelism that reflects Christ-like compassion to reach the world with the gospel.

Bishop Earl Wright, Sr. is a wonderful man of God, and I'm happy to know him and to welcome him to the floor of the House of Representatives today as guest chaplain.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-

minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

DOD AUTHORIZATION CONFERENCE REPORT AND ITS SUPPORT OF OUR WARFIGHTERS

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

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Madam Speaker, today the House will consider one of the most important pieces of legislation that we have worked on this year: the Defense authorization conference report. It includes provisions to restore our Nation's military readiness as well as protecting our troops.

This critical bill restores our military readiness by authorizing \$1 billion for the Strategic Readiness Fund that will require an in-depth status of our forces, especially our National Guard, and requires a plan to reconstitute that force.

This legislation offers assistance to our most precious and important resource: our warriors and their families who sacrifice so much. It provides a 3.5 percent pay increase for service-members and prohibits increased health care fees while improving the health care system. The bill addresses the growing needs of our troops that require care in traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, other mental health conditions, tuition assistance programs, and also authorizes a unique program that was started in my State of Minnesota called Beyond the Yellow Ribbon to reintegrate our forces back to civilian life.

Madam Speaker, I am proud that this Congress will pass legislation this week to provide our troops with the resources and health care benefits they deserve and protect our Nation's readiness.

FUND OUR VETERANS

(Mrs. DRAKE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. DRAKE. Madam Speaker, this is day 73. That is 73 days since the start of the new fiscal year. Our veterans still do not have access to the increased funding provided in a bill that passed the House and Senate months ago and the President is waiting to sign.

This bill includes increased funding to improve access to medical services for all veterans, new initiatives for mental health and PTSD, increased funds for improved medical facilities, and increased funding to assist homeless veterans, to name a few.

The Democrats have refused to move the bill forward while our veterans have been operating on an extended shoestring budget since October 1, and 2 days from now the current budget will expire.

If the Democrats are acting in good faith and in the best interest of our Na-

tion's veterans, why have they continued to delay this bill, and why do they now intend to use our veterans to pass an end-of-the-year omnibus spending package?

The veterans bill could be passed and sent to the President and signed today. I am calling on the Speaker to move the bill forward, and I call on all Americans to contact their Representatives to tell the Democratic leadership to send a clean veterans appropriations bill to the President now.

THE STUDENTS OF NORTHPORT HIGH SCHOOL: TEACHING US ABOUT INVESTING IN THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

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

Mr. ISRAEL. Madam Speaker, in the closing days of this session, we are going to debate our key priorities, whether we should invest more in researching illness and disease or whether we should cut funding.

I hope we will learn the lessons about the right priorities from a group of high school students in my congressional district at Northport High School. Two of their teachers, Mr. Pendergast and Mr. Deutsch, were afflicted by ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. ALS strips people of their ability to speak, to swallow, to walk, and in many cases to breathe independently.

Now, these students could have ignored their plight. These students could have said we have other priorities. These students could have said it's not my problem, not our problem. Here's what they did: They raised over \$400,000 on their own for ALS research and advocacy. They didn't just turn away from this problem; they became part of the solution. On January 16 they are going to gather at their Midwinter Night's Dream and raise even more money.

These students have become our teachers. I hope that we will learn their lessons about investing in the right priorities, about caring and showing compassion for those who need help. They have taught us a critical lesson, and I hope that we will listen carefully to the students of Northport High School.

FUNDING OUR TROOPS

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

Mr. PITTS. Madam Speaker, the Pentagon said last week that layoff notices for Army employees could start going out the middle of this month.

"Merry Christmas, here's your pink slip" may sound like a harsh way to greet an employee this time of year, but that is what the Defense Department will be forced to do with civilian employees and contractors in the run-up to Christmas.

Because congressional leaders refuse to negotiate with the President to fund our troops in the field, the Department of Defense has been forced to cut spending in other areas in order to pay the bills for continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even as our troops have made major security gains in Iraq, the Democrat majority wishes to pull the plug by cutting the funding to support their mission.

I believe we're sending exactly the wrong message to the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces: not funding our troops. Each day that goes by without such a bill is a failure of the leadership of this dysfunctional Congress.

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DEMOCRATIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

Mr. COSTA. Madam Speaker, when the Democratic Congress was elected last November, we pledged to enact measures to protect and support our military troops and veterans. Since taking office, we have honored that promise by passing important legislation.

This year, the House has passed the largest increase for veterans health care in the history of the Veterans Administration, has made major improvements in equipment and training, including protecting the mine resistant ambush protected vehicles that reduce the strain on our servicemen and women and protect them in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, we continue that commitment by passing the Defense authorization conference report, which includes a much-needed 3.5 percent pay increase for our troops, improves military health care, and requires a report on the current state of readiness for our forces, which are stretched very thin.

Madam Speaker, this Congress has a proud record this year of supporting our troops and veterans. I hope all of our colleagues will join in continuing these efforts by supporting the Department of Defense authorization conference report.

On Veterans Day and Memorial Day, we honor those who have served and given their lives. This vote today honors those who serve us every day. I urge the President to sign this legislation once it has passed the Congress.

AMERICAN FAMILIES NEED REAL LEADERSHIP FROM CONGRESS, NOT MORE POLITICS

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

Mr. BOUSTANY. This week, the Democratic leadership will unveil a half-trillion-dollar spending bill be-

cause they are unable to complete their constitutional responsibility. This half-trillion-dollar spending bill follows a failed energy bill that did nothing to increase our domestic supply of energy and failure to come up with a new farm bill.

Families across America are paying higher energy costs, they're bearing the burden of higher costs of living, and they are paying more for their health care. We in Congress have a responsibility to them. Furthermore, the Treasury Department waits now to see if Democrats will tax millions of Americans with the AMT, with their so-called AMT fix.

The American people want results, not politics. Let's finish the farm bill to provide some stability to our food producers and an energy bill to address the uncertainty and fluctuating prices.

Finally, let's be diligent with Americans' hard-earned money with responsible spending. Let's put politics aside, let's get our work done, and let's give American families the results which they can be proud of.

U.S. MINT COMMEMORATIVE COINS

(Mr. SNYDER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SNYDER. Madam Speaker, proclamations and commemorations are a wonderful part of the job that we are honored to have. Elevation of certain historic events so that they are remembered and respected, particularly by our young people, is so important.

No one in Arkansas is unaware of the significance of the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School in 1957. No one in America should be unaware of the courage of the Little Rock Nine. That courage is celebrated in one of the two commemorative coins that are part of the U.S. Mint collection this year.

Now, I come here this morning to let you know if you don't have your order in by December 14, which is the end of this week, you won't be able to order the coins from usmint.gov, or call 1-800-USA MINT. For you folks on the Hill, the Mint is having their annual Holiday Hill coin sale in Rayburn 2220, where you can buy this coin, and also the wonderful coin sponsored by the late Representative Jo Ann Davis honoring the 400th anniversary of Jamestown. usmint.gov, and you, too, can send these as great holiday gifts.

CONGRESS, LET'S GET TO WORK

(Mr. WALBERG asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WALBERG. Madam Speaker, growing up, my mother taught me that two wrongs don't make a right. For months, Congress has failed to meet its budget deadlines, and now House leadership is trying to make up for the inefficiency with a massive pork-filled spending bill to fund our Federal Gov-

ernment. This is inside-the-beltway political gamesmanship.

Americans want change, and I came to Washington to fight the status quo. House leadership is essentially black-mailing the American people by saying it will only support our troops and veterans if its budget-busting, deficit-spending initiatives are funded. With high gas prices, rising health care costs and economic insecurity, the last thing Michigan families need is more out-of-control government spending. People back home in Michigan know higher spending equals higher taxes, which is the last thing our hardworking families need.

Let's get to work, give our troops fighting the war on terror the resources they need, support our veterans, and show true fiscal restraint with taxpayer dollars by keeping spending in check.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY ACT

(Mr. SIREs asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SIREs. Madam Speaker, last week, congressional Republicans refused to join us in supporting energy legislation that will provide real relief to the American consumers. Instead, Republicans once again showed that they have no problems doing the bidding of both Big Oil and the utility companies.

For too long, Washington has dragged its feet, denying that there was actually an energy problem. This new Democratic Congress is taking our Nation in a new direction. Our energy security plan is about producing more clean and renewable sources of energy right here in the United States. Over the next 10 years, this bill will create 10 million new green jobs by investing in renewable energy, with tax incentives for solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal technology. This investment will not only be good for our economy, but it will also help reduce our dependence on foreign oil and will allow us to finally address global warming.

Madam Speaker, this House has acted. Now it's time for the Senate and the White House to acknowledge our energy problems and join us in supporting this important legislation.

EARMARKS

(Mr. FLAKE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. FLAKE. Madam Speaker, at some point this week, Congress is going to consider a massive omnibus spending bill that rolls the 11 remaining appropriation bills into one enormous bill.

I wish I could take the floor today and talk about what's in the floor bill, but I can't, because I have no idea. I'm far from alone. Save for a few Members of leadership, all of us are in the dark