

Project. He was responsible for the Dayton Floodwall; the Falls of the Ohio Wildlife Conservation Area; the renovation of the Louisville Post Office and the Louisville Courthouse; and a new terminal at Standiford Field; new bridges in Covington and Newport; the Gene Snyder Airport at Falmouth; and, of course, the freeway. That is what Gene called it anyway. Just the freeway.

"Gene embodied the old rule that Members of Congress should be friends after 5 o'clock. He was a committed conservative, but even liberal Members lined up to thank him in his last days in Washington. One of them had this to say: 'Gene Snyder has been devoted to building things like bridges across rivers and streams, but he has also devoted himself to devoting goodwill among people.'

"When the last staffer turned off the lights and pulled the door shut on Gene's Capitol Hill office, an era in Washington ended. The people in the Fourth District saw a lot more of him and Pat. The members of Owl Creek Country Club would hear his stories now. The people at Concordia Lutheran saw him quite a bit.

"But Washington would miss, and still misses, his common touch, his lack of pretense, his principle.

"Age and illness would take their toll in the last years of Gene's remarkable life, but his humor remained. Old friends would call just to hear the recordings on his answering machine.

"But now death has done its work, and a great American story comes to an end. Yet we know it continues. This husband, father, lawmaker, mentor, and friend goes to the Father's house now.

"We take comfort in trusting him to the Lord of Mercy, who tells us that in the life to come, every question will be answered. Every tear wiped away. And we look forward to the day when we see Marion Gene Snyder again, upright, restored in body, healthy and strong, reaching across the fence to take our hands."

So, Mr. Speaker, that is the eulogy that Senator MITCH MCCONNELL of Kentucky, the senior Senator from Kentucky, the Republican leader in the Senate, as he delivered the eulogy to our friend Gene Snyder Saturday at the funeral in Louisville. I read the eulogy because I could not say it any better.

Gene Snyder was a legend in his own time. He is a legendary Member of this body. He was one of the most powerful Members of this body for many years. But beneath that sometimes publicly crusted personality was that warm, gentle spirit and warm, gentle heart; that helpful person who reached out a hand to help those who needed it, whether it be a Member of Congress or a person back home looking for help on a Social Security claim or a veteran's pension or the like.

We won't see his kind again, unfortunately, but I am glad that I had the

honor and privilege of knowing Gene Snyder for many, many years, listening to his advice, laughing at his stories, and enjoying the companionship that we did. God rest his soul.

Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Congressman ROGERS, I think you captured the emotion and the power of that funeral, the eulogies, the reminiscences that brought so many to laughter. Sitting with Gene and Pat Snyder was always a wonderful journey back to the old House in the days before C-SPAN, before 24-hour news cycles, before multimillion dollar campaigns.

The one thing that struck me about him when I first met him was his complete lack of pretense. As a young man, I couldn't believe this was a Congressman, compared to the image that one would have on TV, somebody so approachable, so transparent, and his great gift of humor. He could teach with humor. He could scold with humor and make his point very clearly. He was a man who built friendships that transcended partisan differences.

As Congressman ROGERS mentioned from Senator MCCONNELL's eulogy, one of his great friends in the House was Congressman Carl Perkins, who represented what is now the western part of the Fourth District, centered in Ashland, Kentucky, in Boyd County. He and Carl Perkins could fight on the floor, fight in the hallways on issues, but at 5 o'clock they were friends, and they were strong friends committed to the Commonwealth, committed to the future of Kentucky.

He was a strong leader. And probably the highest compliment that I could pay him is that he was real. And that fact is never lost on those who knew him. Those who were his foes in legislation had tremendous respect for him and invariably they liked him.

The real fruit in a person's life comes from the seeds that are sowed in many lives, the fruit that is born from that. I think of several names to mention here that come to mind. Congressman ROGERS shared his perspective on Gene's influence in his life. I have shared mine on his influence on me. My wife, Pat, and I used to live in La Grange, Kentucky, down near the Louisville suburbs. My first campaign chairman in Olden County was Harold Smith. Harold Smith, as a young attorney in 1966, managed Gene's first campaign for Congress in the Fourth District, and then he helped manage my first campaign for Congress in 2002 and then again in 2004 and again in 2006. I think about that legacy of friendship and how he reached out and was known by so many in the community.

Another was his staff director on the Public Works Committee, Mike Toohey, who also was with us on Saturday. Mike left government at the time that Gene retired and had a long and distinguished career in government relations, helping Ashland Oil, later Ashland Inc., to reach out and commu-

nicate its needs and the needs of our citizens in Kentucky legislatively and was a great friend to the Commonwealth and was also one of those products of Gene's influence and his mentorship.

Another was Joe Whittle, who met Gene the first time in 1975 when he was running for attorney general in Kentucky at a time that it wasn't cool for Republicans to be running on a statewide ticket. Gene called him up on the phone. Joe was a little taken aback to get a phone call from the famed Congressman Gene Snyder, but he invited him to come up to meet him in Louisville and then drive up to Northern Kentucky to give a talk at the Beverly Hills Supper Club to a large group of Republicans there. When Gene got up to introduce Joe Whittle, he used his humor to make that strong point about how he had sized up Joe's character, and he said, This is Joe Whittle. He is a lawyer but not enough to hurt. And they instantly became friends and were close and intimate friends until a week ago when Gene left this Earth. Later Joe Whittle became the United States Attorney for Western Kentucky.

The investment that Gene made in so many lives has transcended their immediate impact and gone to other generations.

Anne Gernstein, who is now the chairman of the Olden County Republican Party, was his office manager at his office in Louisville. And before I first met Gene, I met Anne. She was helping with the local campaign, and I walked in the door as a new volunteer, just wanting to get involved in politics, and I would have never thought at that time that I would have the great honor and privilege to follow in the legacy of that great man.

Gene, we will miss your humor and that twinkle in your eye right before you are about to spring a joke on someone.

To Pat and the children, thank you for sharing this great man with us. Your hospitality and kindness are remembered by so many that you have touched throughout the years.

Gene Snyder left an indelible imprint on Kentucky and our country. With his passing, Kentucky has lost, and the Nation has lost, a great leader and a true statesman; but his legacy continues to live on.

THE 30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to address the House.

And to my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle, it sounds like our past colleague Mr. SNYDER and his family served our country well, and we appreciate his contributions to our country in serving in public service.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is the first night of business, returning back from the Presidents Day break. Before we left we had a week-long debate on the question of Iraq, a nonbinding resolution opposing the troop escalation that the President has put forth at this time.

And the discussion continues, Mr. Speaker, as we start, Democrats and Republicans, molding out the direction that we have to head in in this country. The American people, Mr. Speaker, voted for change and a new direction. And to bring about that kind of change and new direction, there are going to have to be some votes here on this floor that are going to speak volumes back home of how we are going to proceed from this point on and how we are going to assist our men and women in harm's way and how we are going to deal with this issue in Iraq and in Afghanistan and other domestic issues that we have here.

I am very pleased to not only share with the Members, Mr. Speaker, but also with the American people the fact that 246 Members of the House voted in the affirmative to disagree with the President as it relates to the recent troop escalation of some 20,000 combat troops and anywhere from 3,000 to 4,000 support personnel being sent to Iraq, which was announced by the President on January 10 of this year.

□ 2145

I think it is very, very important to note that that was a nonbinding resolution. Even though it was nonbinding, it really set the course for the Congress to play a role.

I think the reason why we are in the majority, and when I say "we," the Democrats are in the majority right now, Mr. Speaker, is not the fact that our message was better than the Republican message in the last election. I think the American people were counting on change and heading in a new direction.

So it is important, and I am encouraging the Members in a bipartisan way, that we work very hard to give the American people what they want and to give the men and women in uniform what they need. I think that is a Congress having oversight hearings; a Congress debating the issues as it relates to troop readiness; a Congress that is willing to take the tough votes when they need to be taken; to be able to provide the kind of leadership from the congressional oversight end.

The President is the commander-in-chief. That is outlined in the Constitution. No one is really trying to bother that or hinder that. We just want to make sure that the troops have what they need when they go into harm's way, need it be Iraq or Afghanistan.

I mentioned a little earlier in my talk about readiness. I think it is important that we identify this, because it is used a lot here on the floor. Being a member of the Armed Services Committee and having had an opportunity

to travel to Iraq twice, and looking forward to going back soon and going to Afghanistan and other areas where we have a military presence, readiness is very, very important.

Readiness is almost like if you have an illness and you are going in for a major operation, you want to make sure that that doctor has what he or she needs to be able to carry out your procedure.

I think it is important as we look at our National Guard and we look at our Reservists and we look at our active duty that they have what they need to carry out the mission if they are sent to Iraq. You can't go unless you have up-armored Humvees that are going to match the mission. You should not go and we should not send them if they don't have the Kevlar vests that they need. They should not go and we should not send them if they don't have the kind of backing that they need from a support standpoint that is trained and ready for the mission in Baghdad, need it be door-to-door searches, need it be guerilla warfare, need it be the general equipment one may need to carry out that mission.

There is nothing wrong with the word "readiness." I put it in the category, Mr. Speaker, of responsibility. I think it is important. I think it is irresponsible for us to send men and women into harm's way without the necessary tools that they need.

Now, there are some Members that are saying, well, why do you have Members concerned? A colonel told us or the President told us or I read somewhere in a news release or I saw on the news that they have everything they need, and why would we send them over there in the first place? We all have their best interests at heart.

I am going to share with Members, Mr. Speaker, that being a member of the Armed Services Committee in the last two Congresses and this Congress too, I have seen the Secretary of Defense say they have what they need. "Anything the troops need, we will give it to them." And later I will pick up a news account that they don't have what they need, or go to Walter Reed and talk to a soldier that ended up being blown up in a Humvee because of an improvised explosive device, because that Humvee did not have the up-armor that it needed. It is the total opposite of what I hear here on Capitol Hill and what I have seen at Walter Reed.

Let's take Walter Reed out. I have gone to Germany, Mr. Speaker. I have seen service men and women without legs. They didn't have what they needed. We were told they had what they needed, but they didn't have it.

Just 2 weeks ago, last week during the debate, I think it was on Tuesday or Wednesday, I was at the White House for a meeting and we had an opportunity to ask the President questions and I had an opportunity to ask the President a question. And I shared with the President, we talked the non-

binding resolution. The President agreed he thought that it would pass here on the floor because the votes were there. He has people that are counting these votes.

I said, "Mr. President, I think it is important as we look at this as being a nonbinding resolution, there will be a binding resolution or a binding supplemental, emergency supplemental for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and there will be language in there, and you shouldn't have a problem with it, to say that we should not send the troops unless they are ready. I am not talking about mentally, I am talking about having the equipment they need to carry out the mission and not find themselves in harm's way without having the kind of backing that they need to be able to carry out the mission once again."

Of course, the President came back in a very roaring voice saying, "KENDRICK, do you believe that I would send men and women into harm's way? I hear about the funerals. I write the letters and I call the families. You believe that I would do that?"

I don't believe that the President would do that. But let me just share this with you: It has happened, and I think it is important that we realize that it is happening.

Yes, if I am talking to a friend of mine and they are saying, well, you know, I know there have been reports of the new car that I bought, that it has some sort of problem with the engine that has come out in the auto report or what have you, but I am going to be okay regardless.

Maybe it is not the best analogy that I can come up with at this point, but we have been told that the troops have what they need, we have been told they are ready for the mission that they are being sent to, and we found out otherwise later.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it gives me no pleasure, and Members, it gives me no pleasure, we are at 3,154 men and women in uniform that are dead now. We appreciate their contributions to our country and we appreciate the way that they have applied themselves on behalf of what we sent them over to do. But I will tell you standing here as a Member of Congress, that some of these deaths could have been prevented if they had what they needed.

Now, Members can go back and forth on how you feel about leadering up, manning up and womaning up to be able to do what you need to do as a Member of Congress to fight on behalf of these individuals. I am not questioning anyone's patriotism. I am not questioning anyone's integrity. I am not even questioning any Member of Congress' will or desire to make sure that we give the troops what they need.

I believe we all are well-intended. But we have to make sure that when that man or woman leaves their family on a tarmac, need it be at an active duty military camp or at a commercial airport where you have Reserve and

National Guard individuals that are leaving to go into harm's way, it is our duty and our responsibility as Members of Congress that have oversight of the taxpayer dollars to make sure, even though someone has said it is going to be okay, but to make sure that they have what they need. It is that simple.

So, I was not shocked, Mr. Speaker, by seeing the bipartisan vote before we left on President's break. I am definitely not a prophet and I am not a psychic, but I knew, based on the message from the American people, Democrats and Republicans, I am not just talking about proud Democrats kind of got together and said hey, let's do this. We don't have 246 Members here in this House on the majority right now, so it took 17 Republicans to come along with Democrats or to be with Democrats or to be with individuals that understood that message last November from the American people.

As far as I am concerned, in the 30-something Working Group, we don't focus on issues, "let's go to the floor and make sure we gain a greater majority." Not when it comes to national security. Not when it comes to the very heartbeats and the way of life of those individuals that put their lives on the line and those that have put their lives on the line in the past, and I am going to talk about them a little later, Mr. Speaker.

You don't play politics with that. That is national security. That is someone's daddy, that is someone's mother, that is someone's son, that is someone's daughter that may not come home because someone told someone else in Washington, D.C. that it was going to be okay.

Now, there are a lot of folks around here editorializing on what Mr. MURTHA is talking about from Pennsylvania, who is an outstanding Member of the Congress and also happens to be the chairman of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee.

I think it is important that we look at someone who is a decorated Marine, that has fought for us to salute one flag, who served in Congress double digit years, that still is willing to serve this country. We have someone that is willing to say I voted for the war, as Mr. MURTHA did, and to say that I have been to Iraq, I have had oversight hearings, and I must add that he has had more oversight hearings since this Congress has been active in the last 2 months than they had in the entire 109th Congress with 2 years combined and then some.

And that the committee is hard at work to make sure that when those family members look at those men and women that are going into harm's way, that they know, not maybe, not, well, you know, I am trying to get there.

I heard what the President said. I heard what the Secretary of Defense said. I even heard a member of the brass say it. When they go out on patrol, and I am not a military person and I am not going to represent myself

as someone who has served in uniform. I have just been a State trooper and I have been an elected official for 13 years, and I have served here in this Congress for the last 4 years and a couple of months. And I have been federalized by the people that elected me from the Seventeenth Congressional District.

I will tell you this: I know what my job is, and I know what Mr. MURTHA's job is, and I know what the job of all of the Members of Congress, including the Members of the Senate and the President of the United States and the people that he appoints, that we need to make sure, we need to make sure beyond 100 percent, we need to make sure 160 percent, if we can, 200 percent, that those men and women that go into war, that their chance to come back to this country the way they left is our paramount duty.

So, I am not really tied up in a debate, Mr. Speaker, and I don't think here on this side of the aisle and even some of the Members on the other side of the aisle are tied up in the debate about the details of the obvious.

The obvious is, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the troops should have what they need when they go into harm's way. Why are we even talking about that? Why are some Members objecting to that being in the emergency supplemental, to say that they should have what they need to go into war? If it wasn't so serious, it would be funny. So I think the Members, we need to kind of put that to the side and say that there are other issues that we have to deal with.

Profiteering of the war, reams and reams of paper, Inspector General reports of how U.S. contractors have been fleecing of the U.S. taxpayer dollar. Our paramount, one of our fiscal paramount responsibilities is to make sure that the Federal tax dollar is not only appropriated, but disseminated in the right way to make sure that ultimate accountability is paramount once again.

So I am excited about what is happening here, Mr. Speaker, I am excited about the debate that is taking place, and I am excited about the forward progress that we are making in that area.

I just want to address one more thing before I turn it over to my colleague, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Mr. Speaker, I was very disturbed last week and have been disturbed, and here in the 30-Something Working Group, we have been talking quite a bit about our veterans. Now, I mentioned that a little earlier because the veterans, we say we are the 30-something Working Group. A lot of those veterans are 30-something now. Many of them are even 20-something, because of their service. Some of them are 40 and 50-something. And they are coming back.

In the last Congress, in the 109th and 108th, those were the only two Congresses I can account for, because beyond that it was my mother serving

here, and I am pretty sure that I can get a good account from her about what happened or I can research in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, we have Members coming to the floor chest-beating, "Oh, I support the men and women in uniform and our veterans, and I am going to be in the veterans parade and I am going to wave and carry on and I am going to let them know that I love them."

Well, let me just say this: In the 108th and the 109th Congresses, veteran benefits were cut, period. They were cut. And as we continue to talk about it, as we continue to dissect the President's budget, this document here, as we continue to dissect this budget here, find out what is in it and what is not in it, what is going to be given to the American people and what is going to be taken away, we are going to find out where this administration falls and the old majority in this House falls on the issue of veterans.

□ 2200

Now, I can speak, and I know we can speak, in a very bold voice when we talk about our commitment to veterans. I have a veterans hospital in my district. I have actually two. When I go and visit, I look at those men and women. They could have served back in Korea, World War II. I even met a gentleman who served in Grenada, Haiti, 82nd Airborne. You have these individuals that are there. Vietnam, that are there. Some folks may not know that they served, but we know they served.

Our responsibility in Congress is not to just carry on and talk about how we support the men and women in uniform and those who have served, and we honor them and we appreciate them; but I think it is important that we speak with our dollars and our commitment here as Members of Congress.

In January of 2003, the Bush administration cuts off veterans health care for 164,000 veterans. That is on our Web site.

March 2003, the Republican budget cuts \$14 billion from veterans health care. That was passed by Congress with 199 Democrats voting against that measure of cutting the \$14 billion.

In March 2004, the Republican budget shortchanged veterans health care again by \$1.5 billion. That was passed by the Congress, 201 Democrats voting against that measure.

March 2005, President Bush's budget shortchanges veterans health care again by more than \$2 billion. Again, 201 Democrats voted against that. This was House Resolution 95. The vote number was 98.

In the 30-Something Working Group, we actually pull information from the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. I think it is important that Members and the American people realize that.

Again, November 2005, the Bush administration as it relates to the shortfall, Democrats fought that summer to be able to get back the \$2.7 billion that was taken out. And we have a member

of the Appropriations Committee here, but in the last continuing resolution because the Republicans did not do their job, Mr. Speaker, in making sure that the work was done when the Democratic Congress took over, they couldn't get all of the bills passed. They just kept punting down the street. In our continuing resolution, we retooled Members' projects and other nonissues that weren't a priority because of the thirst that veterans have and the Department of Veterans has to provide the services for our men and women that serve. The Democrats increased the VA health care budget by \$3.6 billion in a joint funding resolution. I say all of that to indicate it is important that we do this.

One last point. While we were on break, The Washington Post: "Soldiers face neglect and frustration at Army top medical facility" here in Washington, D.C., Walter Reed Hospital. This is a Washington Post article, Sunday, February 18, 2007. It was dropped here on my doorstep in Washington, D.C. I read this, and it was a follow-up article. I think it is important that the American people and Members of Congress pay close attention to what is happening.

You have patients and outpatients that are saying that Walter Reed, they are encountering a messy bureaucratic battlefield that reminds them of the real one that they faced overseas.

It also talks in this article about rats and mice and dead insects in this hospital. Smells and carpet stains.

Again, Mr. Speaker, our job, yes, we say we support the troops. Yes, we say we support veterans. We are supposed to say that. But when we come here and we take our voting card out and we go to these committees, we have to make sure that we follow through on what we say.

So I am excited by the fact that by reading everything that I have read about what has happened in the last two Congresses and beyond, that we have already put \$3.6 billion, and we haven't had a full cycle to be able to even dissect the budget and to appropriate. So saying that, I want to pass it over to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), a good friend of mine. I am glad she is here to shed light on our message here tonight.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you so much. It is a pleasure to join my 30-something colleagues, Mr. MEEK and Mr. MURPHY.

Mr. MEEK, you started talking about the travesty that was revealed by The Washington Post just before last weekend about what is going on at Walter Reed Medical Center and the campus and its facilities.

I had the privilege of going to visit our men and women that are at Walter Reed who have come back from Iraq injured. Almost every soldier I met with was an amputee and went through a devastating experience, devastating injury. But the ward that they take you through, like this article says, is spit-

polished and brand-spanking clean. There is not a shadow of what is described in this third-party validator, which is how we refer to our information that we bring out here to demonstrate the facts.

I want to read just a paragraph from the article. I want to highlight some of the things, and we have been joined by our good friend Mr. ALTMIRE from Pennsylvania.

This article hit me like a ton of bricks: "Life beyond the hospital bed," and this is what is going on at Walter Reed that is not what they show us as Members of Congress and that they show the President and Vice President about what is going on at Walter Reed. "Life beyond the hospital bed is a frustrating mountain of paperwork. The typical soldier is required to file 22 documents with eight different commands, most of them off post, to enter and exit the medical processing world, according to government investigators. Sixteen different information systems are used to process the forms, but few of them can communicate with one another. The Army's three personnel databases cannot read each other's files and can't interact with the separate pay system or the medical record keeping databases. The disappearance of necessary forms and records is the most common reason soldiers languish at Walter Reed longer than they should," and it goes on.

That is just unbelievable. A mountain of red tape and bureaucracy is what our troops come back to the United States to and have to deal with. I thought we well established after 9/11 that interoperability and communication between systems was an obstacle that was intolerable.

How could we allow this to happen and just let our veterans, who fought for us so valiantly, and the analogy I will make is while our troops might not come home, and thank good they are not coming home to the same reaction as our Vietnam veterans came home to, how is this not as bad? It is actually worse, in a way, because instead of just having to suffer the wrath of their fellow Americans, which was a travesty and certainly hurtful and harmful, instead they come home and suffer the wrath of their government, the benign wrath of their government. "Benign" meaning not specifically intended to harm, but it is like death by a thousand cuts.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. If the gentlelady would yield for a moment, let us also think about what this message is to those that would sign up for this volunteer military force being sent to defend our country overseas. Not only is this unconscionable to those who have sacrificed everything to fight for this country in Afghanistan and Iraq, but think about those who we are asking to join the Armed Forces. We don't have a draft any more, and many people are thankful for that. We rely on the decisions by courageous men and women across this country to join voluntarily our Armed Forces.

So when they see people coming back from these wars, being treated without the basic dignity that any of us would expect those men and women to be treated with, I would think, I hope it doesn't, but I would think it might give pause to those that would join our military.

So I think of this from a point of conscience deep inside me, and I also think about it from a standpoint of national security. What kind of signal are we sending to those who are going to be the next generation of troops when this is how we treat them when they come back.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. That is a very important and valid point.

I want to read a quote, and that quote is this: "So let's get something straight right now. To point out that our military has been overextended, taken for granted and neglected, that is no criticism of the military, that is a criticism of the President and Vice President and their record of neglect."

Who do you think said that? I will tell you who said that, George W. Bush, as a candidate, said that on November 3, 2000, in an interview on CNN.

I think it is pretty clear that he was right almost 7 years ago, and it is just sad that he didn't mean it. It is sad that he didn't actually do anything more than say those words instead of taking to heart what he supposedly believed at the time and making sure that it didn't happen when he became President.

Clearly Walter Reed, the lack of body armor and preparation and training that we are sending, that we have been sending and he was willing to send our troops over to Iraq and Afghanistan without, is clearly still something that he is willing to do. Unfortunately, all the President has been is a candidate who spews words with really not too much meaning behind them. It looks like Mr. ALTMIRE would like to say something.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentlewoman from Florida and the 30-something Working Group.

I was in my office doing some work after the district work period, and I heard the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) speaking on veterans and the problems at Walter Reed. I had to come down here and join in the conversation, and I appreciate your offer to do so.

I want to tell you about a few things that happened in my district back home. I had several meetings with organizers and folks in the veterans community in my district. I toured a VA hospital that is undergoing a major expansion. As we were doing this throughout the week last week, the articles from The Washington Post about what was happening at Walter Reed appeared.

I have to tell you that the veterans community in my district, and I am sure in other districts around the country, my veterans were outraged at what was happening there because

there has been a lot of talk during the debate on Iraq and other forums that certain individuals are not supporting the troops and not displaying the right commitment to the troops, and there is a partisan affiliation with that. But I want to tell you, we have a situation taking place at Walter Reed where we have veterans returning from Iraq and from Afghanistan, as has been pointed out, with severe injuries. These are 19 and 20 year olds, with severe, long-term, lifelong injuries. These are the people that we are talking about when we are having the debate on Iraq and Afghanistan and who is supporting the troops and who is not.

I would leave it to others to determine who is at fault here. That is not what this is all about. What this is about is protecting our veterans and finding a way to improve the system.

I have to say I shared the outrage of the veterans in my communities when I heard about these articles because these are the people that are fighting for us overseas that are in harm's way, and the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan is going to be the subject of another debate coming up on funding and we are going to hear some rhetoric thrown around I am sure on this floor and other places about support of our troops and who has been supportive of our troops.

As the gentlewoman from Florida knows, during the debate on the budget, the continuation resolution, I was one who pushed very hard for increased funding for our Nation's veterans. I want to say that our leadership was able to put in \$3.6 billion in funding increases for the VA health system. I have said many times, and I will say it here again tonight, Mr. Speaker, that I will never support a budget bill that does not fund the VA health system to maintain the current level of services every year that that budget funds.

□ 2215

They have been neglected for far too long, and we have seen what has happened at Walter Reed. We have seen the situation as outlined in great detail, and I do want to commend The Washington Post for the job that they did in putting forward these facts because these are things that needed to be known.

We have a backlog in the VA of 400,000 cases. A 400,000-case backlog in the VA health care system. Mr. Speaker, that is just unacceptable in this time.

So I will yield back, but I did want to say that I was in my office, and I just could not resist the opportunity to come down one more time and say that I share the frustration of the Members here, the 30-something Working Group, on this issue because I personally am a little bit tired of the rhetoric that certain people are not supporting the troops. I agree that there are people who are not supporting the troops, and I will leave it to others to determine who that is, but I do not think that

that has a place in the debate when we have a situation at Walter Reed that has been outlined. We have a budget situation where we have not funded our veterans as we should have in past years, but we are going to make up for it with this year's budget and continuing budgets.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. ALTMIRE. Your veterans in your district and veterans across this country have you to thank, along with others, that you helped rally to the cause to make sure that the continuing resolution that we passed here, which is effectively the Act that keeps the government operating, that provides the resources to different agencies, including the Veterans Administration, you made sure that that bill had the proper resources in it for our veterans.

Here is the good news. We are talking about what is past and we also have to talk about the prologue as well. A new sheriff is in town, and the good news for veterans and for the American people is that we are going to make those investments in veterans health care. We are going to change things in this Congress. Mr. ALTMIRE and I ran in part to make those changes, and Mr. MEEK and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ stood up here night after night after night making the case for that change.

If the American people spoke out about many things, one of them certainly was that part of our change in foreign policy had to be doing justice to those veterans. So I hope that when people hear us talk about some of the bad things happening within our veterans system here, they understand that we are only saying it because we are part of the movement which is going to change that.

The Disabled Veterans of America were in my office today, and they shared with me a pretty remarkable statistic, and I hope I get it right. In previous foreign conflicts, the ratio of those killed to those that were wounded in battle was 3 to 1 wounded to killed in action. In this conflict, it is 16 to 1. Now, that is great news, that we have made advances in protection for our soldiers, in armor, in the ability of our medical professionals to intervene on the battlefield that we are saving that many lives. It is a tragedy that one is lost, never mind the 3,000.

The stress, though, that that puts on our system is a great one. We have more and more wounded, more severely wounded coming into our hospitals, and it means that we have to step up to meet that new obligation. We are so lucky to have people coming back that can still go on to lead productive lives, but only if we provide them with those resources.

The other story that they told me was of the number of young soldiers just back from this war who are ending up in in-patient care in our State veterans hospitals, those that have been afflicted not just by the physical wounds, but by the mental wounds as well.

Our obligation has to be not just to treat the broken bones, the damaged bodies, but also to the mental stress that these brave men and women have come back with.

I just want to talk for a minute about who we are talking about here, because we have fought previous battles in a very different way. We have relied largely on our enlisted men and women to fight these wars, and I think we need to remember who we are asking to go over to Iraq and to Afghanistan to fight because no longer is it just our enlisted men.

We are treating our National Guard basically like they are our normal Army today. Sometimes we forget that. It is good we are the 30-something Working Group here because sometimes young people that have only seen this conflict think that that is how things are, that the National Guard and the Reserve are sort of like everybody else and they get sent over there, and that is what they signed up for. Well, that is not what they signed up for. That is not how we have conducted our military interventions in the past.

We have zero active duty or Reserve brigades in the United States right now that are considered combat ready. We have 84,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve that have been deployed two times or more since 2001. The average mobilization for a Reserve or National Guard member is 18 months, and now, as we are learning that the President is once again going to rely on National Guard forces to be part of this new escalation in Iraq, we are finding out that these forces, as they get ready in their hometowns and their home States, are not even close to combat ready in terms of the equipment they need.

The Oklahoma National Guard reports that one-third of their members do not have the M-4 rifles.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. On that point, just to focus on the National Guard and how correct you are about how they are being treated versus what they signed up for, there are now 14,000 National Guard troops being deployed earlier than they were originally scheduled to meet the demands of the President's proposed plans to escalate the war.

National Guard and Army units are being called up sooner than previously scheduled, and that is even though some of these units do not have the equipment that they need. They do not have the training, and some of them are having to go over there foregoing the training.

Mr. MEEK and I are going to be meeting with our general, who is in charge of our National Guard in Florida very soon. I just saw the request today, and I am looking forward to meeting with him. I met with him in my district in Florida as well last year, and the conversations that I have had with him and with others about the condition of the equipment, not just the condition of the equipment that is going over

there, but what happens to the equipment once it comes back because we are not replacing the equipment and sending them new equipment after it has been through 5, 6 years of an Iraq War.

So the equipment that they are working on and that they are utilizing has been through war literally. I mean, we are not making sure that they have the equipment that they need. We are sending them over there two, three and four times now.

When I went to Walter Reed a couple of weeks ago, every single guy I met had been through three tours, three. One of the guys I met, his little boy was there, and literally his dad had been on three tours. His little boy was six, which means that this dad missed half of his child's life already, half. I mean, that is just inexcusable. That is not what our volunteers sign up for. I mean, even if you signed up for the regular standing Army, it is unreasonable to expect that they would have to have that kind of pressure, physical, mental, emotional pressure put on them as well as their families, especially in the middle of the situation in a war that we are involved in under dubious circumstances to begin with.

I do not know if Mr. MEEK wants to jump in here now, but he is still sitting so I imagine not. So I will go back to Mr. MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. We are talking about the best of the best. If anyone was able to operate and achieve under the strain, it is the men and women in our Armed Forces, and so we expect a lot of them because we know the training they have been through. We know the kind of people they are, but we have asked so much of them that we can ask very little more.

We do differentiate at some level between our enlisted men and our National Guard and Reserve troops, and I think it is appropriate because when you are talking about them, you are talking about ripping somebody out of a family, out of a community.

These are not just fathers and mothers. These are small businessmen. These are employees. These are employers. These are members of the PTA. These are members of the Elks Club. These are people who hold communities together. That is the type of people that our members of the Armed Forces are. Those people that sign up for the Reserve and National Guard do that because they have this commitment to their community, and it does not end with their commitment to their military service. They are part of the community in ways that a lot of other people are not.

So when you talk about bringing people out two or three times to serve in the Reserve and National Guard, you are breaking up families and communities. That is why we had an enlisted service.

I think one of the discussions that we will have going forward, and one that I think will be bipartisan agreement on,

as there has been with most everything we have done here, is that we need to have an honest conversation about increasing the troop strength of our military, increasing numbers of troops that are enlisted and doing this as a permanent job, because it has gotten to the end of the limit of a lot of the people who are serving in our National Guard and our Reserve.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I would add to that, the gentleman from Connecticut has eloquently outlined the types of people that we are talking about, that find themselves in this situation in our veterans hospitals. We are talking about people who really are American heroes. These are the best and brightest of our society. These are people who have left their families, as the gentlewoman from Florida has outlined. They have left their children. They are taking three, sometimes more, four tours, and they come back home.

They find themselves in a military hospital. They find themselves backlogged on waiting lists. It takes 6 months to 2 years to access your health benefits at the VA. This is shameful treatment for people who are our heroes in this country. We need to have a national commitment to supporting our veterans.

These are people who put their lives on the line for us. These are people who have left their family, as we have talked about, and we have had a situation in recent years where we had not given them the help that they need on the VA health side. We have made a commitment in the new Congress that we are going to make up for that as we have talked about.

But I do want to make clear that everyone in this House realizes, both Republican and Democrat, that these are the heroes of our society. Nobody is going to argue with that. These are folks that we applaud them for their efforts. We thank them and we cannot show our gratitude in any more forceful way than to give them the funding that they need when they come back home and find themselves in a VA health care facility or receiving treatment at the veterans facility, even on an outpatient basis.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I want to follow up on what you are saying and emphasize and demonstrate what we are doing to our best, and I do mean doing to our best and brightest once they have come back. You have been an eloquent champion of our veterans.

I think it is important to recall a private conversation that you and I had on the floor during the run-up to the adoption of the supplemental. It happens that I am a member of the whip team, and you were my assignment that day. I had an opportunity to talk to you about whether we could count on your support for the supplemental and how important it was.

Your answer, which was the appropriate answer, was, well, Debbie, the answer is no, unless you can assure me that there was an increase for veterans

health care. Because at that moment, I could not assure you because I did not have the information at my fingertips, I had to get back to you and was proud to be able to report that we did provide a significant increase that we were able to bump up beyond the continuing resolution significantly the health care we are providing to our veterans. But it is to your constituents' credit and the veterans that you represent that you do that.

But let us just go through some facts that we know. The percentage of Army servicemembers receiving medical retirement and permanent disability benefits back in 2001 was 10 percent. The percentage of the same Army servicemembers receiving medical retirement and permanent disability benefits in 2005 down to 3 percent. Army Reservists receiving medical retirement and permanent disability in 2001, 16 percent; same group in 2005, 5 percent.

Let us go to the case backlog at the Veterans Administration on new benefit claims in fiscal year 2006. 400,000-case backlog. This is from the Army Times, third party validator. Average length of time veterans wait before receiving monthly benefits, 6 months to 2 years. That was in the Los Angeles Times.

The number of soldiers at Walter Reed navigating the medical and physical evaluation process since 2001 has doubled. The average length of time it takes for Army soldiers to convalesce and go through the military medical and physical evaluations, nine to 15½ months.

□ 2230

The increase in the Army's physical disability caseload since 2001, 80 percent. The number of veterans from the global war on terror expected to enter the military and veterans health care systems in the coming years, 700,000. And I will just read the quote again from Candidate Bush: "So let's get something straight right now. To point out that our military has been overextended, taken for granted, and neglected, that's no criticism of the military; that is the criticism of a President and a Vice President and their record of neglect."

Well, it sure is. And these statistics from the time that this President has been in the office are evidence of that.

I would be happy to yield to one of the three gentlemen here.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. I thank you, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I just want to bring up one other topic here as well before we yield back to Mr. MEEK, and that is also, when we ask our men and women to go over there and fight, and then when they come home and they are not taken care of, we also need to remember who we are sending over there, our Reservists and National Guard, but who is joining them over there. This is a tangential but important topic. President Bush has talked a lot about this coalition of the willing, and we need to understand

that the American people, when they hear about the allied forces over there, know who they are now, because people are jumping ship faster than the evening news can keep up with it. Great Britain, Poland, Lithuania, South Korea. By the week, somebody else walks away. And as we make decisions in Iraq, like this plan for escalation in which there is not even a pretext of reaching out and forming some international consensus, remember when we went into Iraq in the first place, at least we tried to pretend that we were going to go through some international decision-making process. At least we sort of gave some faint illusion of using the United Nations as a forum for which to have this discussion. You didn't even hear a conversation about trying to reach out to our allies with this plan to escalate this war. I mean, we didn't. Because why? Because we knew if we asked Great Britain or Poland or South Korea or Lithuania to be part of this force, the answer would be pretty simple.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. If the gentleman would yield for a question. It is somewhat rhetorical, but if you know the answer, feel free to tell me what it is. Do you know what percentage of the troops that are over in Iraq that we will have as a Nation once Great Britain pulls out?

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. If you sort of listen to the rhetoric coming out of the administration, you would think this grand coalition has, what, 50 percent American troops, 60 percent, 70 percent, 80 percent? No. Ninety-two percent. Ninety-two percent of the troops on the ground in Iraq are American forces. We went from a high of coalition troops, those are non-American troops, of 25,000, and now down to almost below 15,000 troops and dropping by the day.

So I think that is just a point of information that we have now decided on a path that isn't even going to have a hint of coalition-building. We have decided to go this on our own. And, frankly, I think that has grievous consequences for what is happening on the ground in Iraq, frankly has just as important consequences for the future of foreign policy when we have gotten to a point where we don't even talk to our allies about our strategy there.

And I would be happy to yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank you so very much for yielding. I think it is important for us to also realize that the next action that we will probably, no probably, we will have on Iraq, Mr. Speaker and Members, will be the \$99.6 billion emergency supplemental to the war. And I think it is important that we pay very close attention to this vote that is coming up and what leads up to that vote.

I spoke earlier about making sure that troop readiness, that troops have what they need when they go. I spoke of going to get a procedure done. You have a medical procedure that needs to

be done, the first thing you want to check and make sure is the doctor has what he or she needs to be able to complete the procedure, because you do want to get up from that table one day.

This is very, very important. And I think that as we continue to talk about this issue of Iraq, it is our responsibility; we cannot critique the present administration or the past majority in this House if we do the same thing they did and expect different results. That is just not going to happen. We know that those that have come before us, whatever authority they might have been from the executive branch, and said they have what they need, we have the up-armored Humvees, we have all the things that they need when they get there. We were told that. And, better yet, we still have men and women at Walter Reed and other veterans hospitals, military hospitals throughout this country and even in Germany, and I visited twice, that are without legs because they didn't have the up-armored Humvees that they needed.

So saying all of that, the debate is going to be: Are we going to do the same thing that the Republican majority did, saying that we talk a good game about standing up on behalf of the troops and we disagree with the President on certain issues as it relates to Iraq? But if we do what they did, which was very little, then what happened in November will not reach its full potential in making sure that we head in a new direction.

So I think it is important that we take this in a very strong way, and I am glad that we had 17 Republicans join us on a nonbinding resolution before we left here, the last big action that we took before we left on Presidents' break. And I encourage more of my Republican colleagues to be a part of this movement in the new direction. I think it is very, very important. I think there have been a lot of things that have been highlighted. I know that the whole coalition of the willing will soon be the coalition of one, because we are going to be the only country that is left. There is a lot of rhetoric going on, we have to be there because we have to fight them over there so we don't have to fight them here. I don't hear Great Britain saying that. I don't hear some of the other countries that have announced their departure and those that have left Iraq.

I am one to believe, just as a single Member, that there will be a U.S. presence for some time in the region. But at the levels that we are now, over 143,000 troops and counting, it is going to be very difficult for us to continue to sell to the American people that there is a great need to keep those kinds of levels there. And as you spoke earlier about the readiness issue, this is very, very important. This is very, very important. I mean, we wouldn't want to get the word out to the undesirables here in the United States of America to say that law enforcement here is not ready to deal with

major crimes here in the United States of America. We definitely don't want to get the word out to the rest of the world that we are not prepared to defend ourselves in a way that we should and need to be prepared to be able to defend ourselves or help our allies in the future.

So I think that is important. It is something not to take lightly. A lot of work has to be done here. A lot of tough votes have to be taken. And we have to communicate with the Members and the American people to not let them fall behind as we go through reforming this House and reforming the legislative presence in this whole debate on Iraq.

Mr. ALTMIRE. Could the gentleman yield for a moment? And then I will yield to the gentlewoman from Florida. On that point, I wanted to tell another story that happened when I was back in the district.

I was at a fire hall meeting some folks, volunteer firemen and fire-women, and we were discussing the budget and one of them talked about how there needed to be support for our first responders. And I said, well, I completely agree, and I was disappointed to see that in the budget that the President submitted he cut funding for first responders, and in fact he cut fire grants by 55 percent. And the people around just couldn't believe that. They said, well, that can't possibly be true. That is not what they had heard; that is not what they had been led to believe. So, thankfully, the miracle of modern technology, I had my BlackBerry in my pocket and I pulled up the House Budget Committee, and Chairman SPRATT has put together a wonderful Web site. If you go to house.gov, any of your constituents can pull up the Budget Committee's Web site and look at the President's budget, and there is a specific page on there on what the President's cuts proposed are for first responders. And sure enough, there is a 54.7 percent reduction in grants for firefighters. He almost completely zeroes out the COPS program.

So when the gentleman from Florida talks about how important it is that we have homeland security funding back home and we fund our first responders, well, somewhere along the line there is a disconnect when it comes to what they are proposing down on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, because they don't seem to be getting that message.

So I did want to tell that anecdote, that our men and women who are courageous in the communities and serving as volunteer firefighters depend on these grants and they depend on the help that they need, and we in the Democratic majority are going to make sure that they get it. But there does seem to be a disconnect on some sides as to what has been the case.

I would yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. Just to quickly help close us out,

the bottom line is that our veterans come home and face devastating treatment from their government. We have outlined that tonight. We send them over there with equipment that in many cases is faulty. We are not adequately preparing them and giving them enough time to be well trained to do their best over there. And they are doing their level best given the assignment that we give them. We are not providing them with the resources, and we are not providing them with the equipment. And, fortunately, we have a Democratic Congress now that is not going to give this President a blank check any longer, not going to let him run roughshod over our duty to be a check and balance on the administration. And that is what the 30-something Working Group is designed to outline. We are going to make sure that we get the message out and that we help our colleagues and anyone who might also hear this conversation between us understand what is really going on.

Mr. MURPHY, I would yield to you to give out the Web site and Mr. MEEK for closing.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. I think the real lesson from Mr. ALTMIRE's story is that he is like a Boy Scout, he is always prepared. He has the information at his fingertips that his constituents need. You can learn something every day from our colleagues.

To get in touch with the 30-something Dems, the e-mail is 30SomethingDems@mail.house.gov. And then on the Web site where a lot of the information we are talking about here tonight and in previous nights can be found is www.speaker.gov/30Something. And with that, I will yield for final thoughts back to Mr. MEEK.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you so very much, Mr. MURPHY. And I want to thank Mr. ALTMIRE for joining us and also Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I want to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us to have one more 30-something Working Group hour.

With that, Mr. Speaker, it was an honor addressing the House of Representatives.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Western Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to be recognized by the gentleman from Eastern Iowa and privileged to have the opportunity and the honor to address you, Mr. Speaker, on the floor of the United States Congress.

A lot of things have transpired since we took the week off from this Congress for the Presidents' recess, we call it, which was really a work period back in the district. And our constituents and those in the State of Iowa and in some of the areas north and east of us

went through a severe, severe ice storm that tens of thousands of them are without power as we speak. And I know that you and I have an eye on that very closely, and we do though have a great confidence in the resiliency of the human spirit back in the Midwest, and friends and neighbors will step forward to do all they can. And what is within human possibility will be done and things will be taken care of there, Mr. Speaker.

So having that off my mind, I take up the subject matter that I came to address this evening. And it has been some time since I stepped here on the floor of the House of Representatives, Mr. Speaker, to talk about an issue that is the number one issue as I go around western Iowa and Iowa and other places in the country and have meetings with individuals, town hall-type meetings.

Whenever a group of people come together, if you ask questions, stand and listen, eventually the subject of immigration will come up. And it has been the most intensely watched subject and discussed subject perhaps over the last 3 years or a little more, Mr. Speaker.

I recall when President Bush gave his speech that laid out his vision on the immigration reform, and I believe the date was January 6 of 2004. I am not off by more than a day, if that. And that speech started us down this path and this Nation of having an open dialogue about what kind of a Nation we are and what kind of a Nation we are to become. And this is something that has embroiled most of the discussion across the country. Everybody has an opinion. It is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, a healthy debate.

I recall when Pat Buchanan ran for the Presidency back in 1966, he said: I will call for hearings. I will force a debate on this country. We have got to have a national debate so that we can come to a consensus and put this country down the path towards its future.

□ 2245

We have been intensively debating this issue of immigration for the last 3 years, and that would be all of 2004, 2005 and 2006 and we find ourselves now into 2007. So I would say we are about 38 months into this intense discussion, and the results we have from this are hard to measure at this point. One of the reasons is because it is a very convoluted and complicated issue.

We have a configuration here in America that doesn't necessarily promote the right kind of policy. I say that, I am cautious about how I address it, because first of all, I will recognize that there are employers who have premised their business plan on hiring illegal labor.

I can recall in an agricultural hearing that I attended in Stockton, California last year, there was a lady there, there was a witness, before our Agriculture Committee who ran, I believe it was organic, a truck farming operation where they raised peppers and

those kinds of vegetables down south of Yuma near the border.

Her complaint was, well, we set up these farms in processing and we need over 900 people a day to operate the harvesting and the sorting and the packaging and the shipments of this crop every day. Now that we have done a better job of enforcing the border, then her lament was that they have a turnover of 9 percent per week, 9 percent of their labor supply per week, it is about 80, and they are having trouble filling their labor supply.

So I asked the question, where did you expect your labor supply to come from when you placed your business close to the border? And the answer was, of course, well we expected our labor to come over from Mexico and come work on our farms and then go back to their homes. Well, that would be illegal labor working on farms south of Yuma with the idea that was the plan from the beginning.

Now, the request was, come to Congress and ask us to legalize this illegal behavior. It was a planned strategy from the very beginning of the setup of the business operation.

I lay this out because this is not a unique circumstance across this country. In fact, it is becoming a standard practice. I am seeing it more and more again as businesses set up to run their operation, whether it is going to be food processing or farming or maybe a dairy operation, and they decide, we are going to need labor to do this.

We would like to go forward with our plan and put our infrastructure in place, invest our capital, buy our cows, get our equipment up and get an order in. We will have to hire some illegal labor to milk the cows.

I had a dairyman tell me a couple of weeks ago that 51 percent of the milk in this country are milked by people that don't speak English. That doesn't necessarily indicate they are illegal immigrants in America, but that would indicate that a significant percentage of them most likely are.

That is some of the scenario. Some of the scenario on the one side is business interests that can capitalize on cheap labor. Believe me, when you pour millions of people into a labor market that are illiterate and unskilled that will work cheaper than anybody else, you are going to drive that labor down.

There was a report that was issued here within the last few weeks that shows that the unskilled labor in America has lost 12 percent of its earning capacity because they are flooded. There was a report on Fox News about a month ago that we have a 30 percent high school dropout rate in America, 30 percent dropout rate.

So if the students in high schools are dropping out at a 30 percent rate, and we are bringing in illegal labor that will work for the cheapest price, it seemed to me, and we know this to be a fact, that the competition between our high school dropouts and the people that didn't go to school, many of