a good start to adjusting education benefits in a changing environment.

Another concern I heard during this listening session was about the difficulty our troops are having applying for college when they are overseas. Many of our troops want to begin their education, but going through the college application process is hard enough if you are working on your home computer in your living room. It is even harder if you are stationed 7,000 miles away from home with limited access to phone, e-mail, or free time for that matter.

We need to find a way to help our deployed soldiers utilize their education benefits by helping them through the difficult application process. Not only will this improve participation in the program, it will improve our soldiers' morale and their ability to reintegrate when returning home. One of the good things I heard is that some of the colleges are getting this. Some in the State system and now even the private college system in Minnesota are understanding these challenges and are becoming more flexible on the public side, and I applaud this kind of public-private partnership.

A final note on education is the lack of benefit structure or program for spouses—for spouses of those who are now in the Armed Forces.

With over 2,600 Minnesotans currently stationed in Iraq, we have hundreds of military spouses working to keep their families together while their loved one is overseas. Many of them, by the way, were going to school, but now their husband or wife is overseas and they have to take a job and give up their education. They have less income, but they have to take care of their families. One spouse told me at one of our listening sessions she had been both a single mom and a military wife while trying to go to school, and being a single mom was much easier.

We need to look at ways to extend benefits to military spouses who are working at home to keep their families together while they try to continue their education. We all know the importance of investment in education. Why should we deny benefits to military spouses who have sacrificed so much?

Another critical issue I continue to hear about is health care for our returning soldiers and veterans. Again, we were all shocked to see the conditions revealed at Walter Reed Hospital at the end of February, and I am pleased those who are responsible are being held to account. While the conditions at the outpatient facility at Walter Reed are being fixed, it is a good time to revisit the overall structure of health care for our troops and our veterans. I share the concern Chaplain Morris states in his letter to the Pioneer Press that we will: ''Fix the crisis and forget the problems'' in regard to health care and what I hope can be done to fix them.

I continue to hear about the difficulties associated with Tricare. On my visits around the State, I learned that only 40 percent of healthcare providers in Minnesota are Tricare providers. Though this is an improvement from the past, it is still unacceptable. From our healthcare providers, we hear that the program is painful and cumbersome to work with, and it costs them significant amounts in staff time and energy to navigate the paperwork. For our military families, especially those in rural areas, traveling to a provider that will take Tricare is often a lengthy process that is simply not possible.

We need to look at ways to streamline the Tricare system, and, if necessary, further incentivize providers to accept Trice.

Another problem I heard from my visits around the State is the inability of returning troops to have marriage counseling covered by their benefit plans. Under current regulations, Tricare does not cover the counseling that is often necessary when our warriors return to their homes and families. Many of our troops have been deployed for extended periods of time, and when they return home, it is difficult to readjust into life with their families.

If a returning soldier wanted to receive marriage counseling, for instance, they must go to their family doctor and get a referral for mental health issues caused by marriage. Then, after substantial effort and delay, it becomes possible for a soldier to act on the referral for stress and mental health concerns and see a marriage and family therapist. We have to do better than this for our returning warriors.

Another major issue we confront with Tricare is the lack of Tricare-certified Chemical Dependency Treatment Centers. Because of the burdensome certification process for these centers, we have 257 Chemical Dependency Treatment Centers that are certified by the State of Minnesota but not a single one of them is certified by Tricare. So if any of our returning heroes comes home and develops a problem with substance abuse, there is not a single place in Minnesota they can go for help. This is a critical oversight which needs to be corrected.

Another issue we need to be prepared to handle is post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. We all know PTSD is going to be an issue we will face for years to come as more of our soldiers return from abroad. And if we are committed to dealing with it, we need to be committed to the facilities and the people who will be working to cure the disorder on a daily basis.

One way we can do this is to incentivize mental health care professionals to join our veterans and military hospital system. I have learned in my outreach across the State that it is difficult to recruit these professionals, especially qualified psychiatrists, to VA and military hospitals in rural areas. I have always said that the quality of your healthcare should not depend on your ZIP Code, and this is especially true for our veterans and military families.

We also need to make sure we have adequate facilities for the influx of participation in veterans' programs for the next few years. While most of the veterans I have spoken with over the past months have told me that the care they receive at the facilities in Minnesota is nothing short of excellent, we need to plan for the strain an increasing number of veterans will have on our facilities that are operating near capacity .

Finally, I would like to address the importance of a comprehensive strategy for reintegrating our returning heroes into society. Quite frankly, this is bigger than any one single issue confronting our veterans and military families, but it encompasses everything I have talked about so far today.

In my home State of Minnesota, the National Guard has developed an innovative program known as Beyond the Yellow Ribbon to conduct reintegration academies for the families and their loved ones who are returning from Iraq. We have watched with great pleasure as this program has helped countless families deal with the everyday challenges that are not touched by Washington rhetoric. Through this program, we have been able to engage our families, our communities, and most importantly, our returning heroes, to ensure that they are comfortably shifting back to life out of the combat zone.

I will continue to work with our Minnesota National Guard and the families, communities, and veterans across our State so that we can continue this program and use the experience we gain from it to benefit our Nation as a whole.

Inscribed on the base of the Korean War Memorial is the following: ''Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met.'' These words ring true today as so many of our service men and women are fighting overseas in the war on terror.

We need to make sure the sacrifice they make is met by a commitment here to do all we can to ease their reentry and take care of their concerns as they return.

We need to provide support for these soldiers. We need to provide support for their families. And we need to do it before, during, and after they return from abroad. It is not about rhetoric, and it is not about politics. It is about a commitment to listen and a commitment to get things done. I look forward to working with my colleagues to this end during the coming months and years.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio is recognized.

TRADE AGREEMENTS

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, last month, at a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing, Rhonda Stewart, a single mother from Hamilton, OH, Butler

County, testified that despite working full time, caring for her 9-year-old son Wyatt—even serving as president of the PTA—she and her son must rely on food stamps to survive.

At the end of each month, she told us, she must forgo dinner so her son can eat because the food stamps, which is about $6 a day, don't go far enough. She told us that at the beginning of the month, he gets pork chops. He knows he eats better in the beginning of the month than at the end of the month when she is running out of money. At the end of the month, she sits and tells him she is not really hungry, as her son eats, because she wants him to have enough, even when she doesn't.

On the same day that Ms. Steward testified, U.S. Treasury Secretary Paulson told the Senate Banking Committee that the economy was doing well. He said over and over that the GDP was up 3 percent for the quarter. He kept insisting: Senator, you don't understand, things are going very well in this country. GDP is up 3 percent. People are making money and companies are profitable.

When you think about all of that, here is the story: Profits are up. The stock market is doing well. Millionaires are enjoying exorbitant tax breaks. Worker productivity is up, but the workers are not sharing in the increasing profits most corporations are making. Workers across the country too often are losing their jobs, and a single mother working full time cannot afford to eat dinner—even with the $6 a day in food stamps.

A Wall Street Journal article reported this week that since 2001, the economy has grown by 16 percent—16 percent since 2001—while worker pay, after inflation, has grown less than 1 percent—16 percent growth in the economy, profits up, workers gaining less than 1 percent.

Wrongheaded economic policies and job-killing trade agreements have fueled income disparity at home and abroad.

A few years ago, after the North American Free Trade Agreement passed, Congress was considering another one of these job-killing trade agreements. I traveled to McAllen, TX, where I crossed the border into Reynosa, Mexico. I rented a car with some friends and went to visit some families in Mexico just a couple of miles on the other side of the American border. There I met a husband and wife who worked for General Electric, Mexico. They lived in a shack that was about 20-by-20 feet, with no running water, no electricity, dirt floors. When it rained hard, the floors turned to mud. They worked 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, and each made less than a dollar an hour. Behind their shack was a ditch that was about 3 feet wide, perhaps, which was full of who-knows-what—perhaps human and industrial waste. The children played in this ditch. The American Medical Association has said that along that border is one of the most toxic places in the entire Western Hemisphere.

We visited an auto plant nearby, a modern, high-tech auto plant. The plant in Mexico looked just like an auto plant in Lordstown, OH, or Avon Lake or Cincinnati. The workers were working hard, the floors were clean, the technology was up-to-date, and the productivity was very good. But there was one difference between the Mexican auto plant and the one you would see in Ohio. That difference was the Mexican auto plant didn't have a parking lot. The Mexican workers were not making enough to buy the cars they made.

You can go halfway around the world to Malaysia to a Motorola plant, where the workers are not making enough to buy the cell phones they make, or you can go to Costa Rica, where workers at a Disney plant don't make enough to buy the toys they make. In China, workers at a Nike plant are not making enough to buy those shoes they make. These workers are not sharing in the wealth they create for their employers.

That is why these job-killing trade agreements don't work. Only when workers share in the wealth they create will we know our trade policy is working. In fact, when the poor in the developing world—those people who are working hard, working 50 to 60 hours a week, with their hands—only when the poor in those countries are able to buy the products they are making for us will we know our trade policy in the United States is actually working.

During the fight against the Central American Free Trade Agreement 2 years ago, the largest ever bipartisan fair-trade group was formed. Democrats and Republicans, environmental groups, religious groups, labor organizations, and business groups united and we changed forever the debate on trade. That coalition is alive and well, not just in the House of Representatives but also for the first time in the Senate. They are already working to revamp our Nation's trade policy and working to establish a manufacturing policy.

Senators BYRON DORGAN, LINDSEY GRAHAM, and I have introduced legislation that would ban imports from sweatshops. We have called for tougher World Trade Organization action to be taken against China, a country where, at least in 2005, 5,000 political prisoners were executed. The human rights violations continue in China. The oppression of workers continues in China. The kinds of values we hold dear in this country are violated every day by that Government and every day by these companies doing business in China, a country that manipulates its currency and continues to exploit its workers.

Our Government must renegotiate these trade agreements so that they lift up workers here and abroad, reward U.S. businesses that stay here, reward U.S. businesses that produce here, and reward U.S. businesses that create jobs here. That means doing away with current fast-track authority. That means doing away with the fundamentally flawed North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA model trade agreements. Make no mistake, we want trade. We want more of it, but we want fair trade. It is not a matter of if we revamp U.S. trade policy; it is when and who benefits from that.

America is a nation of innovation. The future of our manufacturing policy is firmly planted in the research and development of alternative energy. Today, I spoke with several people from Ohio—business owners and plant managers—who are part of a group called the Manufacturing Extension Partnership. It is a relatively small government program that helps small manufacturers, small businesses in Ohio and across the country, learn to compete better, helps them learn to cut their health care costs, helps them to be more energy efficient, and helps them learn how to export some of their products. We have a long way to go.

Oberlin College, not far from where I live, is home to the largest building in the United States on a college campus that is completely powered by solar energy. However, when that college built this building, they had to buy the components of the solar panels from Japan and Germany because we don't make enough of them in this country.

The same is true when you talk about wind turbines. In Ashtabula, OH, they make components for wind-turbine manufacturing. So do some other places around the country. But they do not make enough. More and more wind turbines are being built in this country, and it is a great opportunity, as all of alternative energy production is, for us as a nation to use that, in part, to help rebuild our manufacturing capabilities, to cut energy prices, and to do the right thing for the environment. It works in every way.

That is why as we, in the next couple of months, move toward votes on trade promotion authority, as we move forward, perhaps, on votes on bilateral trade agreements with Colombia, Peru, Korea, Panama, and other countries, perhaps, it is time that we pass trade agreements in this country that lift up workers, help our small manufacturers, that help us continue to preserve and expand our manufacturing base.

It is an American value to reward hard work. This Congress has a real opportunity not just to talk about a different trade regimen but to go in a different direction, to replace trade promotion authority with a trade promotion authority legislation model that will help to lift our workers up, create jobs in this country, help the developing world lift up their living standards so that we can continue to reward work and continue to fight for our values as a nation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that upon completion of my remarks, Senator ALEXANDER of Tennessee be recognized for 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. REED. Madam President, the emergency appropriations bill passed by the Senate this morning is urgently needed for our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, for our wounded veterans, and for scores of Americans facing natural disasters on the homefront.

I commend Chairman BYRD and Senator COCHRAN for their hard work and close collaboration. As the acting chairman of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee, I also wish to thank Senator HUTCHISON and her able staff, along with my committee staff, for the help they gave in crafting the portions of the supplemental which dealt with military construction and veterans affairs.

The total for military construction and veterans affairs in this supplemental is $6.548 billion. It includes in title I $1.644 billion for military construction. Also contained in this section is a proviso restricting the obligation of $280 million until the Secretary of Defense certifies that none of the funds will be used for the purpose of establishing permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq. I think that is an important point to clarify.

Title II of the recommendation includes a total of $4.9 billion for military construction and also for activities at the Department of Veterans Affairs. This includes $3.137 billion to restore funding for BRAC, which is very important to reset our forces as they are returned from overseas and to help reconfigure all of the services. This fully funds the request of the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2007 for this account and will keep the BRAC process on track.

Because the costs of the war are not associated strictly with activities on the battlefield, the recommendation includes $1.767 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In crafting the VA portion of this bill, we targeted the funding specifically for purposes of building capacity to deal with the influx of OEF and OIF veterans, hiring claims adjudicators and leveraging technology to expedite benefit claims, and upgrading existing VA facilities.

The VA health care system is one of the best in the world. It has specialties in a number of areas, including spinal cord injury and blind rehabilitation. Because of these specialties, the VA has become a great resource for the treatment of troops wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, due to the nature of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the advances in battlefield medicine, both the DOD health care system and the VA health care system are treating more military personnel with complex and multiple wounds and particularly traumatic brain injuries.

In response to this, in 2005, the Congress provided funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish polytrauma centers. The funding contained in this bill builds on the success of these centers by providing a total of over $163 million in polytrauma care for services ranging from establishing more level 1 comprehensive polytrauma centers to creating polytrauma residential transition rehabilitation programs, to upgrading the entire polytrauma network system.

The bill also adds $150 million for enhancements to readjustment counseling, substance abuse programs, and mental health treatment capacity. These are specialty areas that the VA will need to continue to expand to deal with readjustment issues facing veterans returning from the war zone. In order to begin making progress toward deficiencies identified by the VA's facilities condition assessment and to prevent a possible Walter Reed Building 18 situation, the recommendation includes $550 million in nonrecurring maintenance and $356 million in minor construction.

In addition to funding provided to the Department, the supplemental also includes a general provision directing the National Academy of Public Administration to conduct an independent analysis of the management, structure, and processes that are in place at the VA with regard to providing health care to active duty and veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as providing benefits to veterans of these conflicts. This study will assist the VA and Congress in identifying the cumbersome bureaucratic redtape that far too many of our soldiers go through in their transition to the VA.

The bill also includes a provision requiring the Congressional Budget Office to conduct a budget study of the current and future long-term budget impacts of OEF and OIF on the Department of Veterans Affairs. We know with a number of these young men and women who have been severely injured—many with brain injuries and likely lifespans of 50 or 60 more years—that we will have to provide long-term, consistent, robust funding. We should identify that number now and provide that continuing support for the next several decades.

This supplemental marks the continuing high priority the Senate places on ensuring that yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's soldiers are cared for in the highest manner once they have done their duty and once they have come home to America.

Let me make one other point. I was somewhat disappointed in this bill because I was attempting to include an amendment to rehabilitate a levee system in Woonsocket, RI, to ensure it is up to Federal standards.

This amendment would have provided $3.25 million for the city of Woonsocket to rehabilitate the levee, including replacing important gate cables. The present cables are about 40 years old. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, failure of a cable during operation could result in an uncontrolled discharge downstream of the dam. Woonsocket is an old industrial city, densely populated, and these levees protect that city.

The Woonsocket project was built between December 1963 and April 1967 by the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps estimates that cumulative flood control benefits for the Blackstone Valley project are more than $82 million. This project in place protects at least $82 million worth of property.

Given the importance of this flood protection to Woonsocket and communities on the Blackstone River, I believe Federal assistance is warranted to protect life and property.

These deficiencies were discovered as a direct result of Katrina. We learned in Katrina there were projects, levees that were unsatisfactory. They failed and they caused billions of dollars of damages. Being forewarned—I hope we are forewarned—that having studied these problems, I hope we can now come together in Congress to provide the resources and help these local communities, many of which do not have the resources to sustain this kind of immediate and rapid expenditure.

A recent assessment by the Corps found that the Woonsocket levee and dam is in need of repairs. The Corps has given the city until February 2008 to make these repairs, otherwise the project will no longer be eligible for Federal construction funding through the Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition, if these repairs are not made, the Federal Emergency Management Agency could, and likely will, determine the levee no longer offers adequate flood protection and could require residents to buy flood insurance, which is a very expensive proposition. The city of Woonsocket is economically distressed. It needs Federal assistance. There are other communities around the country that might be in a similar situation.

The devastation wrought by Katrina in New Orleans shows us what could happen. Now we have the knowledge—the foreknowledge—and now we have to act. I am disappointed we did not act in this situation to protect this complex of levees.

I will continue to bring this issue to the attention of my colleagues again and again because I believe that with this knowledge, action is required—prompt, appropriate action—to ensure this community is protected.

I wish to make a final point because my colleague has been very patient and very considerate in allowing me to go ahead.

We have included in this supplemental language with respect to our