

GENERAL JAMES D. THURMAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CARTER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate General James D. Thurman on his retirement from the United States Army after 38 years of dedicated, distinguished, and honorable service. He will retire on November 22, 2013, concluding his service over the past 2 years as commander of the U.S. forces in Korea. During both war and peace, General Thurman has served with courage and distinction in the face of tremendous adversity, demonstrating his commitment to America and to our people.

During his long and honorable career, General Thurman successfully commanded 10 different units at every echelon of command, including extensive operational combat deployments. Besides his command of the 4th Infantry Division and the Multinational Division in Baghdad, Iraq, he made significant contributions during the initial invasion of Iraq as the chief of operations for the Coalition Forces Land Component Command. Other notable assignments during his tenure include operations in Kosova as the chief of the Plans and Policy Division for Allied Forces Southern Europe and battalion executive officer in the 1st Cavalry Division during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In his final assignment, General Thurman served as the senior U.S. military officer in Korea where he was responsible for 28,500 U.S. forces stationed there. His top command priority was to deter and defend against North Korean provocations and aggression and, should deterrence fail, to be prepared to "fight tonight" and win. He ensured the readiness of his multinational, combined and joint forces through a broad range of actions.

As a result of changes he directed during the two annual multinational, combined and joint exercises in Korea, forces under his command became the most mission-focused training exercises in U.S.-ROK history. His initial assessment of existing capabilities on the peninsula resulted in the addition of an armed reconnaissance squadron and other changes to better prepare and position U.S. forces to respond. His steady hand and strong relationships with his ROK counterparts, as well as with senior civilian and military leaders in the U.S., were critical to safely navigating several operational crises.

A native of Marietta, Oklahoma, General Thurman graduated from East Central Oklahoma University, where he earned his commission through the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. His first assignment was with the 4th Infantry Division, which he later commanded and deployed with to Iraq. Since his first assignment, he and his wife, Delia, known as "Dee" Thurman, have moved over 25 times in 38 years, including four tours in Germany, two at the National Training Center, and

three in my district at Fort Hood, Texas. During that time, they raised two daughters, and they are now proud grandparents.

Retirement is to be celebrated and enjoyed. It is not the end of a career but, rather, the beginning of a new adventure. I commend General Thurman for his selfless service to the Nation and to the United States Army. I wish him and his wife the best in the years ahead, and I welcome them as new constituents to the 31st Congressional District.

CUTS TO SNAP HURT VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, next week is Thanksgiving. All of us in this Chamber will go back to our districts, and we will celebrate this holiday with our families, usually with a big turkey dinner with all of the fixings and with all of these wonderful desserts; but, Mr. Speaker, for millions and millions of Americans, they won't have anything to celebrate next week because they don't have enough to put food on their tables for their families. There are close to 50 million people in the United States of America—the richest country in the history of the world—who are hungry. Close to 17 million of them are kids.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of these terrible statistics, we have a Congress that is working overtime to make life for many of these people even more miserable. There has already been a cut in SNAP as a result of the ending of the Recovery Act moneys that provided an extra boost to the program. So everybody who is on this program, on November 1, received a cut in their benefit—a benefit that is, on average, about \$1.50 per meal per day. They received a cut. On top of that, the House of Representatives passed a farm bill that has an additional \$40 billion cut in this program.

That would result in millions of families who currently receive the benefit losing it altogether. It would result in hundreds of thousands of children who right now are able to take advantage of a free breakfast and lunch program at school to lose that benefit. It would also result in about 170,000 veterans losing the benefit.

So I want to talk a little bit today about our veterans and about how they are being adversely impacted by some of the policies that we are pursuing here in the House of Representatives.

On November 1, Jonathan Capehart of The Washington Post wrote a column entitled, "Oh, SNAP. Veterans Get Dissed by the GOP." I want to read the first few paragraphs of his piece:

Remember all the howling by Republicans about the closed monuments and war memorials during the Ted Cruz government shutdown? Remember how they helped World War II vets storm their memorial on the

very first day? Remember how one of the Members of Congress snarled at a Park Service ranger for trying to abide by the law and keep the memorial closed to the public? Remember how the likes of Cruz and Sarah Palin railed against President Obama for the cuts to veterans' benefits that resulted from the Cruz-caused shutdown?

"Our veterans should be above political games," Cruz said at the Million Vets March on October 13. "Veterans have proven they are not timid, and we will not be timid in calling out anybody that uses the military as pawns." Palin said at the same event, "We can only be America, home of the free, if we are America, home of the brave."

So, pardon the forthcoming blue language: Where the hell are they now that a multi-billion-dollar cut to the food stamp program has hit thousands of veterans squarely in their wallets?

He is referring to the cut that occurred on November 1.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "In any given month, a total of 900,000 veterans nationwide lived in households that relied on SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, to provide food for their families."

In any given year or in any given month, millions and millions of dollars of SNAP funds are spent at military commissaries to help feed military members and their families who struggle against hunger.

Mr. Speaker, I raise this issue because there seems to be somewhat of a contradiction here in this people's House of Representatives. We are all very good at kind of talking the talk. People get up time and time again, and they talk about how important and how wonderful our veterans are. We all go back to our districts on Veterans Day and on Memorial Day, and we praise our veterans, and we thank them for their service to their country and for their sacrifice; but when it comes to making sure that our veterans have enough to eat, that they have enough food to put on their tables for their families, we are worse than indifferent in this House of Representatives. We are making things worse for them.

If this cut that the House of Representatives passed goes into effect—this \$40 billion cut in SNAP—as I said, 170,000 veterans and their families will lose their benefit altogether. This is on top of a cut in their benefit that they have already received.

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I don't know what people think is meant by praising our veterans. But instead of talking the talk, we ought to walk the walk a little bit more. We ought to make sure that the men and women who served our country, who this Congress voted to send over to Iraq and send over to Afghanistan, we ought to ensure that when they come back that they at least have enough to eat. Many veterans that come back have a tough time getting back into the workforce, and yet some of the language that was put in the House farm bill would actually make it almost impossible for them to get this benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues as we approach Thanksgiving to not forget our veterans.

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am again on the floor today because our Nation has failed to heed the warning of George Washington, who told us to beware of foreign entanglements.

We have lost over 4,474 Americans in Iraq and 2,276 Americans in Afghanistan. In both of these wars combined, 46,720 of our servicemembers have been wounded. Furthermore, the American taxpayer is spending \$10.45 million every hour to pay for the cost of the war in Afghanistan since 2001. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that. We are spending \$10.45 million an hour just to pay for the money spent in Afghanistan since 2001. Despite these facts, we are now entering into a long-term agreement that, at best, is a failure—at best is a failure.

It is with great disappointment that I share an NBC article, entitled, “Endless Afghanistan? United States-Afghanistan Agreement Would Keep Troops in Place and Funds Flowing Perhaps Indefinitely”—perhaps until 2024. I would like to read a short paragraph and submit for the record a few additional excerpts.

While many Americans have been led to believe the war in Afghanistan will soon be over, a draft of a key United States-Afghan security deal obtained by NBC News shows the United States is prepared to maintain military outposts in Afghanistan for many years to come, and pay to support hundreds of thousands of Afghan security forces.

Mr. Speaker, George Washington was right. Afghanistan is an impossible situation. History has proven that it is impossible. The Bilateral Security Agreement will only serve to endanger American lives and squander taxpayers’ money. I implore my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in standing up for the American people in opposition to the signing of this agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the President has the constitutional right to enter into the agreement. We have no oversight on the agreement itself, but we can put a resolution on the floor and let the Congress debate and let the American people know that we realize what we are doing in Afghanistan, instead of continuing to pass budget bills to fund Karzai.

Mr. Speaker, I have got a little poster here of Karzai. The man is a corrupt leader. All he is doing is taking the taxpayers’ money and becoming richer and richer. Mr. Speaker, the funny and sad thing about this in the poster—it is a cartoon—there is a poor American soldier standing behind Karzai, who is at a money machine, and it says the thoughts of the soldier:

I would like to make a quick withdrawal from here.

To the American soldier, I am sorry to say, if we don’t do our job in Congress, you will be there until 2024.

The American people need to call their Members of Congress and say that we do not accept this agreement to keep our troops there until 2024. If you can’t stop it, at least have a debate on the floor of the House and pass a resolution to say this is what the American people want to see: no long-term agreement with Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank God for blessing our troops and blessing America.

EXCERPTS FOR THE RECORD FROM NBC NEWS ARTICLE “ENDLESS AFGHANISTAN? US-AFGHAN AGREEMENT WOULD KEEP TROOPS IN PLACE AND FUNDS FLOWING, PERHAPS INDEFINITELY”

While many Americans have been led to believe the war in Afghanistan will soon be over, a draft of a key U.S.-Afghan security deal obtained by NBC News shows the United States is prepared to maintain military outposts in Afghanistan for many years to come, and pay to support hundreds of thousands of Afghan security forces.

The wide-ranging document, still unsigned by the United States and Afghanistan, has the potential to commit thousands of American troops to Afghanistan and spend billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

The document outlines what appears to be the start of a new, open-ended military commitment in Afghanistan in the name of training and continuing to fight al-Qaeda. The war in Afghanistan doesn’t seem to be ending, but renewed under new, scaled-down U.S.-Afghan terms.

The deal, according to the text, would take effect on Jan. 1, 2015 and “shall remain in force until the end of 2024 and beyond.”

The document doesn’t specifically say how many U.S. and NATO troops would remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Afghan officials tell NBC News they hope it will be 10 to 15 thousand. U.S. officials tell NBC News the number is closer to seven to eight thousand, with an additional contribution from NATO.

Factoring in troop rotations, home leave, and breaks between deployments, the service of tens of thousands of American troops would be required to maintain a force of seven to eight thousand for a decade or longer. The anticipated costs would likely run into the billions quickly.

[T]he United States shall have an obligation to seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO) for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you another letter I received from a constituent about the Affordable Care Act. He writes:

About 9 months ago, my wife was forced to leave her job, in part because they wanted her to travel to Boston twice a week and the responsibilities to care for our daughter who has cerebral palsy made that impossible. Our health insurance was from her employment.

We went on to COBRA, which cost about \$1,400 per month. Waiting to have permanent insurance that did not have a termination date, we contacted Anthem Blue Cross for a quote for private insurance.

We were told that my wife was uninsurable for 10 years because she had been treated for depression a few years ago when our daugh-

ter was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and we were told she would require spinal cord surgery to possibly walk.

They then said, because of her condition, the cost for only my daughter and I was almost \$4,000 per month. The burden for the last 6 months was overwhelming. Insurance brokers informed us that only the Affordable Health Care Act could help us.

Yesterday my wife signed up for health insurance for all of us. Due to our income, we do not qualify for assistance and we were never looking for any. All we wanted was affordable insurance for my family. The policy we selected will end up costing about what our COBRA payment is, \$1,400, depending on how much deductible we end up using, which is all we ever wanted.

I know the only reason our family is safe is because of the President, who cares more about people like us than the CEO of Anthem Blue Cross or Aetna.

Mr. Speaker, I receive calls and letters like this all the time. It is why I worked so hard to pass the Affordable Care Act in the first place.

This is a transformative piece of legislation, a law that provides more security for the middle class and a better, healthy quality of life for the entire community. It empowers patients and doctors again and puts them, and not insurers, back at the center of care. It makes important, long-overdue reforms that most people just take as common sense.

But for 3 years now, this House Republican majority has been trying to roll the clock back and bring back the bad old days when insurance companies could discriminate against people with preexisting conditions, even children with preexisting conditions, once again. They want to see women pay more for the same coverage than men, be denied coverage because they survived breast cancer, were a victim of domestic violence, or had a child by cesarean section. They want to see small businesses lose tax credits and seniors’ health care and drug costs continue to rise at staggering rates.

But we are not going to go back. The Affordable Care Act is already making a profound difference for individuals and families in need. It is time to stop with the partisan political games and let it work for families who desperately need to have health care coverage and insurance that they can’t afford.

EURASIAN SITUATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to talk about some European issues, especially in eastern Europe.

First, I want to talk about the country of Belarus. Three years after the brutal and bloody crackdown on peaceful demonstrators after the December 10 presidential elections, nine political prisoners remain behind bars under deplorable conditions in Belarus. This includes Nikolai Statkevich, who ran against Lukashenko in 2010; Ales Bialiatski, the head of Viasna, a