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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PORTER).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

March 15, 2005.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JON C. PORTER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes, and each Member other than the majority and the minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) for 5 minutes.

HOUSE DEMOCRATS SPEAK OUT ON NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning, along with my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), to talk about how House Democrats feel about national security. It may seem obvious to say we Democrats support our troops and support a strong national defense, but I want to offer today a more detailed explanation of where we stand and why.

These are challenging and difficult times for our country. We are engaged

in a global war against terrorism, we have military forces deployed around the world, and we are involved in two shooting wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan. These deployments and these conflicts are putting a terrible strain on our military, on our troops, on our equipment, on our military families, on our defense budget, and on our national economy.

I believe we will overcome these challenges because we have the greatest treasure in the world, our service men and women, who are selflessly serving around the globe on behalf of this great Nation. They are the key to the war on terrorism, more than any doctrine or system. Their effort and sacrifice will make ultimate victory for us in the war on terror, and in Iraq and Afghanistan, possible.

Unfortunately, the two most people-intensive services, the Army and the Marine Corps, are last in line for funding from the Defense Department. For example, the fiscal year 2006 budget request for the Army, not counting money that may be added in the supplemental, actually declined by some \$300 million relative to last year's level.

Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to think that this administration would actually reduce funding for the Army, the service with the most people and the most equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan, in a time of war. Even if the amount for the Army is ultimately increased because of supplemental appropriations, what kind of signal does this send our troops, who are literally putting their lives on the line, when the administration asks for fewer funds for their service? Our servicemen and women deserve better.

I know I speak for all House Democrats in saying we support our troops, but what is more important for everyone to understand is that supporting the troops is more than just a bumper sticker. It means giving them the best

possible leadership, the finest training, and up-to-date and working equipment, protective armor body, and vehicle armor. We in Congress have a duty to ensure that they have all the tools they need to succeed on the battlefield.

We also have a duty to provide for their families while they are deployed in service to our great Nation. We have a duty to take care of the families of those who are killed and those who are wounded.

Mr. Speaker, we also have a duty to our citizen soldiers, members of the National Guard, members of the Reserve, who also make such extraordinary sacrifices. They not only serve our country beside their active-duty counterparts, but they also do so at considerable sacrifice back home. Because they have jobs in their communities, oftentimes they give up these jobs and ask someone else to pick up the slack created by their absence. Moreover, while they are deployed, their families are entitled to benefits, but it is often hard for families to use these benefits because so many of them do not live close to military facilities.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we Democrats believe we have an obligation to our Veterans, whether it is allowing them to receive full retired pay in addition to VA disability compensation, allowing their survivors to receive both Social Security and Survivor Benefit Plan benefits, or allowing their survivors to receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation in addition to VA benefits. We have an obligation to make sure they know that America appreciates their patriotism and is willing to recognize their sacrifices.

America should know that Democrats unanimously take these responsibilities very, very seriously. The supplemental appropriation bill, which we will pass later this week, will have overwhelming bipartisan support. That is evidence of the commitment that we on this side of the aisle have in supporting our troops. But I want to be

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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