

Maybe they could have Wal-Mart Kids Day, where kids would not get to actually watch the game, because somebody has got to work the concessions.

Or Mug Night: the lucky fan gets to keep his swank Republican leadership job, even if his mugshot is taped to his grand jury's dart board.

Or we could even have at the Washington Nationals baseball game starting Thursday night, we could have Halliburton Gasoline Night: a tank of gas for the first 1,000 fans at the patriotic Halliburton price of \$8.95 a gallon.

Or the Enron Doubleheader: Fans get in early with promises of a big win, but then the team kicks you out and takes your pension away.

In the spirit of Republican Washington, the Washington Lobbyists will not care much about public opinion, making decisions in secret and ignoring criticism from the fans. And to avoid unpatriotic dissent, games will be played in the middle of the night, after sports writers have gone to bed.

□ 1245

If we want to change things and change how things really work in Washington, Mr. Speaker, we are going to have to change pitchers. Until we do, the Washington lobbyists and their friends here in Congress will always win.

MILITARY READINESS NEEDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I join my friend and colleague, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD), this afternoon to address matters of importance to Democrats on the House Committee on Armed Services.

I was fortunate enough to visit our men and women overseas in Iraq about a year-and-a-half ago, and I appreciate the amazing job that they are doing. Despite the complexity of their mission, our troops have performed ably and professionally; and they are, without doubt, the strongest and best-trained fighting force in the world.

However, we must ensure that they have the appropriate equipment to continue their record of success. We often overlook the impact that the high operations tempo in Iraq and Afghanistan have had on our equipment. Though the military has accomplished a great deal with what they have, we have clear indications that we are wearing down our equipment perhaps faster than we can replace it. The frequent use of Humvees, trucks, and aircraft, coupled with the harsh climate conditions, has caused them to wear down faster than expected.

The Army estimates that trucks are being degraded at three to five times

the normal peacetime rate, with the Congressional Budget Office suggesting that it could be as much as 10 times the recent average. We see similar trends in our aircraft and tanks, with wear rates ranging from two to five times the normal. Meanwhile, National Guard and Reserve units that deploy with their own equipment have left it in theater when they return, creating shortages in the United States for training and other purposes.

Mr. Speaker, we simply cannot ignore the potential impact of this trend on the long-term readiness of our military. Our worldwide prepositioned stocks, which are intended to give our troops rapid access to equipment when needed, are severely depleted, with the Army estimating that we would need 3 years to fully restore them. Also, the Department of Defense estimates that it has \$12.8 billion in unfunded maintenance costs, with the CBO projecting the numbers could be as high as \$13 billion to \$18 billion. At the current rate of operations, it will take years to reset the force to where it needs to be.

Now, we make these points, Mr. Speaker, not to be alarmists but to raise awareness of the state of our military and to emphasize that Congress must remain committed to our troops, both in theater now and in the future. We must pledge not to send our men and women into harm's way with substandard equipment, while actively seeking to rebuild our forces to meet future needs.

Mr. Speaker, furthermore, our commitment to our troops does not end when they return home. There is growing evidence that the combat stresses on our troops may contribute to higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. We must improve our PTSD counseling programs as well as our veterans' health care system.

I was disappointed that, during consideration of the emergency supplemental appropriations bill, the House voted down the Democratic motion to recommit, which would have provided more funding for veterans' health programs. Mr. Speaker, our veterans' health system is strained as it is, and I can think of no greater disservice to those men and women serving now than having them return to a nation that refuses to provide appropriate support for their needs.

I know many members of our committee have fought to meet our obligations to our service members and our veterans, and I would particularly like to thank and recognize the efforts of our Ranking Member, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), as well as the leadership of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS). Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) for his dedication, and I urge all of my colleagues to remain committed to guaranteeing sufficient military readiness and veterans' services.

SOLEMN DUTY OF CONGRESS TO PROVIDE FOR MILITARY NEEDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. BUTTERFIELD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague, the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LANGEVIN), to talk about the position of House Democrats, particularly those of us on the Committee on Armed Services, regarding an issue of importance to our national defense.

As a new member of the Subcommittee on Readiness, I have been privy to briefings from our combatant commanders and from the Department of Defense. The testimonies provided by these great Americans have led me to the conclusion that our military equipment located in Iraq and Afghanistan has become severely worn and damaged.

The Congress of the United States has a solemn constitutional duty to provide for our military, and the Democratic Members of the Congress take this responsibility very seriously. A sufficient part of our duty is to make sure that our troops have the equipment they need to be successful when they are engaged in war. Whether it is MREs or canteens or desert uniforms or personal protective vests or up-armored Humvees, our troops deserve to have enough equipment in good working condition to get the job done. Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that our troops are on the verge of not having the equipment they need to win these wars, and that is not good.

Many of our briefings, Mr. Speaker, are top secret, and I would not dare to breach that confidence. But, Mr. Speaker, it is not classified that the pace of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is taking its toll on our equipment. We are simply wearing out the equipment at a fast pace.

By the Army's own estimates, trucks are wearing out at three to five times the rate as they would during peacetime operations. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the truck usage is as much as 10 times higher than average during the last 7 years. Our aircraft are aging and wearing out at twice the rate as in peacetime. The Marine Corps reports its CH-46 helicopters are being used at 230 percent of the peacetime rate.

It is not just that our equipment is wearing out, Mr. Speaker; it is that so much of our equipment is wearing out.

Forty percent of the Army's equipment has been deployed since the start of Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Thirty percent of the Marine Corps' equipment is deployed, and 2,300 items require depot maintenance. Twelve percent of the wheeled vehicles in Iraq are so broken down that they will have to be replaced.

We have also depleted a high percentage of our prepositioned equipment.