

implicit truth comes shining through as radiant and bright as her love for her son. I hereby submit this letter for the RECORD, which reads:

"My Dear Sweet Boy Larry, I know how busy you were on Mother's Day. Your commanding officer's message apologized that mothers may not get a call on their special day. I knew that if you could find a way, you would call. Your voice always calmed my fears. The day passed, and, again, I prayed for your safe return home. I detailed my prayers, trying to think of every danger you might encounter. No IEDs, no enemy mortars, no friendly fire, no disease. And, God, please bring Larry home safe, unharmed and of sound mind and body. But then they came, two Marines marching to my door, carrying a cross that was so very painful to bear.

"Larry, you played such a huge part in our lives. You were a Guidon bearer and team leader all along. You marched through our lives and led us to wonderful places. You imprinted your love on our hearts. It was a joy to watch you grow and play. We laughed endlessly at your antics on and off fields of grass and ice. You led us on an incredible patriotic journey with your badge of courage. We anxiously waited those 13 long weeks of boot camp to pass and we would be able to hold you in our arms again. You conquered Infantry school and you called home every day, keeping us informed from foxholes, rifle ranges, and even bars. I will never forget answering the phone and hearing my 21-year-old son say 'Hi, Mommy.' Your daily calls home meant so much to me.

"Marching on, you paraded us through our Nation's capital. You impressed us with your precision and pride. You walked in the sunshine all the way. We watched you soar even higher the day that you waltzed Olivia into our life. She fit so well into our plans, and I knew she would take good care of you. I was happy to share you with her. Then your dream to deploy came true and our hearts with dread. Oh, Larry, how thankful I was to go and see you before you left. That time I spent with you is so precious to me. You introduced me to your Marines. You were always mindful to ask them to curtail their leatherneck language in front of your mom, saying to them, 'Hey, this is my mom. Watch your mouth.'

"Then it came time to say good-bye. I prayed, and God graced me with calmness so that I could look you in the eyes. Without a quiver in my voice, I opened my heart and told you how deeply I loved you, how happy I was to be your mother and that I would see you when you came home. Olivia and I stood side by side. We held each other up as we watched the buses filled with courageous and brave Marines drive away. You'll be happy to know that Olivia picked up that Guidon and has called me every day. Oh, dear Larry, no one will ever fill your magic shoes. So

many people loved you. It is so evident in these past days. Our home has been filled with love from family, friends, community, and even those we never met. You will continue to guide us into the future of your family. We must regroup and, as we learned entering the Marine Corps, 'adapt and overcome; we thank God for your presence in all our lives. He is working so faithfully to turn the evil that took you away from us into everlasting love. Your flag will continue to wave in our hearts. We proudly stand and watch you lead your fallen comrades to the Gates of Heaven.

"Look for me when I get there, and we will walk hand in hand together again.

"Semper Fi, love always, Mom."

TRICARE COVERAGE TO GUARD AND RESERVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but be moved by what the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. LARSON) just had to say. It seems with all too much frequency, on a daily basis, either in the local media, the national media, we are learning of young Marines, young National Guardsmen, young members of the Army and Navy who have given their lives in Iraq.

Right now, 40 percent of all the force in Iraq and Afghanistan are Guardsmen or Reservists. That is something that is very different from previous wars. In fact, in the Vietnam War, very few Guardsmen and Reservists were sent over there. In the first Gulf War, there was a substantial call-up. But I do not think at any time in our Nation's recent history have we ever seen so many Guardsmen and Reservists serving. If Members take the time to look at the casualty reports, they will know that not only are 40 percent of the people serving over there Guardsmen and Reservists, but a very high new number of the people who are wounded, a very high number of the people who lose their lives are in the Guard and Reserve.

Last Friday I had the great privilege to visit some Mississippians at Walter Reed. I asked the folks on the floor if I could visit every wounded Mississippian. It might surprise some people to find out of the five soldiers that I was able to visit, every one of them was a Guardsmen or Reservist.

□ 2230

Young William Brooks, a student at Mississippi State University, in a Humvee that ran over a mine, lost both legs. Young Corporal Rice, of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, lost a leg with the Marine Corps Reserve. Specialist Yancy, a reservist in the heating and air conditioning business back home. Young Elliot Smith, who lost a foot with the 115th Mississippi National Guard.

The stories go on. It is not unique to Mississippi. But what is I think a unique burden that is borne by our Guardsmen and Reservists is that unlike their regular counterparts that they serve next to every day, they are not afforded an opportunity to buy into our Nation's health care system.

It is called TRICARE, and it is not free. They do have to pay into the system. They have to pay even more if they want their family covered. But right now, if you are a Guardsman or Reservist, you cannot even buy in. One of the things we found out is that 20 percent of all our Nation's Guardsmen and Reservists do not have health insurance. Twenty percent of our Nation's Guardsmen and Reservists also, coincidentally, were found unfit for duty when they were called up, and it might well be because of this lack of health insurance.

Last week in the House Committee on Armed Services I offered an amendment, along with seven of my Republican colleagues and a number of Democrats, to see to it that TRICARE was extended to every Guardsman and Reservist, not just those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

After a spirited debate and over, by the way the objections of the committee chairman, the ranking member, the gentleman from New York (Mr. McHUGH), by a vote of 32 to 30, the committee decided to extend TRICARE coverage to every single member of our Nation's Guard and Reserve, because we felt like they deserved it.

Sometime between 1 o'clock in the morning when this passed and 6 o'clock Thursday evening, the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) informed me right there in the back of the room that there was a budgetary concern about this, that there was some mandatory spending associated with the bill, that the gentleman from Iowa (Chairman NUSSLE) of the Committee on the Budget was going to raise a point of order.

I would like to remind my colleagues that on 21 occasions already this year, 21 major pieces of legislation came to this floor where they waived every budgetary restraint. Sometimes it was so people like Paris Hilton could inherit tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars without paying any taxes on it. Sometimes it was for things like the prescription drug benefit for seniors, that we were told at the time would cost our Nation \$435 billion, but it turns out it is really going to cost \$1.2 trillion over the next 10 years. But they waived budgetary rules for that.

The one time they selectively chose to enforce the budgetary rules was over \$5 million for a very narrow bracket of National Guardsmen who happen to be Federal employees who are already on FEHBP and who might want to enroll in TRICARE. So the same folks who in the past 4 years have added over \$2 trillion to the national debt, giving the wealthiest Americans, the political contributor class of America, enormous

tax breaks, decided that these folks who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, that they do not deserve the opportunity to buy their health care coverage. I think that is wrong.

I went to the Committee on Rules tonight, and as we speak the Committee on Rules is going to vote on this. But I would like to remind the Committee on Rules that since last Thursday, the Reserve Officers Association of the United States, the Military Officer's Association of America, the Adjutants General Association of the United States, which is the Adjutant General of every single State, EANGUS, the National Guard Association, they all have come out in support of this amendment, and I will include their letters of support for the RECORD.

Mr. Speaker, I am putting the Committee on Rules on notice that it is my intention to offer the motion to recommend should this amendment not be made in order, and that I think it is most appropriate that this amendment that has already passed the House Committee on Armed Services be voted on by every Member of this House.

RESERVE OFFICERS

ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, May 24, 2005.

Hon. GENE TAYLOR,
Rayburn House Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE TAYLOR, I am writing to confirm the support of the Reserve Officers Association of the important amendment to the FY 2006 National Defense Authorization Act that you would like to bring to the House floor.

ROA agrees that TRICARE Reserve Select should be extended to the drilling population on a cost-share basis. Mobilization should not be the physical qualification test to achieve medical readiness, as it puts the cart before the horse.

The governments own studies have shown that between 20 to 25 percent of our Guardsmen and Reservists are without health care coverage. Medical readiness is our number one challenge when Reserve Components are mobilized.

A Reservist is required to meet the same health and physical fitness standard as is an Active-duty member. Yet Reservists are the only part-time federal employee not offered health care coverage.

Better health care benefits will help our recruiting, readiness and retention efforts. Providing TRICARE health will help persuade spouses that the Guard and Reserve is a career and not just a job.

The Reserve Officers Association with its 75 thousand members thanks you for your support. With the Guard and Reserves providing 40 percent of the deployed forces, seeking parity of benefits is a national security issue.

Sincerely,

ROBERT A. MCINTOSH,
Major General, USAFR (Retired),
Executive Director.

MILITARY OFFICERS,
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA,
Alexandria, VA, May 23, 2005.

Hon. DAVID DREIER,
Chairman, Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the 370,000 members of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), I am writing to urge you to support—or at least not to op-

pose—an amendment that Reps. Gene Taylor and Joe Wilson will offer to the FY2006 Defense Authorization Act that would extend TRICARE coverage eligibility to all members of the Selected Reserve who are not eligible for the Federal Employees Health Program (FEHBP).

A broader amendment was approved by the Armed Services Committee, but the Congressional Budget Office identified a potential mandatory spending problem because certain members also are eligible for FEHBP. The proposed Taylor-Wilson amendment will resolve this problem by excluding FEHBP enrollees from eligibility for the Reserve TRICARE program, since they already have access to federal health coverage.

MOAA believes strongly that it is essential to extend health care eligibility to all Selected Reserve members. These members make up 40 percent of our deployed forces, and the Guard and Reserve already are experiencing recruiting and retention difficulties.

State National Guard leaders have consistently told us that extending health coverage to all of these members is one of the most important things we can do to improve recruiting and retention. It is essential to ensure all Guard and Reserve families have access to quality health care and to preserve continuity of health coverage, regardless of the member's mobilization status.

I urge you to help facilitate this important initiative for the Guard and Reserve members and families who are bearing such a large and disproportional share of national sacrifice in the war on terrorism.

Sincerely,

STEVEN P. STROBRIDGE,
Colonel, USAF (Ret),
Director, Government Relations.

ADJUTANTS GENERAL ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES
Washington, DC, May 23, 2005.

Hon. GENE TAYLOR,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE TAYLOR: I am writing to advise that the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS) wholeheartedly endorses your amendment to the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act which will provide full TRICARE benefits to all National Guard and Reserve members. The AGAUS met in Omaha, Nebraska on May 20, 2005 and voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Taylor/Wilson amendment. The Adjutants General from the fifty states and four territories make up the AGAUS. All were represented in Omaha. The discussion and vote were resoundingly supportive.

We believe it to be in the best interests of our nation to provide full TRICARE benefits to all National Guard and Reserve members. Full time military technicians and Active Guard/Reserve (AGR) members already receive full medical benefits through existing programs or TRICARE. However, the traditional force does not have this option completely. The TRICARE Reserve Select program recently enacted is a welcome and appreciated step. However, your amendment is necessary to ensure reserve component members are always able to report "ready for duty." Many will not require the benefit because they have coverage through their civilian employment. This will mitigate some of the concerns over the cost of program.

Our National Guard and Reserve members are fighting along side active duty forces to defeat terrorism. They and their families should have the ability to share in medical benefits. On behalf of the AGAUS thank you for realizing this and so proactively working

to achieve the equity our members and families deserve.

ROGER P. LEMPKE,
Major General, ANG,
President, AGAUS.

ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES,

Alexandria, VA, May 23, 2005.

Re H.R. 1815 National Defense Authorization Act of 2006 Rule.

Hon. DAVID DREIER,
Chairman, House Committee on Rules, Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN DREIER: I am writing on behalf of 45,000 members of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard (EANGUS). We urge you to adopt a Rule making in order the amendment to be offered from Congressman Gene Taylor that would allow cost-share access to TRICARE for eligible members of the National Guard and Reserves.

Since September 11, 2001, over 400,000 members of the reserve component have been deployed. While we appreciate the enhancements to TRICARE included in the committee bill (H.R. 1815), they will not address the issues of medical readiness and continuity of care for members of the reserve component. The availability of health insurance has a direct affect on a service member's access to healthcare, health status, job decisions and financial security.

There is considerable bipartisan support for cost-share access to TRICARE for all members of the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of status. In the past two years, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) has included a provision in their version of the Defense Authorization bill that provided cost-share access to TRICARE.

The House Committee on Armed Services passed an amendment that would provide TRICARE to all National Guard and Reserve members by a vote of 32-30. We understand that the amendment was stricken by the Chairman of the committee due to budgetary implications. The new amendment that will be offered by Congressman Taylor will address those issues.

We believe this issue deserves full consideration by every member of the House of Representatives. Therefore we urge you to adopt a Rule making in order the Taylor amendment allowing cost-share access to TRICARE for eligible members of the reserve component.

Working for America's Best!

MICHAEL P. CLINE
MSG (Ret), AUS,
Executive Director.

NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES, INC.,
Washington DC, May 23, 2005.

Hon. DAVID DREIER,
Chairman, House Committee on Rules, Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN DREIER: Late last week, thirty-one members of the House Armed Services Committee voted to pass an amendment which would provide access to health care, on a cost-share basis, to members of the National Guard. Subsequently, Chairman Hunter struck the amendment from the bill based on potential budgetary implications which violated the rules.

I am writing on behalf of the men and women of the National Guard Association of the United States to urge you to create a rule which would allow such a measure to be included in the National Defense Authorization Bill.

Just like the Minutemen at Concord and Lexington, today's citizen-soldiers have left

their homes, families, and careers to take up the fight. When they are called to duty, they must arrive physically fit for duty. Yet, many do not have access to basic health care. We consider it a key readiness issue that soldiers and airmen have access to health care so that they are ready for duty when called. Other part time Federal employees have the option of buying into a government sponsored health plan. We believe our soldiers and airmen deserve no less.

Congressman Gene Taylor plans to offer a revised amendment to the Authorization Bill which would allow members of the National Guard access to the military healthcare system, on a cost-share basis. We strongly urge your committee to pass a rule which would make consideration of this amendment possible.

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

STEPHEN M. KOPER,
Brig. Gen. (Ret.), USAF,
President.

NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES, INC.,
Washington, DC, May 23, 2005.

Hon. GENE TAYLOR,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE TAYLOR: I am writing to thank you for your efforts on behalf of the 450,000 members of the National Guard who so desperately need the opportunity to access health care for themselves and their families.

As recently as May 17, 2005, the National Guard Association of the United States testified before the Defense Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on this critical issue. We said in part:

"This committee is well versed in the contributions being made by members of the National Guard in operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Global War on Terror. As the Secretary of Defense has said repeatedly, 'The War on Terror could not be fought without the National Guard'. Battles would not be won, peace would not be kept and sorties would not be flown without the citizen soldier and citizen airman. We are asking on their behalf for the resources necessary to allow them to continue to serve the nation.

"At the top of that list of resources is access to health care. The National Guard Association believes every member of the National Guard should have the ability to access TRICARE coverage, on a cost-share basis, regardless of duty status.

"While we are encouraged by the establishment of TRICARE Reserve Select, which is a program where members 'earn' medical coverage through deployments, we don't believe it goes far enough. Healthcare coverage for our members is a readiness issue. If the Department of Defense expects Guard members to maintain medical readiness, then it follows that they should also have access to healthcare. As you know, when a National Guardsman is called to full time duty, he or she is expected to report 'ready for duty'. Yet, studies show that a significant percentage of our members do not have access to healthcare. Making TRICARE available to all members of the National Guard, on a cost-share basis, would provide a solution to this problem. And, it would finally end the turbulence visited on soldiers and their families who are forced to transition from one healthcare coverage to another each time they answer the nation's call.

"In addition to addressing readiness concerns, access to TRICARE would also be a strong recruitment and retention incentive. In an increasingly challenging recruiting/retention environment, TRICARE could make

a significant difference. Part-time civilian federal employees are eligible to participate in federal health insurance programs. NGAUS believes that National Guard members should receive, at a minimum, the opportunity afforded other federal part-time employees."

We have worked diligently for the last five years to secure legislation that would provide the healthcare access that you propose. You have our unwavering support in this endeavor and the thanks of Guard and Reserve members and their families across the country. Please continue your effort on their behalf.

Sincerely,

STEPHEN M. KOPER,
Brigadier General (Ret.), USAF,
President.

APPROVAL RATE OF CONGRESS AT LOWEST POINT IN 10 YEARS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WESTMORELAND). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for half the remaining time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, as we prepare to return to our districts for the Memorial Day work period, I think it is important for us to take a look at where we are today and how exactly we got here in the Congress. I think, for the most part, and certainly a lot of recent polls indicate it, the American people are fed up with the Congress, that the approval rate of Congress is at its lowest point in 10 years, and it leads me to wonder how did we get to this place? I think we have to take a look back at the first 5 months of the 109th Congress this year to get some answers.

Earlier this year, the Republican leadership went ahead and changed the way the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct does its business. In the past, whenever ethics changes were being considered, they were addressed in a bipartisan fashion with both Democrats and Republicans at the table, and that is the only way ethics reform can honestly be addressed. But the Republican leadership ignored that protocol and strong-armed enough of their Members to pass new and weakened ethics rules, without any support from our Democratic colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I think the American people understood that these new ethics rules were basically a blatant attempt by the majority to protect one of their Republican leaders. These new rules allowed either party, Democrat or Republican, to protect its own Members. Under the new Republican rules, if a majority of the committee could not determine whether or not an investigation should proceed after 45-days of receiving a complaint, that complaint would simply be dropped. Since the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct is made up of five members from each party, either side could prevent an ethics investigation from moving forward against one of its Members.

That is not the way the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct is sup-

posed to work. Under the old bipartisan rules, which have now been restored, an investigative committee was created after a 45-day deadline if a majority of the committee could not determine how to proceed.

The weakened ethics rules by House Republicans did not fool anybody, certainly not the editorial writers around the country, both liberal and conservative. They followed the House proceedings closely and they were essentially fed up with the new Republican rules.

I will just give you some examples. The conservative Chicago Tribune said, "How do House Republicans respond to ethical lapses? By trying to bury them."

The Hartford Current wrote, "The committee has been careening towards ethical oblivion in recent years as the majority Republicans have relaxed the standards, eased up on investigations and created trap doors through which alleged transgressors could escape."

Finally I cite the Sarasota Herald Tribune, which wrote, "If the GOP's leaders in Congress continue to change the rules to protect one of their own, they will have ceded the ethical high ground they pledged to take in 1994."

Again, this is what I call the Republican abuse of power, and it is a major reason why people have lost faith in Congress and why Congress is at a 10-year low in terms of people's support or feelings about the institution.

But the Republican leadership did not just stop at weakening the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct rules. No, the leadership also purged three Republican members of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct earlier this year, three members who ruled against a Republican leader the previous year.

After losing his chairmanship on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, the Republican gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY) told the Washington Post that there is "a bad perception out there that there was a purge in the Ethics Committee and that people were put in that would protect our side of the aisle better than I did."

He continues, "Nobody should be there to protect anybody. They should be there to protect the integrity of the institution."

Mr. Speaker, it took congressional Republicans nearly 4 months to finally listen to their former ethics chairman and the media. But, fortunately, in the end they did restore the old bipartisan ethics rules. The gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY) was clearly right, the integrity of the House is much more important than any one Member, and I think it is time the Republican leadership learn that lesson, not only on that Committee on Standards of Official Conduct issue but in general.

The abuses of power by the Republican majority really make you wonder why they are necessary now. It seems clear to me that the Republican leadership went to all this trouble to protect