

determining the need for a commissary. The reality is there are millions of other military-connected citizens, reservists, retirees, dependents and survivors who also have commissary privileges.

If these groups are counted and clusters drawn where the highest concentration of eligible shoppers occur, the Pentagon could easily establish regional commissaries, a system I predict which would function much more efficiently and cost-effectively.

The second step would be to raise the commissary surcharge which has not been raised since 1983. A 1-percent increase would generate approximately \$53 million annually. I know this is not popular to say, but commissary shoppers, with an average basket cost of around \$50 would hardly notice the .50 cents added to their bill.

Taking these two steps would give DeCA leaders the flexibility they sorely need to improve services, upgrade stores, and show the rest of the Government that a performance based organization can really work.

Finally, I think it is important to make the point that the men and women directly impacted by these possible commissary closures freely chose a military career serving their country, oftentimes knowing they will make considerably less in terms of pay than they would in a civilian occupation. Part of the reason they dedicate their lives to protecting our country's liberty is because they are told that in return they and their families will receive medical care and access to a commissary. If these commissaries are forced to close, we will be breaking the promise made to them and denying these heroes of our society the adequate compensation they clearly deserve in return for their dedication to our country's military.

As you may know, I am a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and serve on its Subcommittee on Benefits. I come from a family with a long history of serving in the military. I myself am an Army veteran. I have four brothers who served in World War II and my immigrant father earned a Silver Star for valiant and heroic service in World War I. Thus, it is no secret that I strongly feel that our country owes a deep obligation to all active duty military personnel and veterans and must do everything possible to see that they receive the health care and other benefits they so rightfully deserve. It is my intention to work with all appropriate Members to see that these closings do not occur and that the commissary systems long-range problems are resolved.

This isn't an argument over who can sell the cheapest groceries. The question is how do you want to compensate the troops? Is the Pentagon going to raise pay to offset for closing commissaries? Even if each military personnel was given an extra \$75 per month to compensate, the cost would be prohibitive. In the end, we would spend more than it costs to keep the commissaries open and running.

I urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to join me in this effort. We owe the fine men and women in our military no less.

#### ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROGAN). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. SMITH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, just frustrated for the last several days, when I have heard Members from the other side of the aisle, the Democrats, suggest to the Republicans, why are you not doing this, why are you not passing campaign finance reform? Why are you not helping this group, or why are you not doing this for those people?

I would like to remind everybody, Mr. Speaker, that the Democrats have controlled this Chamber for the last 40 years, ample opportunity, ample time to deal with some of the problems that they are so ready now to stand up and criticize Republicans for not moving faster.

I cannot help but think of the welfare reform so long overdue, where the U.S. Government has in effect said to young women in this country, if you get pregnant, we are going to do these things for you.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, anybody going to their own young daughter and saying, I want to talk about the possibility of you getting pregnant and, if you get pregnant, we are going to increase your allowance by \$500? We are going to give you a food allowance.

We would never say something like that to our own kids. Yet as a society, we have been saying that.

Nothing happened to change welfare until the last 2 years when Republicans, for the first time in 40 years, gained a majority in this House, in this chamber, and decided, look, enough is enough. We are sending the wrong signals. If we want to get back to an America that rewards those people that work hard, that save, that try, then we are going to have to make some changes of where we have been going for the last 40 years. That means changing a complicated tax system.

We now have a Tax Code where special interest lobbyists have been coming in over these past 40 years and getting favoritism for their particular clients. So now we have a Tax Code that is so complicated, that is so unfair that everybody agrees that it needs changing. Yet it has not been changed.

And now what we are saying on this side of the aisle, and we are gaining support from the Democrats, is that we need to make some basic changes in our tax code to make it flatter, to make it fairer.

I would like everybody to guess how many people now work for the IRS, snooping around our different tax filings to see what they can find out. Luckily this week we passed a bill to say, no more snooping for IRS agents.

Sometimes we question what is happening with immigration. If you compare the number of people hired for immigration, something around 14 or 16,000, I think, with the 115,000 IRS agents that we employ to go over taxes, to do our auditing, saying that they have to have this kind of power because they are afraid the American people might cheat if they are not threatened with an audit, it has got to be our goal to get rid of the IRS as we know it.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all Members of this Chamber to look at what has been accomplished over the last 40 years and what has not been accomplished. And even though Republicans might not be passing as many bills right now as we did 2 years ago, I think it needs to be clear that we are for changing this Tax Code. We are for doing away with as much of the death tax penalty as we can, to do away with that estate tax or at least increase the exemption, to do away with our Tax Code that discourages savings and investment.

We have the greatest penalty, Mr. Speaker, we have the greatest penalty against businesses that decide to buy new tools and machinery. So we penalize savings and we penalize investment. We need to change that. We are moving steadily ahead to do some of the things that should have been done much earlier than this session or last session.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. GEKAS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. GEKAS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions or Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MILLER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. MILLER of Florida addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana [Mr. MCINTOSH] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. MCINTOSH addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota [Mr. GUTKNECHT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. GUTKNECHT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. KINGSTON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

#### PROBLEMS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. BILIRAKIS] is recognized for 5 minutes.