EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. HARMAN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from California?

There was no objection.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. HARMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HARMAN. Madam Speaker, ''let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the Nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan,'' so Abraham Lincoln reminded the Nation at his second inaugural.

Regrettably, Congress is poised to forget those who bore the battle, the widow, the widower and the orphan.

To finance a huge and ill-timed tax cut, the House recently passed a budget resolution that calls for cutting the Veterans Affairs budget by $15 billion in benefits and health care. It also calls for huge cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, two health programs critical to the well-being of many veterans and their spouses.

This is not the appropriate way to honor the men and women who bravely defended our freedom nor is it the way to honor the men and women currently in Operation Iraqi Freedom, nor those like 22-year-old Marine Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez from the small town of Lomita in my district who was killed in action there.

Madam Speaker, honoring our veterans is a lifelong commitment, beginning with the warm welcome upon their return from war. It continues when we fly the POW-MIA flag, when we care for our veterans and their families and, ultimately, when we lay them to rest with appropriate remembrance and tribute.

Madam Speaker, deeds must match words. Our budget resolution must restore funding for valued veterans programs. To honor these veterans, our deeds must fund their services.

□ 1700

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

TREATMENT OF VETERANS IN FY 2004 BUDGET RESOLUTION

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

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, I rise today as a proud American and member of the House Committee on Armed Services to strongly condemn the cuts to our veterans health care that were pushed through in the House budget proposal for fiscal year 2004, and that we thankfully restored today when we voted overwhelmingly to instruct conferees to prevent those cuts from being considered by the conference committee.

It is outrageous that upwards of 90 percent of the mandatory spending that would have been cut came directly from programs that provide service-connected disability and education benefits to our Nation's bravest citizens. These programs are the heart of the Veterans Administration, and in fact they are the very reason the VA was created.

The across-the-board cuts did not stop there. Discretionary funding, which includes veterans health care, was also grievously cut by $14.2 billion over the next 10 years. Health care takes up 96 percent of that spending, meaning we were slashing at least $1.63 billion per year in health funding. At a time when this Congress is searching for ways to provide better health programs, like a prescription drug benefit to seniors, how could we have justified cutting into successful programs veterans currently receive? Many of these men and women would have no choice but to turn to Medicare because of our actions; and until the Spratt amendment, which was passed today, and spearheaded by so many of my colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle, Medicare itself would have been cut as well.

The path this House almost chose to embark upon is even more troubling given the action our military is now engaged in overseas. Our courageous servicemembers are engaged in dangerous combat, and a number of them will inevitably sustain injuries. Madam Speaker, I will not return home and tell the brave men and women and families of those deployed overseas that we are not doing everything in our power to support them when they return. We have promised these benefits again and again as the very least we can do to repay the risk and sacrifice the men and women of our Armed Forces make on a daily basis. We must not break that promise now.

I choose to show our servicemembers that I support them and will continue to support them when they return home from combat. I want them to remain confident that they will be cared for should they be injured. I want the families to know that they will not be abandoned should, God forbid, their loved ones not return home to them.

Madam Speaker, the Republican budget resolution did none of these things and must be improved. We took that step today. Earlier today I voted for the Spratt motion to instruct conferees to eliminate proposed cuts in so many programs vital to veterans to show our Armed Forces and veterans that they are not second-class citizens and that we value their efforts and sacrifice. This motion to instruct passed today, and I will continue to fight for our veterans just as hard as they have fought for us. It is the very least that they deserve.

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

(Mr. SCHIFF 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 gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MALONEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. CASE 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 gentlewoman from Oregon (Ms. HOOLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. HOOLEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. INSLEE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

VETERANS

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

Mr. STRICKLAND. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to talk about our veterans, the way we are treating our veterans; and I would like to give a little history of what has happened in the recent past.

Until about 1 year ago, the veteran that went to one of our VA hospitals or our clinics to get medication was expected to pay $2 in copayment for a prescription. That, unfortunately, was raised; and veterans across this country are aware of the fact that they are now required not to pay $2 per prescription copayment, but they are required to pay $7 per prescription. I thought that was an unwise decision on the part of the VA, and I introduced legislation to repeal that increase and to return it back to the $2 per prescription level.

I was absolutely shocked when the President sent his budget to this House