

disrupt bipartisan support with a bunch of political cheap shots. The U.S. spends nearly three times as much on R&D as the second-place country, Japan. And more money is spent on R&D activities in the U.S. each year than the rest of the G-7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom) combined. The United States also holds strong leads in specific sectors. For example, the U.S. produces 32 percent of the entire world output in high-technology products. Technology products also account for a very large share of U.S. exports, thereby making a positive contribution to our overall trade balance (source: National Science Board Science and Engineering Indicators, 2004).

A Record To Run From. Finally, Senator KERRY likes to attack President Bush for "not having a record to run on." But while the President indeed does have a strong science and technology record, it is worthwhile for us to examine Senator KERRY's record on science and technology as a member of the Senate for the past two decades. A review of floor statements posted on Senator KERRY's web site show that, over the past 4 years, he's only mentioned science four times in floor statements. Further, even though Senator KERRY is a member of the influential Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, he has not introduced any legislation during this Congress on science and technology issues. Science, research, and innovation are vital to our country's future. Senator KERRY hasn't shown leadership on science and technology during his two decades in the Senate. Now he is dividing what has been bipartisan support for science and technology. Mr. KERRY, it is not good for science and it is not good for our country's future.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GERLACH). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CONGRATULATING DR. MELVIN STEELY ON HIS RETIREMENT

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to acknowledge the retirement of Dr. Mel Steely, a history professor and former colleague of then Professor Newt Gingrich. Dr. Steely is ending a 40-year career as a professor at the State University of West Georgia.

Born during Roosevelt's America May 9, 1939, Melvin Thomas Steely grew up in Cedartown, Georgia. With an interest in history, Dr. Steely aspired to teach, attaining both a master's and doctorate degree in history from Vanderbilt University. He taught at Lambuth College in Jackson, Tennessee before moving to West Georgia College to teach Modern European History in 1964.

Dr. Steely was the kind of a professor who would have no part of grade infla-

tion, and a grade of "A" in his classroom was well-earned. Despite how much he may have cherished the student, there was no fast track to success in his courses. Much like life, he believed you have to work and learn in order to achieve success.

Although he was a member of many professional organizations, Dr. Steely's contributions as President and lobbyist for the American Association of University Professors earned him both the Sumberg and the State Akin awards. He has worked in political campaigns for both parties. He has served as the faculty adviser to the West Georgia College Republicans for 24 years and continues to this day to serve as Speaker Newt Gingrich's biographer and curator.

Along with the many students he influenced over a 40-year teaching career, Dr. Steely's most significant accomplishment and legacy will be as the director of Georgia's Political Heritage Program. In 1985 he started an audio/video collection of famous Georgia political leaders in an effort to preserve our State's political heritage. Moderated by West Georgia history professors, the collection includes rare interviews with former governors, lieutenant governors, United States Senators and Members of the United States House of Representatives.

The political heritage archive also collects the political papers of Speaker Newt Gingrich and House interviews with all but two former Georgia governors since World War II.

Other significant individuals featured in this collection include Governor Jimmy Carter, Governor Lester Maddox, Governor and current United States Senator ZELL MILLER, United States Senator Herman Talmadge and Ambassador Andrew Young.

Beyond politics and history, Dr. Steely is involved in numerous civic organizations, including the Moose and Elks clubs, the Kiwanis Club, the Boy Scouts, the Methodist Church and Governor Sonny Perdue's Civil War Commission. With his wife, two daughters and five grandchildren, Dr. Steely should have no problem keeping busy outside of his continued involvement with the West Georgia Political Heritage Program.

On behalf of the constituents of Georgia's 11th Congressional District, I appreciate Dr. Steely's service to our community and his help in preserving Georgia's history. I wish him well, and may he find many new adventures in his retirement.

CARING FOR OUR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) is recognized for half the time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, we are here this evening to discuss an issue

that I believe should be one of the highest priorities in the budget, one of the highest priorities for Members of Congress and one of the highest priorities for our government. We are here this evening to discuss caring for our veterans and their families. We are here on the floor to show them the respect they deserve.

Since the beginning of our Nation's history, our veterans have answered the call to duty with dignity, with courage and with great honor. These brave men and women have never flinched in the face of danger and as we speak on the floor this evening, a new generation of veterans is being made in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like all Members of this body, I pray for their safety and hope that they may return home to their loved ones as soon as possible. Like the veterans before them, these brave men and women deserve our respect, our gratitude and our care, not just while they are in harm's way but also when they come home and take off the uniform. There are so many issues facing our veterans community now that we must address so that the VA can care for the needs of our newest generation of heroes. I believe we must encourage all veterans to enroll within the VA so they can fully understand the need within our communities. There is a program in my home State of Maine called Operation I Served which is working to identify and enroll as many veterans as it can. I believe this is a noble effort and one that I fully support. I personally ask all veterans to enroll in the programs.

Mr. Speaker, one of my greatest concerns when I came to Washington was to give over 150,000 veterans in my State a stronger voice on the issues that are important to them. I have been honored with being ranking member on the House veterans benefits subcommittee. During my time on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have learned a great deal from the full committee ranking member the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) and from the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman. The bipartisan effort of our committee has resulted in the passage of good legislation, including improved veterans education benefits, the enhanced self-employment opportunities and improvement in home loans and adapted housing benefits. The housing veterans' affairs committee has achieved a great deal for veterans because of the bipartisan spirit with which it pursues issues important to veterans and their families. Unfortunately, that bipartisan desire to care for veterans does not reach into the administration's budget request. Veterans in this country are all too aware of the growing mismatch between the demands for veterans services and the funding allocation to supply these services. Some would have us address this issue of mismatch by decreasing the demand for VA services by limiting access to certain veterans or by increasing copayments to those veterans. I believe this is absolutely the

wrong policy to pursue. If we truly value the sacrifice our veterans have made for this country, we will work to ensure that all veterans have access to high quality care. We must make caring for our veterans a priority, not only in words but also in our budgets and we should give the VA the mandatory funding that it needs to take care of our veterans.

I look forward to discussing this issue further this evening with my colleagues here. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. It is great to be here with the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD), the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN). The fact is that we are here because we are concerned about veterans and the fact that this administration is woefully underfunding VA health care. The truth is that since President Bush came to office, he has sent to this Congress budgets which ask for greatly increased costs to our veterans. The President has asked that the cost of a prescription drug be increased from \$7 a prescription to \$15 a prescription. The President has asked in his budget that a \$250 annual user fee be imposed upon our veterans. The President has asked that the cost of a clinic visit be increased. And the President through his administration has created a new category of veterans which they call priority group 8. These are veterans who are told that they can no longer participate in VA health care. These people can be combat decorated veterans and still be told by this administration that they cannot participate in VA health care.

What the President has already done is harmful enough to veterans, but just recently a memo surfaced from this administration from the Office of Management and Budget. It outlines what the President will likely do if he is reelected when it comes time to create the budget for 2006. In that memo, we find out that the Bush administration plans to cut about \$900 million out of VA health care funding in the 2006 budget. The reason that is so bad is because we are already underfunding VA health care. We are already imposing additional costs on our veterans. Veterans are waiting months just to see their doctor for the first time in many cases and in many places around this country. Yet the President wants to fund VA health care at an even lower level for the 2006 budget period. What would that mean in Ohio? Ohio is a big State. We have 1,069,132 veterans in Ohio. These are men and women who have served the country with great honor. If the President's proposed cut were to happen, that would result in a cut of \$36 million beneath the current levels of funding just for the State of Ohio alone. We cannot let that happen. That is why I think it is important that we meet as we are meeting here on the floor of the House tonight to discuss this issue, to inform not only

our colleagues but to inform the American people and especially America's veterans as to what is being planned by this administration.

Mr. MICHAUD. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to be here with the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD). Maybe we can get a two-on-two basketball game going here, the Ohio guys against the Maine guys. I just want to say what an honor it is and how terrific it is I think that the gentleman from Maine became the ranking member on a subcommittee in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in his freshman year. I think that speaks volumes of how he has been approaching the issues and how important it is to him. But the one issue I wanted to just touch base on for a few minutes, and I know it is getting late and our time is limited, about the mandatory funding. We have an opportunity to make sure that our veterans are funded every single year through the mandatory funding provisions that we want to implement. Right now it is discretionary funding, it is up to the whims of Congress on whether or not our veterans should get their health care. The request from the Secretary of the VA is completely underfunding the needs.

Everyone keeps saying, "Well, we're spending more on veterans now than we ever have. We are spending more. We have increased by X percent over the last few years." And the one point that continues to get ignored is that we have thousands of more veterans entering into the system. So although there is an increase, if you increase it by 5 percent and the numbers of veterans coming in increases by 10, 15 or 20 percent, then the money you have in the pot is not big enough to handle the needs for our veterans.

□ 2300

And what has happened under the current system, under the discretionary funding system, is that we have failed to keep pace with the medical inflation; we are rationing care to our veterans; we are denying services to some, as the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) said; we are foregoing a lot of the modernization techniques and investments.

And the one point that I really wanted to bring up because I think it is so appropriate given the state of war that our country is in, reducing the funding for research and development for prosthetics. The VA was award winning in the country for the kind of developments and the research that they would put in and the kind of advances that they have had regarding amputees and trying to help amputees who come back. In this war we have seen more amputees than we ever expected because we do not have the armored Humvees, and just the way this guerrilla war is being fought, we have a lot

of veterans who are losing their arms, losing their legs, and now back at home we are cutting the investment for trying to improve on prosthetics.

Not only that, but when we take a step back and we look at the big picture, this is about choices and we can say we do not have enough money to fund all these programs for our veterans. That is a shame in itself if one has to say that, but at the same time they will not reduce the tax cut for millionaires.

We are not asking to reduce the tax cuts for anyone that has made under \$300,000, \$200,000. In fact, Democrats want to increase the child tax credit and increase the breaks for middle-class people. But when one says that they are not willing to repeal any portion of the tax cut for people who make more than \$1 million to pay for this veterans funding, we have a problem in this country.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MICHAUD. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. What the gentleman is describing here are the values embraced by this Congress, and some people seem to think it is more important to give tax cuts to people who make over \$200,000 a year than it is to put sufficient resources into caring for our sick and disabled veterans. That is an argument we can have, but I think the American people are going to side with us. Especially during this time of war, and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) knows this, as he visits his district, as I visit my district, as the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) visits his district, we hear from people that they honor and revere the service that our veterans have given to our country, and they want us to put the needs of our sick and our disabled veterans at the top of the list. They do not want them to be at the bottom and get the leftovers. They want them to be at the top.

Sadly, this administration has decided that it is more important to take the resources we have and give those resources to the richest people among us in the form of tax breaks than to put sufficient resources into our health care.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN).

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

This is a Maine/Ohio event tonight. I am not sure we are ready to play basketball with Hoosiers, but we are happy to talk with them tonight about the problems our veterans face.

We have 150,000 people over in Iraq and Afghanistan doing their level best to carry out an extraordinarily difficult assignment. And it is simply astonishing, it is a disgrace, that President Bush and the Republican leadership in this Congress have made tax cuts for the richest Americans a higher priority than funding health care for our veterans.

Just to put these numbers in perspective, Secretary Principi asked the administration for \$1.2 billion in next year's budget that he could not get. He asked for \$1.2 billion. That seems like a lot of money. How much are we spending every week in Iraq? A little over \$1 billion. We spend \$1 billion a week in Iraq, and we cannot find, the administration cannot find, \$1 billion extra a year to fully fund veterans' health care in this country. It is just unbelievable.

In Maine we are doing better in some respects because we have got some additional clinics. We have got the CARES report that has been done and offers some hope that we are going to do a little better in the future. But nationally we are underfunding veterans' health care. There is no doubt about it. What is really going on, I think, is because the cost of health care, particularly the cost of prescription drugs, is rising so rapidly that more and more veterans are coming into the system, flooding the system, asking for help. And where is the United States Government, where is the United States Congress, when our veterans need extra help? Sadly, missing in action is where we have been.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) was just talking about the White House budget memo for the next fiscal year, not the one we are debating this year but the next fiscal year. That is a cut. In fiscal year 2006 President Bush's proposal is to cut VA health care by another \$910 million, almost \$1 billion, 1 week's worth of spending in Iraq. And if they succeed in driving veterans' health care down by that much, they will have cut veterans' health care to below the 2004 level, below the level that we are spending this year. And I find this proposal just absolutely shameful, especially when our servicemen and women and their families are sacrificing so much in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world.

We should be at this time showing renewed appreciation for our veterans, and that is why I support the gentleman from Wisconsin's (Mr. OBEY) resolution, H. Res. 685, that would reorder the Nation's budget priorities to increase the investments in veterans' health care. This House will vote on the resolution tomorrow, and H. Res. 685 would increase funding available for VA health care for fiscal year 2005 by an additional \$1.3 billion, just slightly more than Secretary Principi asked the President for and did not get.

The resolution would be paid for by limiting unfair and disproportionate tax breaks for people making \$1 million annually. And think about this. That would save just under \$19 billion. In other words, here we are, the conflict going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in 1 year alone, people earning \$1 million a year or more are going to take home \$18.9 billion that they would not have had without these tax breaks. And we cannot find, the administration cannot find, the Republican Congress

cannot find, \$1.3 billion a year to help our veterans. If we were not in Washington, we would not believe it. What is happening is just absolutely unbelievable and needs to be changed.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I want to comment on what the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) has said. The fact is that we are more concerned about millionaires getting a few dollars in tax breaks than we are in providing health care to our veterans. It is a simple fact. The President and the leadership of this House can argue otherwise, but it is true. If we would just simply not be so concerned about giving millionaires more money in tax breaks, we could take care of America's sick and disabled veterans. These people who have fought the battles, paid the price by shedding their blood, losing their limbs. Some have been blinded, disfigured, and horribly wounded in a variety of ways. But this administration cares more for millionaires in terms of getting more money through tax breaks than caring for our veterans.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the good congressman. And I do not know what it is going to take because both the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) also sit on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and I do not know what it is going to take, because in earlier years, as they know, we have got this independent budget for fiscal year 2005 where they spell out the money that they need to take care of our veterans here in this country, and it was unanimous. Then the President's own task force reported earlier the final report in 2003, Improved Health Care, Delivering for our Nation's Veterans, it says right in there that there is a significant mismatch in the VA between demand and available funding.

□ 2310

Something has to be done to take care of our veterans, and it is a matter of priority.

I served in the legislature for 22 years, and a lot of those years I served on the appropriations committee and we had to make the tough decisions. We had to live within a balanced budget because the Constitution of Maine requires that.

So we had to prioritize. That is what this is all about, is prioritization. I do not think the priorities of this Congress and this administration are set in the right places. I think definitely the veterans are a top priority and we ought to take care of them.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) talked about the cutting of some of the research funding for our veterans. I had a chance to go visit Walter Reed hospital and went into the amputee ward. I am glad I did. I had a chance to talk to a lot of the soldiers that were there, and it really opened my eyes.

That is one area we definitely should not be cutting back, because the war in

Iraq and Afghanistan will be over with eventually and people will tend to forget about it, but the people who will never forget about the war in Iraq or Afghanistan are those who lost a loved one or a veteran who came home and is missing a limb or two. They will never forget. That is always going to be on their minds.

That is why it is incumbent upon this Congress to make sure that we have adequate funding. And as stated by my good colleague the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN), actually when Secretary Principi came before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to talk about his budget, he admitted they cut him back \$1.2 billion. That is wrong, and that is not where my priorities are.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, I want to share with the American people, because it is easy to say that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) or the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) or the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) are the ones saying we need to do this.

Almost every major veterans organization has backed the mandatory funding proposal. The American Legion, the AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of American, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, these are veterans organizations who are saying this is something that we need and we are willing to put our names on it. I think that is important.

It is the same with mental health, homelessness and all the other issues that we talk a lot about in committee.

So I just want to thank the gentleman again for the opportunity to be here. It has been great over the last few weeks and months to watch all of the history of the World War II veterans and everything that has been shown on TV and on the history channel and the dedication of the monument and everything else.

I think when we are talking about values and talking about priorities, and as the gentleman from Maine said, as a legislature, you have to make these choices, and they are not always easy choices. But when you compare what we are doing and how many trillions of dollars we are giving a way to the top 1 percent of the people in this country, at the expense, it is not free money, it is at the expense of veterans, and where would those people be if these veterans did not protect the system, the economic system, the democratic system that we have in place right now that enables them to create the kinds of wealth they have created. God bless them. We are not here to say they should not make their money, but we are saying society has an obligation to treat these people fairly, and right now they are not.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman.

Another issue I would like to discuss, and it is an issue that has plagued our veterans community for over 100 years, it is the issue of concurrent receipt, also known as the disabled veterans tax.

H.R. 303 which would address this issue has 382 bipartisan cosponsors, but this bill has not been brought to the floor by Republican leadership. My good friend the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. MARSHALL) has filed a discharge petition, but has only been able to get 206 signatures as a result of this action. And the grassroot movement, the veterans around the country, we were able to actually take a small step to address this issue in the national defense authorization.

But it is a crying shame, because when you look at in my State of Maine alone, two-thirds of the military retirees were left out of this provision, and I fully support total elimination of the ban on both the disability and retirement pay. I do not think we should stop until we get the full repeal of it.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I think some people do not fully understand what is meant by concurrent receipt. Some people do not really understand what we mean when we talk about the disabled veterans tax. But it is a discrimination against veterans.

If a veteran is an individual who has served the country and has qualified to receive a pension, they get a pension. But if they have become disabled in some way and they qualify for disability benefits, they get disability benefits, or they qualify for disability benefits. But the tragic fact is, for every dollar that a veteran, a disabled veteran, gets in disability benefits, \$1 is subtracted from their pension.

So, in other words, the disabled veteran is actually paying for his or her disability, and it is a discrimination, it is an injustice that needs to be corrected.

We would have corrected it. The Democrats in this House have been trying for months to correct this injustice, and the President fights our attempt to get rid of this disabled tax.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STRICKLAND. I will not yield right now, but I will as soon as I finish my statement.

The fact is that we have been trying to get rid of this disabled veterans tax, and it is the Republican leadership in this House and the president of the United States who has fought our attempts to get rid of this terrible injustice. And it will not change, I believe, until the veterans of this country understand what is going on and speak out and speak up and demand change.

You know, talk is cheap, and it does not cost us anything to salute the flag or to appear with veterans in a parade. But the real reflection of our values as a people and as a Congress is seen in how we spend our money, those things which we are willing to support with our budget.

The fact is that this Congress has failed disabled veterans, and I just call upon the President, upon my colleagues in this House, to change their attitudes and change their minds and step up to the plate and allow the Republican Members to come down here and sign this discharge petition. Let us bring this bill to the floor, so that all Members of this Chamber can have a recorded vote, a public vote, so that the veterans know where we stand; not just what we say, but what we are willing to do with our vote to get rid of this injustice.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for yielding.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, talking about the disabled tax, that has been a very discouraging thing. I have heard a lot of veterans in Maine who do not receive much funding at all.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Maine yield?

Mr. MICHAUD. Not at this time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest problem I see when you talk about veterans benefits and health care, sometimes those in the administration really do not understand the distance veterans have to go to get their health care.

The issue I want to bring forward is we have a lot of BSOs, and I hear a lot of complaint in the State of Maine. If a veteran in the northern part of the State has to get health care services and they go to Togas and then they have to get shipped to Boston, they stay overnight in Togas, then another day they go to Boston; they stay overnight in Boston, then they come back to Togas, then back up to the northern part. It is a 4-day trip.

That is wrong. I do not think veterans should have to go through that. It is wrong. We have to make sure they are taken care of, not only their health care, but this disability tax is another issue that I think we definitely should be voting on.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MICHAUD. I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. MCHUGH. You will yield. I thank the gentleman.

Let me from the outset, Mr. Speaker, say that I deeply appreciate the two gentlemen's comments about the concerns with respect to veterans benefits. I think both sides of the aisle, Republican and Democrat, share that concern.

What troubles me is the comments the two gentleman have made with respect though the Republican majority in this House as it relates to concurrent receipt.

□ 2320

The fact of the matter is, this concept has existed since the 1860s, since just after the Civil War. The fact is, for the 40 years prior to the Republicans

taking the majority of this House, my friends' party did absolutely nothing to correct the inequities, the wrongs associated with concurrent receipt that they so rightly cited.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, would the gentleman quickly make his point?

Mr. MCHUGH. I am making my point as quickly as I can. If the gentleman cares to reclaim his time, that is his right.

As the chairman of the subcommittee that has responsibility over concurrent receipt, I would say under the Republican majority, for the first time in more than 140 years, including 40 years of uninterrupted Democrat majorityship in this House, we have taken steps to cut the concurrent receipt inequities by more than half. It is not enough. We need to do more.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time.

Mr. MCHUGH. But for these 2 Members to say we have done nothing is the most disingenuous comment I have heard in my 12 years here.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, what was done 100 years ago is one thing. Veterans want the problem taken care of now.

Mr. MCHUGH. Would the gentleman yield? * * *

Mr. STRICKLAND. Regular order, Mr. Speaker.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GERLACH). The gentleman from Maine has the time.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I am a freshman Member of Congress. I was not here to deal with this issue in the past. I am here now, and it is an inequity, and I think it should be taken care of.

Mr. MCHUGH. * * *

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Maine has the time.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I am not here to put blame on the past Congresses. I am in this Congress, and this is an issue where we have over 380 some odd Members of Congress signing it, and it is disingenuous for those Members of this body who signed it to be cosponsors and refuse to sign the discharge petition, and refuse to bring it out.

Mr. MCHUGH. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Will the gentleman yield to me?

Mr. MCHUGH. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MICHAUD. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND).

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, the issue is this: a vast majority of the Members of this House have signed on as sponsors of a bill to solve this disabled veterans problem, to get rid of it. The leadership of this House will not allow that bill to be brought to the floor so that all of us; you, sir, as well as every other Member of this body, will have a chance to cast a public vote so that the veterans of this country know where we stand.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STRICKLAND. I will not yield.

The fact is that we deserve a chance to have a public vote so that the veterans in your district and in Mr. MICHAUD's district and in my district can look at the record and see how we vote.

Now, why will not those who are sponsoring that legislation walk down here and sign their name to the discharge petition and allow that bill to be brought to the floor? All we are asking for is a public vote. Members can vote however they choose to vote. But the people of this country, especially the veterans of this country, deserve to know where we stand.

Talk is cheap in this chamber. It is the vote that counts.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. STRICKLAND. I will not yield. It is the vote that gives the benefits to the veteran, not the talk, and what we have is talk. As I have said before, rhetoric is empty unless it is followed up with the willingness to cast the vote to make the resources available to the veterans.

We are talking about disabled veterans, veterans who have suffered bodily injury as a result of their service to this country. For too long, these disabled veterans have been denied justice. We are simply asking for justice.

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would like to read an e-mail.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MICHAUD. No.

I would like to read an e-mail I received from a constituent: "It is the veteran, not the preacher, who has given us freedom of religion.

"It is the veteran, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.

"It is the veteran, not the poet, who has given us the freedom of speech.

"It is the veteran, not the campus organizer, who has given us the freedom of assembly.

"It is the veteran, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.

"It is the veteran, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote."

Mr. Speaker, I think that pretty much sums it up. It is the veterans that made this country what it is today. We should be taking care of our veterans, living up to the commitment, making sure that they get the proper health care that they deserve, and we ought to take care of some of the problems of concurrent receipts and mandatory funding.

THE GROWING ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) is recognized for the remaining time until midnight as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Maine for giving

us that wonderful quote about all of the benefits that have been provided to us by veterans. But when it comes to concurrent receipts, it has been the Republicans that have done the most to provide for concurrent receipts for veterans by making a progressive step in the right direction.

I will be glad to yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH) to explain what has happened when it comes to benefits for the veterans.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. I am sorry we were unable to construct a constructive give-and-take discussion on this very important issue with my 2 colleagues who have now left the chamber, regrettably, on this issue.

As I said during the time they did yield to me, and I appreciate that opportunity, the fact of the matter is that when we come to the issue of concurrent receipt, this is a process that I strongly disagree with, and I think the majority of the House, Republican and Democrat, disagree with, and it has existed for more than 140 years. However, the fact is, in spite of my 2 friends' comments earlier, nothing has been done in that 140-year period to correct that situation until the last 3 years.

Over the last 3 years, we have taken significant steps to remediate the inequities that are associated with concurrent receipt. Based on the hard work of the House Committee on Armed Services controlled by, yes, the majority party, we have significantly improved the concurrent receipt situation. I think every veteran service organization in America would admit that.

What has not happened, however, is total correction. What concerns me, and what really I think is the key point with respect to the previous speakers' comments, that while one speaker, the gentleman from Maine, said he was not here, it was not his responsibility that nothing had been done, the other speaker, the gentleman from Ohio, was here and, in fact, was complicit in no corrective action.

I just want to rise tonight to express again my appreciation to the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) for yielding to me to assure the veterans community who have been affected by this, that while we have implemented what amounts to multiple billions of dollars of corrections in this concurrent receipt debate, that we are going to continue to effect even further corrections until the inequity that has existed through the past 40 years of the minority's rule over this House, until equity, until the proper circumstance is corrected. And this is the silly season, the political season, and I just wanted the opportunity to state that, as the chairman has responsibility over this issue.

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Mr. TIAHRT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), the chairman of the sub-

committee that has jurisdiction on this area for all the progress that he has made for veterans in a long time. As it was stated here earlier by the Chairman, 140 years has gone by that this has been an issue, but it took a Republican Congress to act on it. And we have done more for veterans in the last 10 years since we have taken over the House of Representatives as the majority party than happened in the previous generation. So I thank him for his leadership and appreciate his time on the floor tonight.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I want to speak about three things. First, I want to talk a little bit about our economy and how it is growing, why it is growing, why the tax relief that we have passed has been so beneficial.

Second, I want to talk about what is going to be proposed tomorrow by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the ranking member on the Committee on Appropriations. He is calling it "America's Top Ten Obligations." That is the title for a tax increase on what he claims are the top 1 percent of taxpayers in America. We will tell you who those people are.

The third thing I want to talk about is how we are going to bring jobs back into America. It is an agenda we call "Careers for the 21st Century." It is an eight-point plan to make America more competitive.

But first, Mr. Speaker, let me return to our economy. Our economy is robust. I have a chart here that shows how our economy is growing. It starts in the fourth quarter of 2002. As you recall, in the recent history of our economy, in 1999 we had a tech bust. It resulted in a dramatic drop in the NASDAQ because a lot of the tech industries lost value and many people were laid off.

Following that in about November of 2000, prior to George Bush being sworn in for office in January of 2001, the recession started. We saw other job losses. Then on September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked our country using our own technology against us and dealt a severe blow to our economy.

In my home area in south central Kansas, our community had a greater percentage loss of jobs compared to the total number of jobs in the community than any other community in the United States. We were hit very hard. So the terrorist attack had a dramatic impact.

What happened in Congress then is that we passed the President's plan for tax relief. It was an across-the-board tax relief plan in addition to some targeted tax relief. That across-the-board plan affected every individual that pays Federal income taxes in America. Every individual. All of us got a tax break if we paid Federal income taxes. It was a very fair and reasonable thing to do. The percentage was equal for every American.

So that tax increase did one of three things for people who got money back