

Change is vital. We must remind ourselves that the war with Iraq was not a mistake but rather a flagrant abuse of power by our leaders—and a case of shameful negligence by the rest of us for letting it happen. The consequence is more than a quagmire. The consequence is the death of our national treasure—our soldiers.

We are all accountable. We all share the responsibility of what has been destroyed in our name. Let us begin to right the wrongs we have done to our country by accepting that responsibility.

TRIBUTE TO OSSIE DAVIS

HON. KENDRICK B. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor a distinguished actor, director, producer, screenwriter, playwright and historian. Ossie Davis was an incredible man whose life's work, both on and off screen, promoted the advancement of civil rights and humanitarian causes.

Mr. Davis' most important role may well have been as husband. He and his wife, also a prominent actor, Ruby Dee, celebrated 50 years of marriage together in 1998. Both were among those selected to receive Kennedy Center Honors in 2004.

The pair met during Davis' Broadway debut in the play *Jeb Turner*. Both promoted the cause of blacks in the entertainment industry and are well known for their portrayals of characters faced with racial injustice.

My thoughts and prayers are with Ms. Dee, for her loss is truly a loss for us all.

TRIBUTE TO THE HEROIC MEN AND WOMEN OF THE 415TH CIVIL AFFAIRS BATTALION OF THE U.S. ARMY RESERVE

HON. FRED UPTON

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. UPTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the heroic men and women of the 415th Civil Affairs Battalion of the U.S. Army Reserve who have recently returned home after serving their country in Iraq. The sacrifices that these heroes made to protect and secure our country will never be forgotten and we are forever in their debt.

The 415th Civil Affairs Battalion is based out of Kalamazoo, Michigan with soldiers coming from throughout the Midwest. Over the last 7 years this battalion has been deployed five times, and is considered to be one of the most deployed battalions in the active or reserve of the Army. During their time in Iraq these selfless individuals rebuilt schools, worked with the creation of water treatment plants and Iraqi hospitals.

I would also like to extend my deepest sympathy for the loss of two of their comrades, SPC Nichole Frye and CPT Paul Cassidy. They will always remain in our memories and their families will be in our thoughts and prayers.

With our forces fighting overseas today, we are vividly reminded of the debt of gratitude

we owe our men and women in uniform who serve our country. The 415th Civil Affairs Battalion is a glowing example of the greatness of our forces and on behalf of the Sixth District of Michigan; I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation for their service.

VETERANS BENEFITS CUTS AND BUDGET PROPOSAL

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, is nothing sacred in this Administration's budget? At a time when our greatest generation is relying more and more on the VA to provide health services and our newest veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the White House is proposing to slash their benefits and force them to pay ever increasing premiums. What happened to keeping promises to our nation's veterans?

With the constantly rising cost of health care, the proposed funding falls well short of what is needed for our veterans. These veterans paid their service to our Nation and they earned a lifetime of health care coverage—we promised it to them. Now, as the President wants to spend trillions of dollars to privatize Social Security, he also wants to break that promise and make veterans pay for their healthcare again!

The absurdity of this would be laughable if it weren't such a serious and disturbing proposal.

Thomas P. Cadmus, the National Commander of the American Legion sees and understands the absurdity of this as well. He said, and I quote:

"It is incomprehensible that our veterans will pay for the shortfall in VA health-care funding from their own pockets as tax dollars flow out the back door of America."

And these tax dollars aren't just flowing out the back door of America in additional foreign aid funding, they are also flowing out the front door in the form of tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent of our Nation.

We have the money to keep our promise to our veterans and I urge the White House to reevaluate the budget and make the changes needed to reinforce the promise to our veterans.

I am also enclosing a press release from The American Legion which I submit for the RECORD to accompany my remarks.

LEGION LEADER SAYS PROPOSED BUDGET REACHES DEEP INTO VETERANS' POCKETS

WASHINGTON, February 7, 2005.—The leader of the nation's largest military veterans organization reacted strongly to the effects that President Bush's budget plan will have on veterans. He called it a smoke screen to raise revenue at the expense of veterans.

"This is not acceptable," said Thomas P. Cadmus, national commander of the 2.7 million-member American Legion. "It's nothing more than a health care tax designed to increase revenue at the expense of veterans who served their country."

Cadmus was referring to the portion of the proposed budget that would double the co-payment charge to many veterans for prescription drugs and would require some to pay a new fee of \$250 a year to use their own their own health care system.

"Is the goal of these legislative initiatives to drive those veterans paying for their health care away from the system designed to serve veterans?" Cadmus asked. "The President is asking Congress to make 'health care poaching' legal in the world's largest health care delivery system."

"When the President first came to Washington, among his first official acts was to triple the prescription co-payment from \$2 to \$7," Cadmus said. "Once again, the President wants to double the co-payment and fortunately, Congress has wisely rejected that proposal. Making veterans pay for timely access to quality health care is wrong."

This is the third year in a row the President has attempted to establish an enrollment fee for those veterans making co-payments and third-party reimbursements to the VA.

"Many of these veterans are Medicare-eligible and already paying the federal government for their part A and B coverage, so why should they have to pay an additional enrollment fee? VA can't even bill Medicare," Cadmus said. "Other veterans with private health insurance make co-payments and then VA is reimbursed for services. Again, why should they be forced to pay an additional \$250 to go to VA medical facilities?"

"During my visits to VA hospitals, I have not run into Bill Gates, Donald Trump, or Ross Perot seeking care. I see mostly veterans—many on small fixed incomes—trying to make ends meet and exercising their very best health care option." Cadmus observed.

"Veterans' health care is an ongoing expense of war," he added. "You don't thank veterans for serving their country and then tell them, 'By the way, better not get wounded or you'll have to pay extra for your health care.' This is offensive to every veteran in America. That is why this government must move VA health care out from under the umbrella of discretionary spending to mandatory spending," Cadmus stressed.

The American Legion has requested a \$3.5 billion increase in health care spending in FY 2006. The President is proposing \$9.5 billion in foreign aid, about \$2.1 billion more than the current level.

"As young Americans in uniform battle terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as 119 other countries, it is incomprehensible that our veterans will pay for the shortfall in VA health care funding from their own pockets as tax dollars flow out the back door of America," Cadmus said.

"We reminded the President of our position on veterans' health care needs during his campaign and I personally testified on the issue on Capitol Hill last September," Cadmus added. "Our budget request is very realistic when you consider the Secretary has slammed the door in the face of hundreds of thousands of veterans eligible, but currently forbidden from seeking quality care from VA."

"The current appropriations process is broken and is not adequately funding VA medical care," Cadmus said. "President George W. Bush's Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans on May 26, 2003, identified the mismatch between demand and funding as a major obstacle in meeting the nation's commitment to veterans. The American Legion and nine other veterans' organizations believe the answer lies in changing VA health care funding from discretionary to mandatory appropriation."

"No active-duty service member in harm's way should ever have to question the nation's commitment to veterans. This is the wrong message at the wrong time to the wrong constituency.