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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. FORTENBERRY).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
April 19, 2005.

I hereby appoint the Honorable JEFF FORTENBERRY to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT) for 5 minutes.

KEEPING PROMISES TO OUR SERVICE MEMBERS

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, all of us who go out into the field to see our troops, and particularly overseas, bring back many conclusions and various impressions; but to a person, we all come back impressed, inspired, and thankful for the men and women who serve in the Armed Forces of the United States. In hard, dirty, and dangerous circumstances and often thankless deployments like Iraq and Afghanistan, they not only serve but they have had

to adapt and improvise and tackle tasks they were never trained to handle. They have risen to the occasion, they have risen to the challenge, and at significant cost, in terms of those who have been wounded or injured or killed in action. These troops are the finest that any country has ever fielded, and they deserve not only our admiration but our support, and not just for them and their roles, which are vitally important, but for their families back home, for they sacrifice dearly.

There are three levels in which our support should come: first, to those on active duty, and their families, and particularly those who are deployed for long tours of duty in harsh environments and under hazardous conditions; second, to the Guard and Reserve who leave their civilian occupations and are now serving in numbers and percentages we have never seen since the all-volunteer force was created some 30 years ago. Almost half of those in Iraq come from the reserve components. More than 300,000 have been called up over the last 2½ years; 45,000 have had their tours extended. Many are on their second tour, some on their third. They are answering the call, they are doing their duty, and they are proving that the total force works and works well. But they have families back home and jobs and businesses and obligations and debts to pay and health care needs, and they need our unstinting support as never before. They not only need it, they deserve it. Next come the veterans and the retirees, those who have put, in many cases, much of their adult lives into serving their country. They have served and they now look to their country to keep the promises that were made to them at the time they were serving and when they reupped and when they joined again and when they stayed in for 20 and 25 years, promises about retirement benefits, about veterans benefits, about health care and education and many other things.

When the needs of these three groups are put together, all together, they make up a long bill of particulars, more than we can do, in all candor, in 1 year or even 2 years; but every time we take up a supplemental appropriation bill or a defense authorization bill or a defense appropriation bill, we should frankly, candidly, and honestly, searchingly, ask ourselves, what are we doing in this bill, on this occasion, to meet the needs of our service men and women who are serving gallantly in places like Iraq and Afghanistan and what are we doing in particular for their families?

What are we doing to help them out in their combat circumstances, with flak vests and personal protective gear and up-armored vehicles? But what are we also doing for their children back home for their health care needs? Have we provided adequately, I do not think we have, for family separation centers, the one place dedicated to helping them resolve their problems while family members are overseas? And for Tricare, health care, critically important in our society, particularly for Reservists and their families, Reservists leaving their job, what have we done to provide and see to it that they do not have to sacrifice in terms of health care for themselves and their families not only while they are on duty but in the months after they are deactivated and come back home?

And how about servicemen's life insurance? For years it had been inadequately funded. Many troops because of the premium, modest though it seems, have not elected to take it. What are we doing to see to it that every American soldier who goes into combat, hazardous duty has at least several hundred thousand dollars of servicemen's group life insurance? And what are we doing about our veterans, our category 7 and 8 veterans for over 2 years now, if they have not previously registered and are not able to

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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