

Now almost every State has gone to lotteries, casinos, or some type of gambling in a desperate attempt to get more revenue because property taxes just don't raise enough money since so much land has been taken off the tax rolls. Because of this, I believe gambling addiction is going to become a real problem in this country in the years ahead.

Another part of this problem is that government at all levels keeps putting more and more restrictions on the land that remains in private hands. The Washington Post had a headline a few months ago that said: "Judge Saves Land From Development." It might also have said: "Judge Preserves Land for Wealthy" or "Judge Keeps Young People From Buying Homes."

Preventing more land from development is driving up the cost of homeownership and putting it out of reach for many young families. It is also forcing more people into apartments or townhouses or homes on postage-stamp-size lots, leading to new problems from congestion.

The Washington Times pointed out that more than five times as much land, more than five times as much land, has been set aside as national parks, wilderness areas, Federal forests, and Federal grazing areas than has ever been developed. Today, you could put every family of four in the State of Texas and give them 3 acres of lands each and leave the whole rest of the country empty. Over three-fourths of the population lives on 3½ percent of the land.

USA Today reported last November 30 that the U.S. now has 37 million acres of private land under some type of protective trust or restrictive easement, a 54 percent increase just since 2000. Also, conservation of private land from 2000 to 2005 averaged 2.6 million acres a year, which USA Today said was almost half the size of New Jersey, each year. This is information from the Land Trust Alliance, which represents 1,200 of the 1,667 local, State, and national land trusts.

Another group, the Nature Conservancy, manages 1,400 areas in the U.S. and now has assets of \$4.14 billion. Some people will recall The Washington Post series about the sweet-heart deals the Nature Conservancy was doing for its wealthy contributors and board members. The Nature Conservancy had income of \$1.8 billion in 2004 and 2005 and has set aside 15 million acres. According to its tax returns, the Nature Conservancy in fiscal year 2005 received over \$97 million in government grants, over \$14 million in government fees and contracts, and over \$165 million from sales of land almost all to government. All this is always reported in the news as the greatest thing since sliced bread; but unless these activities are slowed, which is very doubtful, young people will find it extremely difficult to find places to start small businesses or build new homes. Also, there will be less money

for people to travel to and enjoy all the parks, preserves, national forests, and recreation areas we already have.

Mr. Speaker, if we keep taking more and more property off the tax rolls, we are going to really cut back on government services. Much worse, if we keep destroying private property and restricting development, we are going to slowly do away with the dream of homeownership and we are eventually going to bring about a lower standard of living for our children and grandchildren.

#### OUR MILITARY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I have long believed that how we treat the most vulnerable in society says a great deal about who we are as a Nation. So you can imagine that I, along with tens of millions of Americans, was appalled at the recent revelations in the media about the care at the outpatient facility at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Now, let me say, having visited Walter Reed more than once with my wife to visit injured Hoosier soldiers returning from battle, that there are, in fact, dedicated caregivers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, doctors and nurses and members of the facility staff who spend their days and nights helping the wounded. But the now infamous Building 18, a decrepit former hotel outside the main gates of Walter Reed, has come to public notice. It housed more than 80 soldiers. With moldy walls, soiled carpets, leaky pipes, mice, and cockroach infested, this facility was a national embarrassment.

I am outraged that our wounded warriors were forced to endure these terrible conditions. Our troops deserve better care, and they deserve it as soon as possible.

But more than the filthy living conditions, Mr. Speaker, the dirty secret of the military health care system in this country is that our injured veterans, after navigating the dangers of the battlefield, must navigate a bureaucratic morass to get the care they deserve. After receiving lifesaving surgeries at military facilities, wounded soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines must negotiate an overwhelming amount of red tape. I have seen it firsthand, working with families attempting to make their way through our veterans' and military health care system.

I was at the President's speech this morning at the 47th annual gathering at the American Legion as the President said that these bureaucratic delays as well as these living conditions must come to an end. The President said, "It is unacceptable to me. It is unacceptable to you. It is unacceptable to our country. And it is not going to continue."

I applaud the President and Secretary Gates for all they have done to hold the entire chain of command responsible for the conditions at Walter Reed, but we must do more to fundamentally bring reform to the system whereby we provide health care services to our veterans.

Today, the American Legion signed an agreement, for instance, with Walter Reed Army Medical Center to establish an office at the facility to assist in the transition of wounded servicemembers from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is a good start. The hope is that the legion office will significantly alleviate the long backlogs in out-processing wounded soldiers. Thank God for these veterans who are willing to help.

As a fiscal conservative, I have long called for smaller, more accountable government. In the area of military health care, we need now, more than ever, more accountable government. I appreciate the President's emphasis on the need to improve the delivery of services and not just throw more money at it. Washington D.C. and especially this Congress under current management and, quite frankly, prior management often solves problems by throwing more money at it. But assuming Congress enacts the President's 2008 budget, the VA health care budget alone will be up 83 percent since he took office.

Money alone is not the answer. We must change the way we serve the medical needs of those who have served us in uniform. We need substantive reforms, and it is my hope that the Dole-Shalala Commission and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs task force that the President announced this morning are able to meet those immediate needs.

The President said, and I would echo today, "We have a moral obligation to provide the best possible care and treatment to the men and women who have served our country. They deserve it, and they're going to get it."

But let us not just solve the problem with more money, with changes in the chain of command. Let us work in a bipartisan way in this Congress to fundamentally bring changes to our health care system that serves our military, that serves our veterans, that ultimately will rise to the level that each one of them deserves.

The Old Book says if you owe debts, pay debts; if honor, then honor; if respect, then respect. One of the ways that our Nation discharges a debt that we cannot ever fully repay to those who have worn the uniform is to ensure that they receive the medical treatment that they so richly deserve. And I commit myself to that today.

#### THE ENUMERATED POWERS ACT

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