

Mr. LEVIN. Madam Chair, I rise in strong support of the amendment by Representative MURPHY to repeal the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy.

The Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is discriminatory and it harms U.S. military readiness. Over the last 17 years, our nation has paid a heavy price for pursuing this policy. Since 1993, more than 13,000 qualified, well trained men and women have been dismissed from the military simply because of their sexual orientation. These are men and women we could ill afford to lose, especially at a time when our armed forces are engaged in two major military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This is why so many of this country's highest current and retired military leaders favor repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen. Admiral Mullen recently wrote, "No matter how I look at this issue, I cannot escape being troubled by the fact that we have a policy which forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens." Retired General Colin Powell and the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili also have urged repeal.

The argument has been made that repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell would negatively affect military unit cohesion. The evidence simply does not support this. Many other countries—including Britain, Canada and Israel—successfully allow gays and lesbians to serve openly. In any case, the Murphy amendment specifically states that repeal will take place only after the President and our nation's military leaders certify that the Department of Defense has prepared the necessary policies and regulations to implement repeal and that these policies are consistent with military standards for readiness, effectiveness, unit cohesion, recruiting and retention.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2011

SPEECH OF

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 27, 2010

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 5136) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for military activities of the Department of Defense, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes:

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Madam Chair, I rise today to clarify why I was unable to vote on Thursday, May 27 and Friday, May 28 in favor of the so-called Murphy Amendment and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, respectively. I would also like to reaffirm in the strongest possible terms my support for repealing the law known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," which prohibits gay and lesbian service members from serving openly, as soon as possible.

As you know, Congressman PATRICK MURPHY's amendment, which passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 234-194, provides for a process to be set in place to implement the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell as soon as the Pentagon completes its review of

the issue and President Obama, Defense Secretary Gates, and Admiral Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, certify that repeal implementation will not negatively affect our military.

During the Rules Committee's meeting on Wednesday to consider amendments to the Defense Authorization bill, I openly declared my support for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and for Congressman MURPHY's amendment.

Unfortunately, I had an official trip in my capacity as Co-Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission) that was scheduled prior to the vote. The consideration of amendments to the Defense Authorization bill on the House floor was such that I was unable to vote. Had I been present and not on official travel, I would have voted in favor of the Murphy amendment's inclusion, as well as in favor of the final Defense Authorization bill.

I commend my colleagues, Congressman MURPHY, Senator LIEBERMAN, and Senator LEVIN, for their leadership on this repeal effort. As I have said time and again, Don't Ask, Don't Tell threatens our national security and costs us millions of dollars each year to kick out dedicated and highly-skilled service members because of their sexual orientation and to retrain new ones.

I am also heartened to hear that our colleagues in the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 16-12 to bring Senator LIEBERMAN's companion amendment to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell to the Senate floor along with the Defense Authorization bill for consideration.

It is indeed a historic day for our military, the American people, and our nation. What should have happened 17 years ago is now closer than ever before. By passing the Murphy amendment along with the Defense Authorization bill, the House of Representatives has pledged to fulfill its promise of upholding the values for which the United States stands by allowing gay and lesbian Americans to serve openly in the military.

As we celebrate this victory, we are reminded of the long battle that has brought us to this point. I would be terribly remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices of countless service members and veterans, many of whose lives have been negatively impacted by this bigoted law, as well as those military and policy leaders, advocacy organizations, and everyday Americans who have taken a stand against discrimination.

Madam Chair, I am eternally grateful to the brave men and women in our Armed Forces who protect this nation and the American people each and every single day and look forward to Don't Ask, Don't Tell being repealed once and for all.

ASSURING QUALITY CARE FOR VETERANS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. LAURA RICHARDSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 24, 2010

Ms. RICHARDSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5145, which will increase the reimbursement amount for Vet-

erans Administration, VA, health professionals who continue their professional education. It will also expand the VA's authority to offer education reimbursements by allowing all health professionals employed by the VA to qualify, including optometrists, nurses, chiropractors, and other vital health care providers who are currently ineligible. This important measure will ensure that the VA community has up-to-date training so that they can best treat our veterans who so selflessly serve our country.

I thank Chairman FILNER for his leadership in bringing this bill to the floor. I would also like to thank the sponsor of this legislation, Congressman MCNERNEY, for his dedication to ensuring that we offer our veterans the highest quality health care.

Madam Speaker, our brave men and women in uniform have assumed the responsibility of protecting us and the values that we cherish as American citizens. We, then, have a solemn obligation to provide them with the resources and services that they need. This includes the best available medical treatment for our veterans who return home wounded or with disabilities. With a new generation of veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is as important as ever that the VA medical staff is fully equipped to treat traumatic brain injuries, post traumatic stress syndrome, and other health complications that are increasingly prevalent due to the new threats of 21st century warfare.

As the representative of a district that is home to over 24,000 veterans and the VA Medical Center of Long Beach, I am sensitive to the health care needs of our servicemen and servicewomen returning home from overseas. These young men and women in uniform risk their lives on our behalf and ask little in return. The least we can do to repay their sacrifice is ensure that they have access to the most modern and effective treatments and a comprehensive array of services. This bill will do just that.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 5145.

EXPRESSING SYMPATHY TO FAMILIES OF SOUTH KOREAN SEAMEN KILLED BY NORTH KOREA

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 24, 2010

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 1382, expressing sympathy for the families of those killed by North Korea in the sinking of the Republic of Korea Ship *Cheonan*, and solidarity with the Republic of Korea in the aftermath of this tragic incident. I would like to thank Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA for introducing this resolution reaffirming our long-standing friendship with the people of South Korea.

Madam Speaker, South Korea has suffered a senseless and tragic loss due to a vicious attack from their northern neighbor. On May 20, 2010 a group of 74 experts, 50 from South Korea and 24 from the international community, published a report containing conclusive evidence that North Korea, in clear violation of the Korean War Armistice Agreement, sank