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House Approves Iraq Redeployment Resolution

The House passed legislation this week that provides funding for our troops on the ground in Iraq and requires President Bush to redeploy our forces.

The legislation, the Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act, H.R. 4156, provides \$50 billion of the nearly \$200 billion that President Bush had requested for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The House approved the bill by a 218 to 203 vote.

Under the legislation, troop withdrawals would begin within 30 days; and, the troops' mission would be narrowed to focus on counterterrorism and on training Iraqi security forces with a goal of full withdrawal by mid-December 2008.

The bill would also require all American personnel, including CIA operatives, to follow Army Field Manual rules on torture. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that the Senate will take up the bill because there is enough opposition to block a vote being taken.

In This Week's Issue:

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Honoring Halifax Community Leaders

This week I filed legislation to name the Post Offices in Weldon and Roanoke Rapids in honor of two distinguished Halifax County community leaders.

The legislation names the Weldon Post Office in honor of Dock Brown and names the Roanoke Rapids Posts Office in honor of the late Judge Richard Allsbrook.

Dock Brown is a wonderful public servant who continues to give everything he can to his community. Whenever Halifax County faces a tough issue, you can be sure that he's there trying to help.

Brown served the community as an educator and politician. He taught school in Halifax County and served as principal for more than 30 years. While teaching he served on the County Health Board, chaired the County Election Board and served 19 years on the Mental Health Board.

Dock Brown taught at a time when the region was coming out the difficult days of segregation. He dedicated himself to making sure that African Americans had the education they needed to better themselves and the community.

Brown also served as a Halifax County Commissioner for eight years and in the North Carolina House of Representative for two years. Additionally, he served as a Weldon Town Board Commissioner, Trustee at Elizabeth City State University, member of the State Agriculture Committee and on the Superior Court Judge Selection Commission.

Brown fought for education funding and he was a very active member of the NAACP.

Brown has received numerous honors including the Order of the Long Leaf Pine and a lifetime achievement award from the State Mental Health Association.

Dock Brown, graduated from J. A. Chaloner Senior High School, attended Shaw University and earned his masters degree from North Carolina Central University. He also served as an Army infantryman in Korea.

Dock has been married to Helen Brooks for over 50 years. They have two children, Ivy Brown Singleton and Dock Brown, Jr, one grandson, Terance Singleton III.

Judge Allsbrook served as a resident Superior Court Judge for the Sixth Judicial District for 22 years, retiring from the bench in 2000. He earned the reputation as a meticulous, fair and compassionate jurist.

Judge Allsbrook was a very intellectual judge who was uncommonly understanding and patient with the people who came before him. I had the highest respect for him and he's certainly deserving of this honor.

I tried cases before Judge Allsbrook, and on one unusual occasion, Judge Allsbrook served on the jury of a case I was presiding over as Superior Court Judge.

Judge Allsbrook, who died October 27, 2007 at age 78, was a Halifax native and son of the late Sen. Julian Allsbrook. He was a graduate of Roanoke Rapids High School and earned an AB and law degree from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. He served as second lieutenant in the U.S. Navy for four years.

Judge Allsbrook practiced law in Roanoke Rapids with his father in the firm of Allsbrook, Benton and Knott for 20 years before becoming a judge. He served as president of the Roanoke Rapids Kiwanis Club and as president of the Roanoke Rapids Chamber of Commerce. He received the Jaycees Distinguished Service Award and was honored with the Boy Scouts of America Distinguished Citizen Award.

Judge Allbrook is survived by a daughter and son, Barbara Alison Allsbrook and Richard Brown Allsbrook, Jr., and by four grandsons.

Fighting Anti-Predatory Mortgage Lending

The House took another step forward in response to the subprime mortgage crisis by passing comprehensive anti-predatory lending legislation.

The Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act of 2007, H.R. 3915, will help stop bad loans being made in the first place. The bill passed by a vote of 291 to 127.

The bill establishes a simple standard for all home loans: institutions must ensure that borrowers can repay the loans they are sold. Lenders would have to determine that a borrower has a "reasonable ability to repay," based on income, credit history, indebtedness and other factors.

For refinancing, the bill will require that all loans provide a net tangible benefit to the consumer, barring "junk" lending driven by fees rather than solid economics. Some lenders had gotten away from these commonsense basics during the real estate boom, giving rise to risky, exotic mortgages and practices.

The bill also prohibits financial incentives for subprime loans that unnecessarily encourage lenders to steer borrowers into more costly loans. Statistics have shown that many homeowners in the current mortgage crisis received more expensive loans than they qualified for. The bill limits the prepayment penalties charged to borrowers who wish to close out their loans, typically to refinance on more affordable terms.

The legislation also expands the federal consumer protections available on high-cost loans by providing much greater disclosures. It also establishes an Office of Housing Counseling within HUD to boost homeownership and rental housing counseling.

Pushing Against An OLF in Northeastern N.C.

This week I wrote to Navy Secretary Donald C. Winter to urge him to look for a site for the planned Outlying Landing Field (OLF) somewhere other than northeastern North Carolina. I strongly support the communities I represent in their opposition to the OLF.

This is the text of the letter I sent to Secretary Winter:

The Honorable Donald C. Winter
 Secretary of the Navy
 1000 Navy Pentagon
 Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Winter:

I am writing regarding the Navy's efforts to build an Outlying Landing Field (OLF). I understand that the task of locating practice facilities for the Super Hornet aircraft is a difficult challenge, and I support the Navy. However, I share the deep concerns of residents about the sites under consideration in northeastern North Carolina in Gates and Camden counties.

Months of meetings, hearings and discussions by North Carolina's OLF Study Group have provided a simple finding – that residents of northeast North Carolina are strongly opposed to an OLF in their region. They believe that an OLF in either Gates or Camden County would have to endure the burden while Virginia Beach and Havelock enjoy all the economic benefits.

The economically distressed counties in northeast North Carolina would face enormous losses of taxable land, would suffer a negative impact to the quality of life and harm to the budding tourism industry. The small number of new jobs associated with the OLF could not offset the burdens placed on these communities.

I believe our national security interests must be protected so it is my sincere hope that the Navy will continue to work closely with the State of North Carolina to seek an OLF site the community supports. North Carolina has a long and proud history of working closely with the Navy and we want to continue that tradition.

I am ready to help move this project forward once a suitable site can be identified. I thank you for your consideration of this request.

Teach for America to Expand to Head Start

This week the House reauthorized Head Start and included language that would allow the Teach For America program to expand into Head Start.

We have a very difficult time recruiting and retaining teachers for our youngest students in eastern North Carolina. This change provides an enormous opportunity to help fill a void.

In July, I wrote to U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy, Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee, asking that a provision be included in the Head Start reauthorization legislation to allow Teach For America (TFA) participants to serve in Head Start classrooms. The Conference Committee adopted the provision and its report was approved by the House.

TFA is an extremely competitive national service program that recruits outstanding recent college graduates to teach for two years in some of the nation's most underperforming school districts. This year, TFA placed more than 5,000 teachers across the country, including nearly 150 in eastern North Carolina.

There is a great need for help in eastern North Carolina's schools, especially for economically disadvantaged children. Across the state only about 50% of economically disadvantaged student passed the state's end-of-year exams in the 2006-07 school year compared to 77% of student who do not live in the poverty. And, the numbers are even more troubling for large numbers of economically disadvantaged students living in eastern North Carolina.

For example, the percent of economically disadvantaged students passing the end-of-year exams in Halifax County is 35.7%; in Washington, 36.4%; in Pasquotank, 40%; in Granville, 40.3%; in Warren, 41.7%; in Pitt, 41.9; in Nash, 42.9; in Edgecombe, 43.4%; in Wayne, 44.6%; and, in Martin, 45.8%.

This is an important improvement to Head Start, which has been the nation's premiere early childhood education program for more than 40 years. More than 20 million children and families have been served by the program and it remains a cornerstone in the efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all Americans with the opportunity to thrive.

The bipartisan reauthorization legislation improves teacher and classroom quality, strengthens Head Start's focus on school readiness, expands access to Head Start for more children, ensures that centers are well-run, boosts coordination between Head Start and state and local programs and improves comprehensive services that help children by helping their families.

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