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## Troubling Report on Veterans' Care

Despite the pledge by the Bush Administration to improve veterans' care, a Government Accountability Office investigation has found that some of the worst problems, such as delays in disability payments and providing personalized care, persist.

This week the GAO released a report assessing the improvement efforts initiated by the Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs after revelations earlier this year about shoddy conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the frustrating, confusing and cumbersome process combat-injured military personnel face in attempting to obtain deserved medical care.

The investigation found that even though the Army has touted creation of more personalized medical care units to ensure wounded veterans won't slip through the cracks, nearly half – or 46 percent – of returning service members who were eligible did not get the service due to staffing shortages.

The report says despite months of review by no less than eight Congressional committees, a Presidential task force, a Presidential Commission, Pentagon and the VA, the government still lacks a solution for reducing severe delays of 177 days, on average, in providing disability payments.

The report also says that the Pentagon and VA still remain far away from having a comprehensive system for sharing medical records as injured veterans move from facility to facility.

The findings, presented at a hearing by the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee, are shameful. Taking care of our wounded soldiers is too important, and we must demand that the government strives for the highest levels of care and respect.



## Congress Ensures Health Care for Children

The House this week approved legislation that would ensure access to healthcare from more than 10 million low-income children.

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act, H.R. 976, was approved by a vote of 265 to 159. No child should ever go without medical care, and this bill moves us closer to ensuring that every American child has access to affordable, high-quality health care.

CHIP was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children of families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to afford private insurance. This bill provides states with the resources and incentives necessary to reach millions of uninsured children who are currently eligible but not enrolled in CHIP. In North Carolina, the bill will provide an additional 116,000 uninsured children with access to health care.

The bill reauthorizes the program for five years and it preserves the coverage for all 6.6 million children currently covered by CHIP and extends health care coverage to 3.8 million additional low-income children, who are currently uninsured.



## House Approves Flood Insurance Reforms

The House voted to reform and modernize our nation's flood insurance program.

The Flood Insurance Reform and Modernization Act of 2007, H.R. 3121, reauthorizes the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), improves flood mapping and ensures multiple-peril.

The legislation makes the Flood Insurance Program more actuarially sound by phasing out subsidized rates on commercial properties, vacation homes and second homes built before 1974. It also ensures the program's continued viability by encouraging broader participation. The legislation provides for a new community outreach program and requires a study on how best to increase participation by low-income families.

The legislation addresses some of the program's weaknesses, which were exposed during the 2005 hurricane season. Small business owners will be eligible to purchase business interruption coverage at actuarial rates to help them meet payroll and other obligations during an emergency. And,

for the first time since 1994, the bill updates maximum insurance coverage limits for residential and nonresidential properties.

The bill also requires FEMA to conduct a thorough review of the nation's flood maps. It makes the updating and modernization of flood maps an ongoing process and increases funding for mapping. In addition, it authorizes the Technical Mapping Advisory Council, made up of industry professionals, to advise FEMA on flood mapping.

The legislation also improves consumer protections by clarifying the disclosures that must be made to consumers about flood insurance. It requires "plain language" information on flood insurance policies. Further, the bill makes flood insurance effective immediately upon purchase of a home.

Finally, the bill includes provisions to responsibly expand the Flood Insurance Program to provide for an optional multiple peril policy – to allow property owners to purchase wind and flood coverage in a single policy. The bill requires premiums for the new optional coverage to be risk-based and actuarially sound, so that the program would be required to collect enough premiums to pay claims. Under the bill, multiple peril policies would be available where local governments agree to adopt and enforce building codes and standards designed to minimize wind damage, in addition to the existing flood program requirements for flood plain management.

## **Committee Hears from Hip Hop Industry**

The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee held a hearing this week to discuss hip hop and stereotypes.

Witnesses included hip-hop artist Master P, rapper David Banner, scholars and some of the most powerful music industry executives, including Viacom CEO Philippe Dauman, Warner Music CEO Edgar Bronfman and Universal Music CEO Doug Morris.

During testimony, witnesses disagreed over who was to blame for sexist and degrading language in hip hop music but were united in opposing government censorship as a solution. Record company executives defended the parental guidance labels and edited versions they said keep the more controversial material away from children and stressed that uniform standards or censorship won't work.

No legislation was offered on the issue, but a dialogue with music industry executives and artists about how hip hop's affect on our culture is expected to continue.

During the hearing I made the following statement:

Thank you Chairman Rush and Ranking Member Stearns for holding this important hearing on the “Business of Stereotypes and Degradation.” I commend this Committee’s leadership in assembling this timely hearing.



Americans have forever enjoyed being entertained, whether through music, movies, or video games. These devices have made their way into the homes of nearly all Americans where music lyrics are mimicked, movie lines are quoted and video game characters are emulated sometimes causing serious bodily harm to our youth.

Through these various media outlets, stereotypes are exaggerated and women are degraded and objectified. Are these lyrics and images a sign of the times – are the producers of these products merely responding to society’s status quo, or is our increasingly tumultuous society causing these offensive trends in entertainment? I believe this is a cyclical problem that raises larger societal issues than what is being addressed with this hearing.



Music is playing a larger part than ever in American society. It is without question that the artists who perform songs with questionable lyrics or suggestive themes pull from the personal experiences in their lives in order to arrive at their final product.

I believe fully in the First Amendment rights provided under the Constitution. Our society is nothing without a high level of respect for this Amendment; without it, we certainly are not free. With that said, I think the artists, with the knowledge that millions of Americans will idolize, imitate, and emulate them, have an obligation to record music, movies and videos in a responsible fashion.



The artists need to know that their positions of power are attractive to our youth, so their influence should be positive. The artists whose music we are exposed to on a daily basis are driven by powerful record labels that

have a fiduciary responsibility to their stockholders to produce what sells. However, the record labels have a larger responsibility – a responsibility to society that they are not sitting idly by allowing these lyrics and music video images from invading impressionable minds.

Studies suggest that exposure to media violence increases levels of aggression, leading to increased crime. Music, movie and video games that promote gang activity, crime, and degradation of women have a direct impact on the way impressionable individuals lead their lives and in some instances these types of offensive media validate their behavior.

The entertainment industry as a whole: artists, actors, record labels, video game designers, and large media conglomerates must work together to help solve the problem of stereotypes and degradation. But responsibility does not terminate with the industry.

Parents, children, and consumers must be vigilant about what they are buying for themselves or for others. The only way to solve the problem of stereotypes and degrading images in the media is to work together – consumers and the industry – to have a positive impact on society.

## **House Increases Access to Investment Capital**

With strong bipartisan support, the House this week approved a measure to expand access to investment capital for small business.

Small Business Investment Expansion Act Of 2007, H.R. 3567, provides reforms to the Small Business Administration (SBA) to assist small business owners, including veterans and women, with obtaining the investment capital necessary to start or grow their operations. SBA's investment programs have been gutted in recent years, resulting in more than \$60 billion in annual unmet capital needs for small businesses. The bill passed by a vote of 325 to 72.



The bill creates a new Angel Investment Program to expand opportunities to obtain seed capital and to help infuse entrepreneurs with this crucial source of financing. Angel investors – individuals who invest in start-up companies – are estimated to account for more than 51,000 entrepreneurial ventures a year and are rapidly becoming a common way for startups to obtain capital.

Specifically, the bill builds the first-ever nationwide network of angel groups and partners SBA with these licensed investor groups that invest in start-up small businesses, providing them with matching financing leverage. This new program provides greater taxpayer protection than the current programs. These programs would work to fill the gaps left by reductions in the SBA's venture capital initiatives.

The bill also ensures that small businesses that receive venture capital are not treated any differently than those entrepreneurs receiving traditional financing. The bill includes safeguards that prevent any individual or entity from gaining an unfair advantage, ensures that the investors themselves are small, and prohibits any large companies from being involved. Finally, the bill improves the surety bond program needed for small businesses to engage in construction projects – raising the maximum allowable bond amount and decreasing fees for borrowers and surety companies.

### Local Choir Performs at CBC ALC

The Eastern North Carolina Mass Choir have only been performing together for a little more than a year, but they sound like they have been together for a lifetime. Directed by Minister Darrell McDonald, who serves as director of the music ministry at Indian Woods Missionary Baptist Church, the choir inspired and reminded us all of why we should be ever thankful for our Lord.



The 60-member choir includes people from all over eastern North Carolina, including Goldsboro, Bethel, Wilson, Greenville, Williamston, Murfreesboro, Ahoskie and all across Bertie County. The choir's mission is not only to perform, but to minister through song because just one song could be the key to reaching a lost soul.



Minister McDonald and the Eastern North Carolina Mass Choir are committed to focusing on the notion that God has commissioned them and controls their destiny. And, because of their deep-felt love for God, they spread the gospel wherever they go.

Eastern North Carolina Mass Choir was invited to perform by the Congressional Black Caucus as part of a four-day legislative conference held in Washington, D.C. this week.

The Congressional Black Caucus' Annual Legislative Conference (ALC) is considered the premier African American conference on policy issues with over 20,000 political activists, students and clergy in attendance. The ALC provides the platform for the 43 African American Members of Congress to share the progress of their work on legislative issues and also allows for the exchange of ideas correlated to policy issues that are of critical concern to their constituents. The conference features expert-led forums on education, health care, the environment, economic development, criminal justice, transportation and international affairs.

The Eastern North Carolina Mass Choir performed with several other choirs at the Gospel Extravaganza held in the Ballroom of the Washington Convention Center on Thursday night.

## Forum Focuses on Combating Poverty

As part of the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference, I held a forum focused on finding strategies to combat poverty.

Eastern North Carolina is among the nation's poorest regions, but the poverty and suffering isn't unique to our region. People are poor, getting poorer and largely being ignored by the federal government all across the country. Elected leaders have a moral obligation to fight for the millions of Americans who are overlooked and suffering each and every day.



Nearly 100 people attended the event and participants included former Congresswoman Eva M. Clayton, North Carolina Institute of Economic Development President Andrea Harris, North Carolina Rural



Economic Development Center Workforce Development Committee Chair Rev. Andy Anderson, Bennett College President Dr. Julianne Malveaux and National Association of Broadcasters Digital Television Transition Director of Public Affairs Myra Dandridge.

The discussion focused on combating rural poverty, the roles that partnerships can play in combating poverty and current legislative initiatives aimed at ending the cycle of poverty.

The unforgivable reality is that more Americans than ever find themselves in need of food, shelter, clothing and health care. We must find more opportunities for cooperation and partnership if we are going to help people who are struggling.