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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. ADERHOLT).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 18, 2003.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROBERT B. ADERHOLT 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 7, 2003, 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 Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EXEMPTIONS

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, throughout history, nothing has more profound impact on the world than the consequences of war; but as we examine that history, we often see the greatest devastation is in its aftermath, starvation, chaos, instability, retribution, unleashing a chain of events that continues centuries later, as we are currently seeing in the Balkans.

The destructive power of today's military weapons and techniques used

to develop them and practice with them can leave in its wake danger for generations to come. The consequences of past military action are not just limited to the mine fields in the Balkans or Asia or Africa. There is a toxic legacy right here in the United States as a result of 2 centuries of testing, training, weapons manufacturing from unexploded bombs to nuclear waste. This affects millions of acres of land, actually in some cases inside city limits to some of the otherwise most pristine countryside in America.

The good news is not only are our Armed Forces the most powerful fighting force the world has ever seen, but they know how to deal with environmental problems. Given the right resources and instructions, they are not just ready, but eager, to do a world-class job of clean up.

The bad news is that as part of its approach to denying problems and avoiding the costs and consequences of its activities, this administration is pursuing policies that would avoid responsibility for environmental impact. For example, just last week the subject of Thursday's hearing in the Committee on Armed Services was a proposal from the administration to exempt the Department of Defense from five key environmental laws from the Clean Air Act to the Endangered Species Act.

These laws not only protect endangered species and eco-systems, they protect the health of people living on and around military bases. If the exemptions were granted, American taxpayers and State and local governments would bear the burden of clean-up costs and face public health risks from toxic contamination resulting from military operations. The evidence shows there is no reasonable case for such exemptions. The environmental laws already allow the Department of Defense to apply for exemptions on a case-by-case basis if they really need it. Both the GAO and EPA Adminis-

trator Whitman have testified that environmental laws have not affected military readiness. There is no evidence that the military has ever been refused an exemption from laws that were necessary and that they sought it.

Even with the current environmental laws in place, sadly, the Department of Defense has too often fallen short of the mark on environmental and public health. A critical area that I have been working on deals with unexploded ordnance: the bombs, missiles, shells that are scattered throughout the United States in all 50 States. We have made progress, but we have got a long way to go. We have millions of acres of current or former military installations spread across the 50 States that contain unknown numbers of high-explosive military munitions that failed to explode when dropped or fired or which were buried for disposal.

In 1998, the Defense Science Board found that we were simply ill equipped to address the unexploded ordnance challenge. We have been working with a bipartisan group of men and women in Congress to address this issue. We have been making headway, but we have got a long way to go. If we were to exempt the Pentagon from its responsibility for environmental clean up, it would be absolutely the wrong direction. Congress instead should be funding and encouraging the clean up, not exempting the Department of Defense from environmental laws.

At the current rate of clean up, it is going to take us hundreds of years to be able to solve this problem. And that is at the current rate of funding. The President's budget just cut \$400 million from the Department of Defense environmental programs.

Putting off the toxic legacy of past military activities means we must delay the ultimate cleanup, we put more families at risk, and we set a terrible precedent as we ask others to obey environmental laws and respect nature at home and abroad.

□ 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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