

Private Michael V. Bailey – Waldorf, Maryland.

Private First Class Raymond J. Faulstich Jr. – Leonardtown, Maryland.

Specialist Jason C. Ford – Bowie, Maryland.

Chief Warrant Officer Thomas J. Gibbons – Prince Frederick, Maryland.

Command Sergeant Major Roger W. Haller – Davidsonville, Maryland.

Sergeant Edelman L. Hernandez – Hyattsville, Maryland.

First Lieutenant Gwilym J. Newman – Waldorf, Maryland.

Second Lieutenant Emily J. Perez – Fort Washington, Maryland.

Staff Sergeant Christopher W. Swanson – Rose Haven, Maryland.

Corporal Matthew P. Wallace – Lexington Park, Maryland.

These are the names of the courageous souls from Maryland's Fifth District who have given the ultimate measure of sacrifice in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

Though they have fallen, they will never be forgotten, and on this Memorial Day we honor them as well as all the servicemen and women, throughout our history, who have given their lives serving others before serving themselves.

And while we mourn the loss of those that have made the ultimate sacrifice, we are comforted by an abiding faith in the fact that they did not die in vain, and that the legacy they have left for future generations is something that will flourish for centuries to come.

On this Memorial Day, we must also renew our efforts to keep our promises to those still with us. At a time when we continue to be engaged in hostilities, let us support and pay tribute to our courageous troops currently serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the globe, who are the veterans of tomorrow.

And let us also pay tribute to the veterans of today – 24 million Americans nationwide, including 470,000 in the state of Maryland. These proud men and women to which we owe so much have fulfilled their duties bravely and honorably, and they deserve nothing less than the support of a nation that recognizes the heroic deeds they have undertaken to protect and promote the freedoms all Americans enjoy.

In working to fulfill the our commitment to our nation's veterans, this Congress continues to make progress on a legislative

agenda aimed at bringing benefits and services for America's veterans in line with the significant sacrifices they have made in service to our country.

This year, the House passed a budget that provides the largest increase in veterans' health care in our nation's history and is supported by all of the major veterans' service organizations. Recognizing that the need for veterans' health care services is only expected to increase as more servicemen and women return from tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, the House has also passed the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act requiring improvements to the military medical care system, as well as other measures to address traumatic brain injury and mental health needs, which are growing problems among returning veterans.

The House has also made strengthening our military and improving military readiness the top priority for the recently passed bipartisan Defense Authorization bill. These investments

in boosting our current force strength and readiness are needed so we Americans can defend our national interests anywhere on the globe, and we can provide the best training, equipment, and deployment conditions for the men and women serving in our Armed Forces.

The new Congress is also keeping our promises to our troops and their survivors. Also in the Defense Authorization is an increase in military pay by 3.5 percent, and a measure that helps the 60,000 survivors and widows of those who have died from service-connected injuries but are currently losing survivor benefits under the Military Families Tax. The bill also takes another step toward ending the Disabled Veterans Tax –expanding special compensation for combat-related disabled retirees who have served at least 15 years.

Unfortunately, the Administration has threatened to veto the bill - objecting to these critical provisions for our troops and their families. We hope this Memorial Day, President Bush will reconsider, and support a bipartisan defense bill that strengthens our military and gives the troops the support that they deserve.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind.

Let us honor their service with actions that fulfill our commitment to our troops and their families – and our veterans – and are

worthy of our grateful nation.

We must celebrate, honor, and remember these courageous and faithful men and women by strengthening our military, improving veterans' health care to keep up with our returning troops, and ending these unfair taxes on military families and disabled military retirees. That is our moral obligation as we honor those who have fallen and offer our heartfelt gratitude to America's veterans and active-duty soldiers on this Memorial Day.