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FULL TEXT

Gen. Dennis Via addresses Legislature as state honors military personnel, veterans

Al.com

February 12, 2014

Leada Gore

Alabama's military took center stage last week in Montgomery.

The Alabama Legislature convened a Joint Session Thursday to pay special tribute to the U.S. Armed Forces. The state's only four-star general, Gen. Dennis Via, Commanding General of Army Materiel Command at Redstone Arsenal, was the featured speaker.

He was joined by members of the state's Military Stability Commission, Alabama National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Perry Smith and Maxwell Air Force Base Commander Lt. Gen. David S. Fadok.

"I can tell you that everyone who wears the uniform considers themselves fortunate - very fortunate - to be part of a special state that celebrates and honors its service members and veterans in such meaningful and significant ways," Via said.

Via also spoke to legislators on the importance of offering employment opportunities to veterans.

"They deserve an opportunity to transition into a good job that will allow them to pursue the American dream they served to protect," Via said. "They are ready to help Alabama companies and organizations improve and grow ... through their selfless service and sacrifice, and especially the service and sacrifice of their families, they certainly have earned it."

Rep. Howard Sanderford, R-Huntsville, presented Via a resolution in honor of Military Appreciation Day. Military service members in attendance were recognized and a moment of silence in memory of fallen troops was observed.

"Our fighting men and women deserve infinite thanks. It is an honor to set aside a day in the Legislature to recognize them," said Lt. Gov. Kay Ivey, who presided over the Joint Session. "Alabama boasts a strong history of supporting our military and it has been my goal since taking office to ensure we continue that legacy."

Alabama is home to more than 11,900 active duty service members, 22,099 Reserve and National Guard personnel and 420,000 veterans, as well as four major military installations: Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Maxwell/Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ft. Rucker in Dale County, and Anniston Army Depot.

Military Appreciation Day is a coordinated effort by the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Military Stability Foundation, the Alabama House of Representatives, and the Alabama Senate.

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Scholarships offer path to attend Churchill Academy

Montgomery Advertiser
February 11, 2014
Paul Sullivan

About 20 thankful students are attending Churchill Academy in east Montgomery as a result of the Alabama Accountability Act of 2013.

Scholarships for Kids Inc., an approved scholarship granting organization (SGO) under the measure, has made the first of \$6.3 million in awards, and Norman Yelder is one of the happy recipients. "I always dreamed of this school," he said of Churchill. "I always wanted to go to this school."

He is a member of the first group of scholarship program students to enroll at Churchill. He started in January and receives about \$6,000 in funds to offset tuition bills. His family does help pay some of the cost, said Lisa Hanlon Schroeder, director and founder of Churchill Academy.

She became aware of the scholarship program last fall and went through the process with the state to be able to accept students. Churchill already had a waiting list of families who had children prepared to come to Churchill, but who didn't have the resources, Schroeder said.

"We brought in 19 children, and we referred to it as their early Christmas presents," she said. "The parents were joyful, and it is satisfying to be able to offer this to the families, who wanted something different for children who may be struggling. The parents were overwhelmed with joy."

Money to pay for the scholarships has been donated to Scholarships for Kids by about 750 individuals, and another 100 businesses, said Jenny McCain, a partner at Maynard, Cooper and Gale in Birmingham who also works with the granting organization. She said so far about 1,000 students in low-income families have been helped through the initiative.

Churchill is a fully-accredited private school for children with mild to moderate learning disabilities. Grades run from K to 12, and Schroeder said the children have a lot of potential if they are taught in the correct manner. She said Churchill focuses on small class sizes, a customized curriculum and individual education plan.

The scholarship project also purchased about \$1,000 in books for the school during a Barnes & Noble book fair. Schroeder would like to thank state leaders who had a hand in making the concept a reality. "Thank you so much for giving these children a chance to reach their potential," she said. "I would hug you if I could."

To get more information about Scholarships for Kids, Inc. and to learn how to become a donor, visit www.alabamakids.net, or contact McCain at 205-254-1210, or jennymccain@me.com.

Scholarships for Kids Inc., founded in March of 2013, is a scholarship granting organization under the Accountability Act. Scholarships for Kids partners statewide with 32 schools, including Churchill and Montgomery Christian School in Montgomery. A summary of the tax

credit scholarship program created by the Accountability Act and regulations may be found at www.revenue.alabama.gov/accountability.

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Fincher receives University of Notre Dame education award for work on Alabama Accountability Act

Al.com

February 11, 2014

Sally Pearsall Ericson

MOBILE, Alabama – A representative from the Alliance for Catholic Education presented the University of Notre Dame Champion for Education Award to State Rep. Chad Fincher, R-Semmes, during a visit from the Fighting for Our Children's Future National Bus Tour on Feb. 7.

The Rev. Sean McGraw, a Notre Dame-based priest who co-founded ACE in 1993, made the presentation, praising Fincher for his sponsorship of the Alabama Accountability Act, which offers tax credits to help parents of children in “failing” public schools pay for private school.

The law also put up \$25 million to give residents and businesses a tax credit for donations to organizations that grant scholarships to low-income students.

The act’s provision for school choice “gives school systems unprecedented flexibility to innovate and improve, and ultimately makes the promise of a high quality education available to every student in the state,” McGraw said.

Fincher also sponsored the Students First Act of 2011, which made it easier to discipline and fire public school teachers.

The Champion for Education Award recognizes individuals and groups in the cities being visited by the National Bus Tour who have made important contributions in making educational excellence available to children from all backgrounds, according to a media release from ACE.

The bus tour is a cross-country, year-long effort to bring attention to the importance of education and the mission of Catholic schools in the lives of children and families, and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of ACE’s founding, the release said.

Mobile was one of 10 cities to be visited this month on the second leg of a tour spanning 50 cities by this spring. The bus visited Pensacola on Monday.

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EDITORIAL: AEA serves system, not the students

Tuscaloosa News

February 11, 2014

Leave it to the Alabama Education Association to knock efforts to help give children an opportunity for a better education.

AEA lawyer Bobby Segall said businesses and individuals who donate money to scholarship funds and get tax credits in return really aren't all that generous. The donors are getting back a dollar in tax credits for every dollar they contribute.

"There is no philanthropy," Segall said.

Perhaps these businesses and individuals wouldn't be contributing to scholarship funds if they couldn't get something back. We have no way of knowing. But is that really the issue? Isn't it a bit more important that some Alabama children might get a chance to escape failing public schools and get a better education?

Then again, is anyone really surprised when children aren't the focus of an Alabama Education Association argument? For decades, the organization has fought reforms that could have made Alabama's schools better.

The AEA is suing to block the 2013 Alabama Accountability Act, which allows parents of children who attend failing public schools to get up to \$3,500 annually in tax credits to help them send their children to private schools or transfer to public schools that aren't labeled as failing.

The law also allows for the establishment of scholarship funds that businesses and individuals can contribute to in exchange for tax credits. The amount of tax credits is capped at \$25 million. The Alabama Department of Revenue says that contributors reached the cap in 2013.

Maybe these contributors aren't as altruistic as some might have you believe. But how would you characterize AEA's efforts to stop children from escaping bad circumstances and perhaps finding a path to a better life? Is turf protection really admirable?

We don't like the sneaky way the Alabama Legislature passed the Alabama Accountability Act. We aren't sure whether it will deliver as promised. But we'd like to give it a chance to work. The AEA's concern is that it just might work too well

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Summary of action in Alabama Legislature

The Associated Press

February 11, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A summary of action in the Alabama Legislature on Tuesday, the 12th meeting day of the regular session:

HOUSE:

—Approved a bill to require teens to get parental consent to use a tanning bed. Goes to Senate.

—Approved a bill that related to regulations for funeral parlors. Goes to Senate.

SENATE:

—Approved a bill to ban smoking in many public places and businesses. Goes to House.

—Approved a bill to make it a misdemeanor to intentionally use a drone to harass someone hunting or fishing legally. Goes to House.

—Completed passing bills to extend the life of several state agencies, including the Alabama Surface Mining Commission and Alabama Construction Recruitment Institute. Go to House.

AGENDA:

—Senate Finance and Taxation-Education Committee meets at 10:30 a.m. in room 727 of the Statehouse to consider a bill reducing estimated state income tax payments by small businesses.

—Senate Judiciary Committee meets at 1 p.m. Wednesday in room 325 to consider revisions to the Open Meetings Act.

—House Financial Services Committee meets at 9 a.m. in room 428 to consider new regulations for payday lenders.

—House Ways and Means-Education Committee meets at 9 a.m. in room 617 to consider tax credits for dual enrollment scholarships.

—House Constitution, Campaigns and Elections Committee meets at 9:15 a.m. in room 123 to consider term limits for legislators.

—Senate meets at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

—House meets at 3:30 p.m. Wednesday.

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Tracking the 2014 session: Senate passes Smoke-Free Air Act

Al.com

February 11, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Smokers could not light up in public places and workplaces, with some exceptions, under a bill that cleared the Alabama Senate on Tuesday.

Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, has tried for years to pass legislation to restrict smoking in public because of the dangers of second-hand smoke. Her bill, SB 168, is called the Smoke-Free Air Act.

The Senate approved it by vote of 21-8, after adding amendments by Sen. Bill Holtzclaw, R-Madison. Figures opposed his amendment to exempt private clubs. Her bill exempted existing private clubs under a grandfather clause, but not those started after the law takes effect.

The bill goes to the House.

Today was the 12th meeting day of the legislative session, which can have up to 30 meeting days.

What they did:

The House:

-- Passed HB 155 by Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana, to end the Public Service Commission's jurisdiction over consumer complaints about telecommunications. Goes to Senate.

-- Passed HB 6 by Rep. Becky Nordgen, R-Gadsden, to say that doctors and dentists could not be required to accept any public or private health insurance. Goes to Senate.

-- Passed HB 254 by Rep. Ron Johnson, R-Sylacauga, to regulate tanning facilities and limit the use of ultraviolet tanning beds by teens.

Senate:

-- Finished periodic reviews of state agencies, called sunset bills.

-- Passed SB 240 by Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, to make it a crime to use drones to harass hunters and fishermen.

Coming up:

-- A House committee will hold a public hearing on HB 281, the "Alabama Student Religious Liberty Act," which says, in part, that students can express their religious beliefs in academic work.

-- A House committee will hold public hearings on HB 145 and HB 406, which would lower the interest rates allowed on payday loans and car title loans.

-- A Senate committee will hold a public hearing on a SB 191, which would amend the Open Meetings Act to prohibit public boards from meeting in small groups or pairs to avoid notifying the public.

The Senate convenes at 3 p.m. Wednesday, and the House at 3:30 p.m.

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Lawmaker: Feds requiring higher fines on pipeline violations in state

Times Daily

February 11, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — A bill from Rep. Lynn Greer, R-Rogersville, would increase civil fines for natural gas companies and others handling hazardous liquids that violate pipeline safety rules.

Proponents of the bill said it's not because of excessive violations — no fines have been levied in the past year — but a desire to keep more than \$1 million in federal support.

"If we don't increase the fines, we could lose federal funding," said Greer, chairman of the House Committee on Transportation, Utilities and Infrastructure.

The committee approved the bill Tuesday; it now goes to the full House.

The Public Service Commission inspects pipelines. Under existing law, fines for safety violations are capped at \$10,000 per violation and are not to exceed a total of \$500,000. Greer's House Bill 301 would increase that to \$200,000 per violation, not to exceed \$2 million.

Public Service Commission President Twinkle Cavanaugh said the commission's goal isn't to fine companies, but to get them to take corrective actions.

"That's what we want, to get them to comply with regulations," Cavanaugh said Tuesday.

Greer said the amounts in his bill are caps, not requirements.

"But we wouldn't have to fine them that much," Greer said. "A little gas company, you don't want to put them out of business, especially if they're owned by a municipality or a county."

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Alabama House says teens need permission to tan

The Associated Press

February 11, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - The state House of Representatives has voted to ban teens from using tanning beds unless they have a parent's written consent.

Representatives approved the proposal Tuesday by a vote of 92-2. The bill now moves to the Alabama Senate.

Teens age 16 and 17 would have to have a parent's written consent to use a tanning bed.

Fifteen-year-olds would need to have a parent's written consent, and have the parent present at the tanning facility during the tanning sessions.

Children 14 and younger would be banned from using tanning beds unless it was prescribed by a doctor.

The proposal would also require all people to use protective eyewear when using a tanning bed.

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Alabama House passes bill that some lawmakers say would open door for discrimination against public health plans

Montgomery Advertiser

February 12, 2014

Kala Kachmar

The House of Representatives passed a bill that some legislators fear would eventually cause problems if enough doctors start opting out of public health insurance plans.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Becky Nordgren, R-Gadsden, would prohibit the state from withholding licenses to physicians, chiropractors, optometrists and dentists for not participating in any public or private health insurance plan, health care system or public service initiative.

Nordgren said the bill's purpose is ensuring that the licensing process is based solely on merit.

She said Alabama doctors currently can decide which insurance plans to accept or deny, but in Massachusetts doctors won't be issued licenses if they don't accept certain health plans.

"We do not want a board of some sort to (say) that before (a doctor) can get a license, they'll have to agree to take a certain insurance," she said.

But Democrats argued that the bill could lead to discrimination of patients with certain plans.

Rep. Pebblin Warren, D-Shorter, said the bill sends the message that the Legislature is trying to protect a sector of the medical field from having to provide services to people in this state.

"I know you're trying to be proactive, but I don't see this as urgent right now," Warren said. She said the bill sends a bad message to everyone in the state, especially patients.

Rep. John England, D-Tuscaloosa, said a lot of doctors aren't accepting Medicaid right now for various reasons. He said he can understand why any state would want to condition licenses on accepting all insurance plans.

"We want to make sure everyone is covered and has access to good doctors," he said. "I don't see anything wrong with saying you don't want to discriminate against people."

England said the bill would be troublesome if it got to the point where people couldn't find Alabama doctors to accept Medicaid.

Nordgren said the bill has nothing to do with allowing doctors to exclude public plans, and that she sees signs all the time saying doctors don't accept certain plans. She said the bill is simply to ensure that physicians aren't denied licenses based on the insurance plans they choose to accept.

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Smoking restrictions approved by Alabama Senate

The Associated Press

February 11, 2014

MONTGOMERY | The Alabama Senate has again passed a bill to ban smoking in many workplaces and businesses.

Democratic Sen. Vivian Davis Figures guided her bill through the Senate on a 21-8 vote Tuesday. Figures has passed similar legislation in the Senate before, only to have it die in the House. Figures is uncertain how it will fare in the House this time.

Her bill bans smoking in most businesses, but bars and private clubs are excluded. It also does not affect smoking in homes, unless the homes provide day-care services.

Figures said she has been working for 16 years to reduce the public's exposure to secondhand smoke. She started by getting smoking stopped in the Statehouse in Montgomery.

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Gov. Robert Bentley open to restoration of former prisoners' voting rights

The Associated Press

February 11, 2014

MONTGOMERY, Alabama — Alabama's governor says he's always believed someone should get their voting rights restored after serving their full sentences.

Gov. Robert Bentley reacted Tuesday to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder calling on Alabama and 10 other states to do a better job of restoring voting rights to ex-felons.

Bentley says he's willing to look at a reasonable request for restoration of voting rights for people who are trying to become productive citizens again.

In Alabama, people convicted of felonies, except driving under the influence and drug possession, lose voting rights.

Most can apply to the state parole board to get their voting rights restored after finishing their prison sentences and probation, and paying fines and restitution. Some violent crimes require ex-felons to apply to the parole board for a pardon first.

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NRA president at Alabama Statehouse today

Times Daily

February 12, 2014

Mary Sell

MONTGOMERY — Alabama native and current National Rifle Association president Jim Porter will be at the Alabama Statehouse today.

Among other things, Porter will hear a House resolution commending him for his work with the pro-gun organization. The resolution is by Rep. Johnny Mack Morrow, D-Red Bay. The NRA was supportive last year of Morrow's bill to allow armed, volunteer security forces in Franklin County schools.

Porter was named NRA president in May 2013.

He's a Birmingham attorney and his father was NRA president from 1951-1961, the Associated Press previously reported.

Porter has made national headlines for some of his remarks. He's called President Barack Obama a "fake president," Attorney General Eric Holder "rabidly un-American" and the U.S. Civil War the "War of Northern Aggression."

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No joke: Alabama Senate passes bill to protect hunters from harassment by drones

Al.com

February 11, 2014

Mike Cason

MONTGOMERY, Alabama --- Sen. Roger Bedford said he thought it was a joke when he first heard that drones had been used to harass hunters.

"I was at a legislative conference with some fellow legislators that hunt and fish like I do," said Bedford, a Democrat from Russellville. "It came up in a conversation that one of the states had been having problems with this. At first I thought they were kidding.

"But animal rights activist groups are using this to disrupt people who are legally and ethically hunting and fishing and that's just wrong. And as a lifelong hunter, I don't want to see that happening in Alabama. "

The Alabama Senate today passed SB 240 by Bedford, which would make it a misdemeanor to intentionally use a drone to harass someone who is legally hunting or fishing.

The bill defines a drone as any aerial vehicle without a human operator.

Read SB 240.pdf

Bedford said he thought about eight other states had passed similar laws. He said he had not heard of any Alabama hunters being harassed by drones.

“But I think it’s just a matter of time if we don’t get something enacted into the law,” the veteran lawmaker said.

Bedford said the law was narrowly written so that it would not affect the use of drones for other purposes, such as showing real estate or inspecting power lines.

“This is just a classic case of the law catching up with technology,” Bedford said. “As these drones have become more and more sophisticated you can operate them further and further away.”

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Mary Scott Hunter calls for 'truce' in Common Core fight on Alabama school board

Al.com

February 11, 2014

Challen Stephens

Mary Scott Hunter says it's time for the members of the Alabama state school board to call a truce and stop fighting over Common Core.

"Both sides of this debate can claim victories," said Hunter in a recent interview with AL.com.

"My opinion, we need to declare a truce on this and move on to other important things."

But the answer from fellow GOP officials is clear. The battle will continue.

"We haven't done anything significant," said board member Betty Peters this week. "We changed the name (from Common Core), but we haven't changed any significant content."

Hunter, the Republican board member for northeast Alabama, said the state board has taken steps to distance itself from the creators of Common Core.

Hunter pointed out the state school board in November rescinded the memorandum of agreement with the authors of the national standards. Last month the state board voted to remove any link to the list of national exemplars, the so-called "de facto national reading list" opposed by critics.

But opponents of Common Core voted against the efforts to cut ties.

"It's misleading," said Peters, who represents Dothan and southeast Alabama.

She compared the recent board votes to renegotiating the terms of an engagement after you've already been married.

We've been giving parents a false of sense of security that (their children are) ready to go, and they're not.

Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards contain 100 percent of the national Common Core standards. And Peters said many of the standards are grade inappropriate.

Peters said removing a link to the list containing suggested reading materials doesn't forbid the use of those books. So she voted against it last month. "I do not want to confuse the public."

"If those books that I found offensive are still allowed for the local system to use then we have a problem," said Peters. She mentioned *The Bluest Eye*, *In the Time of Butterflies*, *Dreaming In Cuban* and *Things Fall Apart*.

betty peters.jpg

Betty Peters, District 2, Alabama State Board of Education. (File photo)

"These have been considered controversial outside of the Bible Belt," said Peters. "I would think we should have a review of them."

But Hunter said business-minded Republicans demand that Alabama raise standards.

"I agree with Mary Scott," said Dr. Charles Elliott of Decatur, also a Republican member of the board. He said the Common Core debate has distracted his party from taking on other important issues, such as high infant mortality rates.

"I'm proud to be a Republican, but my party is so worried about listening to the voices on the Common Core," he said on Tuesday. "The same misconceptions, fears haven't changed in three years."

Elliott acknowledged recent criticism about students being discouraged by mediocre marks under new, more rigorous academic standards.

"We're not giving out as many As," he said. "We've been giving parents a false sense of security that (their children are) ready to go, and they're not."

He said Alabama had set the bar too low. "We're going to keep the Common Core standards because we are finally raising the bar," said Elliott.

charles elliott.JPG

Alabama State Board of Education President Charles Elliott. (File photo/Alabama Media Group)

"It's not the standards per se," said Peters, who said some of the wording and formats are confusing to students. She said good students are being told they are not doing an adequate job and that's counterproductive.

Republican board member Tracy Roberts in an email this week said she agreed with Hunter that the board has taken adequate steps to address concerns. Roberts also mentioned the board has taken steps to protect student information.

Hunter, who has been censured by the Madison County GOP for her support of Common Core, said she understood the concerns about student data.

She said she also understood concerns about the list of exemplars, because that list was not vetted by Alabama educators or committees. "It was actually a point where I thought the opponents have a valid point."

She said she assumed a step away from Common Core would win over Peters and Stephanie Bell, both of whom have opposed Common Core. "I think these votes are going to go forward and it's going to be unanimous and it's not."

"I don't understand what they want," said Hunter, who has repeatedly said flat-out repeal of Common Core would weaken Alabama schools.

Ella Bell, president pro tem of the state school board and a Democrat who represents Montgomery and many of the Black Belt counties, said she welcomes the higher standards because something has to change to improve public schooling in her district.

"I'm willing to try anything that has the stamped approval of learned Alabama educators," said Bell.

Yet it's early and the jury is still out on Common Core.

In his column in this week, Alabama's top teacher lobbyist, Dr. Henry Mabry, also raises concerns. Hardly an arch conservative, Mabry instead argues that teachers aren't being given adequate training or time to develop new methods to meet new standards.

Mabry, executive secretary of the Alabama Education Association, argues teachers shouldn't be threatened or punished for questioning the removal of proven teaching methods in favor of the latest strategy.

"We saw how No Child Left Behind was not the elixir after it was showcased as the be-all and end-all for public education," wrote Mabry in the AEA Journal, "and if the Common Core Initiative concerns are not addressed then it will be doomed just like NCLB."

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Roby, GOP's new Benghazi report absolves military of blame

Montgomery Advertiser

February 12, 2014

Mary Orndorff Troyan

WASHINGTON — Administration officials should have anticipated the terrorist threat to the American consulate in Benghazi before it was attacked in 2012, according to a Republican analysis released Tuesday.

The report from GOP members of a House subcommittee formerly chaired by Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, says the White House overstated its security preparations around the

globe before the incident, which took place on the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

“We were woefully unprepared militarily when it came to what assets we had that were available once it was clear this was an attack,” Roby said.

Roby chaired the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations during its review of the military response to the attack, which killed four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

The report is similar to one issued last spring by several congressional committees, but contains more detail from military personnel in Washington about the attack, which stretched over seven hours at two facilities in Benghazi. Roby’s subcommittee largely absolved the U.S. military of blame, saying the Pentagon did everything it could that night with the resources it had.

“The lack of communication from Washington to those on the ground in the weeks and months leading up to the attack is devastating,” Roby said.

Roby’s subcommittee did not have oversight of the intelligence or diplomatic decisions. The report instead blames the national security staff for not ordering more military resources to the region after other attacks on Western facilities in previous months.

“If this public information was insufficient to cause grave concern to policy makers, those privy to classified intelligence evaluations should have been even more alarmed,” the report states. It also faults the administration for beefing up security in Yemen without doing the same in Libya.

Pentagon officials testified there was no information about a specific imminent threat in Benghazi.

The report acknowledges the Defense Department cannot respond immediately to “every conceivable global contingency.”

“Ensuring that preparations exist for some likely possibilities is not to be confused with the ability to anticipate all prospective circumstances, especially in highly volatile regions,” the GOP committee members wrote.

Although Democratic members of the House Armed Services Committee participated in hearings and interviews during the subcommittee’s investigation, they did not sign on to Tuesday’s report.

In a joint statement, Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the full committee, and Rep. Niki Tsongas of Massachusetts, top Democrat on the subcommittee, said they hope the report will end the GOP investigation.

“While Republicans in both the House and Senate have continued to attack the motivations and actions of those who serve in our country’s national security apparatus, this Republican-prepared

report clearly states that the Department of Defense responded appropriately, quickly, to the best of its ability at that time, and that no ‘stand down’ order was ever issued,” they said.

Democrats also endorsed the report’s conclusions that the Pentagon has appropriately changed some procedures based on lessons learned from Benghazi. For example, more military guards have been posted at diplomatic facilities and the Pentagon has rearranged resources to respond faster if they are attacked.

Smith and Tsongas argued that Republicans were still searching for evidence of a scandal, unlike in 1983, when two attacks in Lebanon killed 304 U.S. personnel stationed there.

“Afterwards, there were no calls for an impeachment of President Reagan, or an extensive political sideshow like the one Republicans have orchestrated for more than a year,” they said.

Roby left the Armed Services Committee to take a seat on the House Appropriations Committee.