EXXON’S EXTRAORDINARY PROFITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, tonight I would like to place on the Rec ord the extraordinary profits of one corporation registered with the New York Stock Exchange by the name of Exxon.

Today, news reports indicate that Exxon, the world’s largest publicly traded company, has posted the largest U.S. quarterly profits in world history: nearly $10 billion. That is $10 billion in just 3 months.

We know where that money came from. It came from all of us. It came from the American people. Quarterly profits for Exxon are up 73 percent since last year. The revenue of this company alone will ring in at over $100 billion this year.

Now how big is $100 billion? Well, $100 billion is about one-quarter of what the U.S. Department of Defense spends in 1 year. But $100 billion is more than all of the following U.S. Departments spend in a year combined. The whole U.S. Department of Education, all of the student loans, all of the help for our schools and children and the country, it is a drop in the bucket compared to the profits of Exxon.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, that is small potatoes compared to what Exxon earns. The Department of Transportation, with all of those bridges across the United States that have to be fixed, some in rural areas, certainly in the big cities, crumbling infrastructure, well, Exxon’s profits are a lot larger than the Department of Transportation spends in a year.

NASA, poor NASA, they only have about $16 billion a year to explore outer space and the heavens beyond us. If you add them all up: Department of Education, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, and NASA, they do not equal the revenues of Exxon.

Now the interesting thing about Exxon, it is the world’s largest publicly traded company, but it has a special deal. Guess where most of its oil comes from? Saudi Arabia. Have no doubt, with the special licensing agreement signed with that company, a lot of that money drawn off of this marketplace will go to education of our children, it will not go to fix up our roads, it is not going to help clean up our environment, and it certainly will not take us as far as Saturn.

No, a lot of those dollars will be used to hire mercenaries to protect the Saudi oil interests, which is one of the major places this country imports petroleum from because we cannot figure out how to get it right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, $9.9 billion in one quarter. The large share of those funds could do if you did not put them in Exxon’s pockets. Think what they could do in your community. Take a program, a teeny program like the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, which spends not $9.9 billion, but $15 million a year. That is pocket change to Exxon. It gives little coupons to senior citizens across our country who cannot afford to pay the rising gas prices and cannot afford to pay their heating bills this winter. It gives them $20 a month in the summer to go to farmers’ markets in their communities to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. We cannot put it in all of the States. Only 28 States have this program, and not in every county.

But if you ever watch one of these senior citizens take one of those farmers’ market coupons and stand in front of fresh fruits and vegetables and struggle with the decision of whether they are going to buy raspberries for the first time in 25 years, what is more important, Mr. Speaker, more profits for Exxon or a little bit to help the senior citizens of America who want to buy fresh fruits and vegetables?

Seniors need all that much that they literally buy it at the end of the day when the farmers reduce their price, and they turn it into soups and stews and put it in their freezers or their friends’ freezers so they can have soups during the winter time made out of fresh vegetables that have been frozen.

Mr. Speaker, $9.9 billion. I am going to write a letter to the president of Exxon. I do not even know who the person is. I am going to ask if they would take $15 million out of the $9.9 billion in profits they just made to double the senior farmers’ market nutrition program in our country. Would they even really miss it? How does Saudi Arabia use all of that money? And why do they need all of those mercenaries to protect their oil wells? Why is that country so unstable? Why do they have to use all of that money? And why do they really miss it? How does Saudi Arabia spend in a year.

Mr. Speaker, $9.9 billion. I am going to write a letter to the president of Exxon. I do not even know who the person is. I am going to ask if they would take $15 million out of the $9.9 billion in profits they just made to double the senior farmers’ market nutrition program in our country. Would they even really miss it? How does Saudi Arabia use all of that money? And why do they need all of those mercenaries to protect their oil wells? Why is that country so unstable? Why do they have to take money out of our pockets through Exxon every single day?

It is really unbelievable that one corporation could make that much money off this marketplace in one quarter and this Congress does nothing.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP: CALLING FOR AN INDEPENDENT KATRINA COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN). Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to come before the House. As the Members know, the 30-Something Working Group, calling for an Independent Katrina Commission, was established here in the House to dictate the response to natural disasters and a possible terrorist attack.

We have to make things better to protect Americans. It is almost like I feel like an insurance salesman saying that we have to have insurance not after the fact, but before the fact. And if we know we have shortcomings, then we need to deal with that in a very effective way.

Being an “evacuee” of Hurricane Wilma due to the fact that there is very little power in south Florida, there are gas lines, Mr. Speaker, I hold up here the front page of the Washington Post that has many people here in south Florida, as a matter of fact in West Palm Beach, standing for hours for gas because we could not get the generators running at Port Everglades to be able to pump the gas to allow many of the stations to have gas and power. These are things that we need to work on.

Governor Bush jumped in front of the train because folks were getting upset with the Federal response once again as it relates to getting the simple things like ice, water, and food down to the affected area. There was a lot of chest-beating prior to the storm, saying, we have 2,000 FEMA personnel in place; we have a set number of trucks that are lined up in Florida, re-posi-tioned, to go in and provide ice water and food. And in many cases the gen-
there just went through a major hurricane waiting 8, 7 hours just for 1 bag of ice and 3 jugs of water, and in some cases nothing showed up, and folks had to go back home.

That is why we need an independent commission, not just now, not just a month and a half after Katrina, but there are problems that have relationships with the President to say, blame me, I am the State of Florida, blame me for the shortcomings of the response. We know in hurricanes, natural disasters, that there are going to be shortcomings. But that is the very simple things that have to be provided, they must be provided. And the reason why they were not provided is that the supplies were not there, period, dot.

FEMA was in charge of making sure that those supplies made it to said location. The truck drivers were not hired by the State of Florida, but were hired by FEMA. And I think it is important that we look at it for what it is.

We do not have to have a commission for every natural disaster or event that takes place here in the United States, but we have a House resolution that, Mr. Speaker, will be part of a discharge petition here in the House, and I want to bring their attention, that so that everyone understands what a discharge petition is.

Basically, we are using the rules of the House to call this resolution up to the floor to discharge it, and we need a said number of signatures to be able to pull it up on the floor so that the House can take a vote. And if we do not have some Members of the majority side to see fit to have an independent Katrina Commission that 81 percent of Americans are in approval of, then we are failing to meet our obligations.

We know that we have problems. The Department of Homeland Security telling people in my district to be patient 72 hours after the storm, saying, we will get it. We will get it. Well, that is the reason why we have it. We are supposed to be prepared for these events, but we are not, and we are not even willing to correct ourselves. So that is in place as it relates to the Democratic response.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate his yielding to me. Just so that our kids and our grandkids are going to look back and be able to say, I think we did something, to look to this body and say, What have you done to prevent this? What have you done to improve the emergency management execution in the United States of America? And we are saying on record here five times a week somehow, at some point, something is going to happen in America that is going to be more tragic than these natural disasters, and we are not going to know how to respond. And our kids and our grandkids are going to look back and say, Did you do anything to prevent this? What have you done to correct yourselves?

And we are asking people at home to contact us, housedemocrats.gov/katrina, and become a citizen cosponsor of H.R. 3764, become a citizen cosponsor, and I think we have over 40,000 citizen cosponsors for this. Get on this Website, housedemocrats.gov/katrina, become a citizen cosponsor so that we can become prepared for a possible terrorist attack that may happen in the United States, another natural disaster that may happen in the United States. We will be ready, and then down the line we will be able to look back, and thank you for the improvement.

We watch the game film the next day, and we see what we did right and what we did wrong, but at the end of the day, we can say we have done our job. We have put the microscope up to the problem. We have looked at it, put the sunshine on it, and figured out what we did wrong.

And it takes courage. I mean, it is not easy to critique oneself. And that is what we are asking this Congress to do, have the courage to do the right thing: Get an independent commission here.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, revisiting my time here in the House, in charge of the committee down here to oversee what is happening, the head of the RNC, because this has become political.

And what we want to say to the American people, Mr. Speaker, is that Democrats want an opportunity to govern this place because our friends on the other side do not know how to govern. They have been in charge now in the House since 1994. They have control of the Senate, they have control of the White House, and they do not know how to govern. And we need to be prepared for not only natural disasters, but potential terrorist attacks to the United States of America.

And we need to do what we did with the 9/11 Commission, an independent commission, independent of all of the nonsense that happens in this body that has gotten us to a point where the Republican majority does not know how to govern. We need an independent commission with an outside Democrat and an outside Republican, bipartisan, where they can subpoena people, oversee what happened for Katrina, oversee Wilma, oversee Rita, and figure out what we need to do, because at some point, at some point, something is going to happen in America that is going to be more tragic than these natural disasters, and we are not going to know how to respond. And our kids and our grandkids are going to look back and say, Did you do anything to prevent this? What have you done to correct yourselves?
I go on the White House Website. I have the Website page here. No mention of an independent or any evaluation of what the failures were during Hurricane Katrina, and we also have the Website that has not changed on the partisan cooperation that is here in the House, because I think it is important for us to identify that so that we do not have to continue to have Groundhog Day all over again.

One last point, Mr. Speaker, while we are on this issue here. The gentleman asks (Ms. Wasserman Schultz) and I talked last night about the fact that we were here pushing for this commission week after week. I mentioned that. And we shared with not only the Members, but also Americans, Mr. Speaker, the fact that it could be them next, victims of a poor, short response or an inadequate response.

Littlley did we know at that time that we would be victims of the shortcomings of the fact that we say we are ready, but we are not really ready or really prepared; and in some cases we are saying we we saw how we have trucks in certain locations and they are not there, do we need to get prima facia proof that they were there? These are the questions that my constituents are asking.

So I want to share with Members that this independent commission is very important, to make sure that one day it may be you and your constituents going through this and you are going to say, Gee, you know, it is amazing that we cannot even get a truck to come in here with water. We talked about last night the fact that the terrorists are not going to call up and say, Hey, I want you guys to get prepared. I am going to carry out an attack in another month or so, you need new equipment and pre-positioning.

That is the reason why the 9/11 recommendations need to be fully implemented. That is the reason why we need a Katrina Commission to look at the lack of response we had on the biggest natural disaster that took place on U.S. soil and the Federal, State and local response to that. That is very, very important. It is not an indictment document; it is a document to make sure that we prevent loss of life in the future, Mr. Ryan of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, he is absolutely right. I think the gentleman makes a great point. This is important. This goes beyond Katrina. The independent commission that we want goes beyond Katrina.

We had a situation in Ohio a year or so ago where a potential terrorist was planning an attack in Columbus. You are in the middle of Ohio, it was something about a shopping mall. The gentleman was stopped and held, and I do not even know what the status is right now. But this was in Ohio. It is not just the Gulf States or Florida. Katrina and the independent commission, these are all the editorials that have been written in support all over the country. I think a lot of the editorial boards understand what we are trying to say here, and they are being very supportive.

We talk about an independent commission. I want to read a little bit from the Houston Chronicle in Texas, a little bit of what they say about trying to fix the problem: “The most promising option is an independent commission, as recommended by the panel of the September 11 problem. This is great, because this puts a little meat on the bone. It should be headed by national figures of unassailable independence and credibility such as former President Jimmy Carter, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.”

We are talking about Republicans, but just to be independent of the day-to-day politics that go on in this Chamber. I am telling you it needs to compromise. This is an issue that has long-term ramifications, and we have an obligation.

We come here early in January every other year and we put our hand on the Bible and we have an obligation to make this government run effectively and efficiently. A lot of hard-working people pay a lot of tax dollars that come to us, and then we invest it to improve the quality of their lives.

Part of that is to make sure they are safe. So when we had all these problems with body armor, where their kids, their sons and daughters were going over; we wanted to make sure they have the proper body armor and the up- armored Humvees; and we fought through the 30-something Group and the Democrats and put enough pressure on where we finally got that problem fixed. It is a whole other issue all by itself, but we want to war without the proper equipment.

But we have a responsibility here to make sure that this government runs efficiently. A component of that is emergency management services, which, as we found, became very apparent in the past few months. So we have this obligation; and we are trying, the 30-something Group, the Democratic Party, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Pelosi), we are trying to move this of politics into an independent commission, get Sandra Day O’Connor, get Colin Powell, get some good, solid Republicans who are going to be independent and do what is best for the country, because time and time again, unfortunately, my friend, the Republicans continue to prove their ineptness, their inability to govern; and we have a responsibility as the minority party, as the opposition party, to provide alternative views, and we want an opportunity to run the government.

We proved in 1993 with not one Republican vote that we could balance the budget and handle those difficult decisions, and that vote in particular led to the greatest economic expansion in the history of the United States of America.

Our friends on the other side are not only inept in trying to administer their emergency services, they appoint all their cronies to the top positions in FEMA, all friends of friends of a college roommate who gives a lot to the Republican Party, which led to poor execution of emergency services. Their party, the Republican Party, some other precedence for the people who govern this Chamber than the country, and they have proved that time and time again. Party over country. What the Democrats are trying to say is pick the country over the party, Mr. MEEK of Florida, Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, the gentleman is 110 percent right. I think every day Republicans want to see, and Democrats and Independents and even folks that are not voting in America, they want to see leadership that is going to see leadership on behalf of the country. Veterans want to see the flag that they fought for and that some of their friends and comrades died for, that it is not caught up in what we call this culture of corruption and cronyism.

We want to talk about cronyism for a minute, Mr. Michael “Brownie,” I am not one to say it is his fault as it relates to staying on with FEMA for 60 days, and then the Secretary of Homeland Security, I am waiting to have a conversation with him on why he would extend his contract at the salary he was making as director of FEMA for another 30 days.

The reason given for doing that is that we need to learn from Director Brown, or Brownie, the President calls him Brownie, we need to learn from him so that we can know more about what happened in Katrina. Now, if you could not get it in the first 60 days, he was only in charge for about maybe 5 or 7 days, thanks to the fact that we were waiting for the Democratic Leader first called for his resignation because we saw that we had someone that did not have the experience.

The fact he is on for 60 days, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, I am waiting to have a conversation with him on why he would extend it for 30 more days at taxpayers’ expense.

Now, folks went into their pockets and said, Well, we are going to help you to save another 30 days, that is on them. I do not have a problem with that. I do have a problem with the fact that we are rewarding him in confidence and cronyism with the taxpayer dollar.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. $148,000. Mr. MEEK of Florida. $148,000. Mr. RYAN of Ohio. $148,000. Talk about rewarding negative behavior. Do you do that with your kids? Your kids come home, they took a spelling test, got a D, do you throw them 30? Good job, Kendrick. Go out and get another
one. That is what we are doing. We are reinforcing bad behavior.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time once again, well, I can tell you, the part that I am more concerned about is the fact that this is a high-profile individual within FEMA. What we have on an everyday basis with someone that really is not competent in Federal Government and is known to the managers? I guess it is okay, because when you think about the culture of corruption and cronyism, it comes from the top, then it must be okay. If it is all right with the Vice President, then it is okay. That means it is okay with the Department Secretaries and Under Secretaries and the regional directors. So that is the reason why we have to cut it off.

Mr. Speaker, do you know something? Not a mumbling word from the majority on this. Not a mumbling word. Better yet, we have folks coming to the floor, and we started talking about the needs to the needs of Americans saying we have to have offsets in Medicaid, we have got to have offsets in possible Medicare, that is not off the table.

What I mean by “offsets” is the fact we have to take money from those programs to respond to the Katrina-Rita issue. We have to do that. But, better yet, we have an example of an individual that I think pretty much all Americans, and I am pretty sure that almost everyone here in the House, agree with the fact that he did not know exactly what he was doing.

I do not blame Mr. Brown. I do not blame him. I blame the individuals that placed him in that position. I blame the managers that saw that he was not up to par and endorsed lack-luster, leave-alone performance, lack of competence in doing that particular job. He is probably good somewhere else.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. “You are doing a good job, Brownie.”

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Yes, “You are doing a good job, Brownie,” on national television, broad daylight. The world is watching.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The world is watching. You are not doing a good job. You are doing a bad job. In fact, you are fired. Get out. What do you mean, you are doing a good job.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And we are going to give you a 60-day extension and have you on as a consultant, have you on so we can learn from your bad job. Maybe we can learn more. No, as a fat matter of fact, hey, you know, 60 days is not enough. Let us extend it 30 more days.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Maybe their plan was this: they said we will keep Brownie on, pay him $148,000, and when there is a situation, we will go to Brownie and ask, what do you think we should do? He will tell you. Then they do thecompliment. Maybe that probably how they are using him, do you think?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. There are too many people around here paying taxes, folks running around here trying to put fiscal responsibility in the backdrop, saying we are conservatives. Meanwhile, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security is defending and extending contracts of a person that the front-page national publications say is competent and not in any way knowing what to do in a natural disaster. So this is beyond comprehension. And not a mumbling word.

I would say this: I do not blame him. I am not running around here saying I am disappointed in Michael Brown for accepting a 30-day extension on a $140,000 salary. I am not blaming him. He could not do that on his own.

No one from the White House called and said, You know something? Over at the Department of Homeland Security, I think you all are probably not playing with a full deck if you think it is okay to do this. Not a mumbling word. So I am concerned, leave alone as a Congressman, as a taxpayer, that this is okay.

Now, this is just a high-profile case. We talk about corruption and cronyism, a culture. People think, well, wow, they are just saying that because they can. It is not an example, and we have been talking about this, and it has been in all of these publications, and they are still doing it, like it is okay.

The only people that can put this administration on a new course and put this majority in check are the American people. But, unfortunately, they will not have an opportunity until late 2006, and on behalf of the country we cannot continue to sit idly by and watch this kind of activity take place.

I would feel a little uncomfortable saying that my colleagues on the majority side are not standing up to their responsibilities in oversight. The Secretary, folks we brought down in south Florida from Wilma, should be called on the carpet in some committee room saying please let us know what we can learn from Mr. Brown. Please let us know what we can learn from the Director of FEMA. Why do we have to continue to pay him and use the taxpayers’ dollars? Someone needs to ask that question. It should be not only the Committee on Homeland Security; it should be congressional leaders calling and saying you need to reverse that.

So I do not uncomfortable about me being upset about this thing, because I can tell you right now, there are a number of people out there that are very upset; and it is time, it is time, that we cut out this culture of corruption and cronyism, especially in this culture of corruption and cronyism. I am concerned about taking people for face value when they say, well, this is what we have in place, and we find out later that it is really not.

I am concerned when we come to this floor and the clock opens up for 15-minute votes, and because the majority side is not prevailing or winning, they demand to hold the clock open for 90 minutes. I am concerned about these events taking place under lights, cameras, and action.

I am concerned about those events that are taking place in the back halls of Congress, in the White House, and in other Federal agencies that are not under lights and cameras.

So this is the kind of boldness, cronyism, boldness and possible corruption in many places that takes place. And do not take it from me, just pick up your local paper or turn on the news. It is full of it. So if we do not hold ourselves in check, and if the majority is not willing to rise up and police this corruption and cronyism, be it Speaker to Speaker, be it an average State trooper, and we had what they call a game warden, and I always used to say, the game warden cannot be the lead poacher. You cannot be leading off the poacher saying that I am in charge of the poachers. So I think it is important that we have folks that will leader up and say, you know something, I know I have been told to be quiet on this, but I have a constitutional responsibility to make sure that we do not have overstep.

These are not personal decisions. Mr. RYAN; these are decisions that are affecting the governance of this country. So when we allow this kind of stuff to go on, it is making the country weaker versus stronger, because the Federal tax dollars are being spent in ways that they should not be spent, and we are not saving any money by allowing the kind of culture to continue.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I think it really comes down to the fact that every decision that is made by this Congress, by the Republican-controlled Congress, by the Republican-controlled Senate, and the Republican President is based on supporting and lifting up the Republican Party. I hate to break it to them, but this is not about the Republican Party; this is about America. This is about what is best for America.

You talk about violating basic House rules, and every time they have done that, every time they have kept the roll call open at 2:00 or 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning; I mean, last year, I cannot remember what vote it was, but we were here until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. It was on the prescription drug bill, because we had to kick over $700 billion to the pharmaceutical industry, one of the most profitable industries in the whole entire world, them and oil, and the reason is they put the Republican Party before the country.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, I am sorry to cut him sir, but I am going to tell you this: I know a lot of Republicans. A lot of Republicans are supporters of me. They vote for me, and
some of them say, great job. I have some great friends on the other side of the aisle, I mean great friends. We do a lot together. We talk about things that are common interests. We are friends. My mother was here before me, and some of them are great friends of my mother, and, because of that relationship, we have a great bond.

But I can tell you this: I think this goes far beyond building up or doing something on behalf of the Republican Party, because some of these decisions that are made, it will turn the stomach of Republicans that I know. It would turn their stomachs. I know on the majority side, I know that there are some Republicans that go home, and they are sick. They are sick of what is going on here in this House. But you know something? If they were to stand up, unfortunately they would be knocked down politically. They will find themselves fighting the whole reason why we are here on this floor, fighting against their party.

So I kind of feel that there is a purpose for what we are doing here, because as far as I am concerned, we could sit back and just say, well, let them do it, or let them look the other way, because the American people are going to see that they are not governing. But you know something? We are Americans, and we have an obligation to not only our constituents. When our constituents vote for us, they are counting on us. That means that we have to care about the entire country and what happens to the Federal dollar, which is the taxpayers’ dollar. It is very unfortunate.

So, Mr. RYAN, I know that it is an influence of the special interests. Their pockets are full because of the relationships here on Capitol Hill that they have and in the White House. Guess what? The average Republican is paying more at the pump, the average Republican has health decisions just like many of our constituents, there is no health care plan. The average Republican is going to have to bear the brunt, Mr. RYAN, and I am sorry for taking a little of your time here, but bear the burden of taking away from Medicare, Medicaid, free and reduced lunches for poor people; taking away from projects that would go to local government to build communities; and all of these faith-based groups that are out there that are trying to bring about some change, it is going to take away from them.

But, meanwhile, when it comes down to saying to a billionaire that we probably cannot give you hundreds of thousands in tax cuts that we have given you over the last number of years, and I am going to reference a report here, a third-party validator, a little later on, to say that it is not working, they say, no, no, no, do not worry about it, do not say anything, millionaire. We have you. We are going to make sure that you are going to protect you, but we are going to make sure that the average Republican, the average Democrat, the average Independent, that they bear the burden, that they send their children into conflict and war, that they pay higher gas prices; not you, special interest. No, no, we are here for you.

But see, the problem here, and we talked about this here in the middle of a term, you have to be elected. You cannot be appointed to the House of Representatives. So that means that we are representatives of the people, not representatives of the special interests, not representatives based on law enforcementaires of the world; we are representatives of everyday folk.

So I think this is important, because Democrats, we have budget alternatives like pay-as-you-go, saying that if you are going to do it, you are going to show how you are going to pay for it, okay? We have alternatives as it relates to dealing with Hurricane Katrina so that we do not continue to waste the taxpayers’ dollars and also make the victims of the event victims all over again. So, Mr. RYAN, we have the alternatives.

I believe that this goes higher than the party. I believe that it goes right to the culture of corruption and cronyism, and I will tell you one thing: The American people will see us bring about great change if just one of the Chambers of the legislative body was to turn Democrat, because what you are seeing here is the influence of the special interests, the lobbyists, you cannot give that up.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Yes, no doubt about it. We will have prevented, if we had been really on the stick and really open, we may be able to have prevented some of the things that are happening.

I think this really goes to the fact that the Republican majority believe that the government and the taxpayer dollars that we have here are just for them. It is for them to build their party up. It is for them to use it to build up the Republican Party. I am sure the party citizens in my district do not pay taxes so that the leaders of the House, the Republican leaders of the House, can go out to Shake Down Street out there on K Street, where all the lobbyists are, and go and shake down the lobbyists. I mean, when a Democrat applies for a job, and the leaders on the Republican majority say to the lobbyists, you cannot give that job to a Democrat because we will not do business with you then.

And when you come to the American people and you try to say with a straight face about fiscal discipline, but when we are here at 3:00 in the morning, and arms are getting twisted to pass a Medicare prescription drug bill, and the Republican majority does not have the courage to go to the pharmaceutical industry and say, listen, we want to pass a Medicare prescription drug bill, but we want to give the Secretary of Health and Human Services the opportunity, the power to negotiate on behalf of the Medicare recipients to get the costs under control. The Republicans put in the Medicare bill that explicitly said the Secretary of Health and Human Services is not allowed to negotiate down the drug prices. Can you imagine that? Can you believe that? And then only 25 Republican Members voted against it.

Then you come to the energy bill, and with the energy bill, you have billions of dollars in there to subsidize the oil companies, and a major oil company comes out today and talks about 20 percent profits in the second quarter, $10 billion, and you are getting public tax dollars from middle-class Americans who live in Youngstown, Ohio, one of the poorest areas in the country, you are taking their tax dollars and you are giving it to the oil companies.

Now, a third-party validator, right here, Cal Thomas, one of the most conservative Republican columnists in the country right now, suggestions to our friends on the other side, to the Republican majority, he is suggesting on the offsets to pay for Katrina, the Republican majority is taking the money from Medicaid, free and reduced lunch, and college students. Cal Thomas says, here is a suggestion: Do not start with the poor, start with the rich. That is Cal Thomas. That is not KENNEDY MEEK, that is not Tim Ryan, that is not DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, that is one of the most conservative Republican columnists in the country.

He also goes on to say, talking about using government as their own little sandbox that they can play in and as a welfare state for corporations, because this is corporate welfare. Cal Thomas, conservative Republican. Did I mention he is a conservative Republican?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. You mentioned it.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I appreciate that.

Quote: Seventy-two percent of farm support money goes to recipients, the richest farmers, partnerships, corporations, estates, and other entities. Corporate welfare, my friend, to the oil companies, to the pharmaceutical companies, and to the big agribusinesses, and the Republican leadership in this chamber goes out to Shake Down Street and tells all the lobbyists on K Street that they have to hire Republicans or they are not going to do business with the Republican majority.

MR. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, let us just make sure that we are crystal clear so that everyone understands. Not just saying, well, let me check, let
us see. Let us look at the people that apply for the job. Oh, there is a Repub-
lican. No. I want you to hire my right-
hand staff. I want you to hire him or
her, put them in the position, okay, and
so I can deal directly with them so
that we can have a line of communica-
tions. And there is a cell phone number
on this person that has my cell number, okay, and I want to make sure that that hap-
pens.

Now, we are not talking about some-
thing that the House Ethics Committee
has not already dealt with, because of
the fact that this issue was brought up
and it was very public. It was not any
kind of clandestine operation that was
going on. You just pick up the paper.
Yes, that is what we are doing. What is
the problem? If they are going to do
business up here, they are going to hire
the people that they want hired, pe-
riod, dot, with a straight face, under
the lights with the cameras on and the
press running.

That is only a problem, Mr. Ryan, and I
believe that when you start looking at
the whole culture of corruption and cronysm, you have to look at these ac-
tivities that are taking place under
lights, camera, and on the front pages
of newspapers. And you know some-
thing? The American people. Mr. Speaker, may feel, well, it is okay, be-
cause Congress is not calling any of
these people in. Once again, you cannot
be the game warden and the lead poacher at the same time. You just
cannot. It is not physically pos-
sible. You cannot have a problem and
be over the very thing that is the prob-
lem.

Once again, I said it last night, I will
say it again. These are not personal
decisions, Mr. Ryan. These are decisions
that are affecting the policy of the coun-
try and the Treasury of the coun-
try. This is not someone that went off
and made an individual bad decision
and said, you know, I made a bad deci-
sion, I made an individual bad decision
and made an individual bad decision
over the very thing that is the prob-
lem. That is the reason why the board,
the voting board was open for 90 minutes,
because it did something. Now, it did
not do what the special interests want-
ed us to do. And you know many of
them, I see them. It is not personal; it
is just business. I see them. Hey, how
are you going? Am I fine? Am I okay?
I am doing just fine. Nice day out
today. Okay.

But the bottom line is when it comes
doing to my constituents and it comes
doing down to Exxon-Mobil coming out today
saying, hey, guess what, wow, 75 per-
cent up in profits, give me a high-five.
What is unfortunate, I think some of
the folks in this Congress are actually
giving these special interest groups
a high-five, and it is unfortunate be-
cause it is on their back. I am sorry, but
We are running around here paying
more for gas than we have ever paid be-
fore, and there are record profits for
the industry. I think there is some-
bthing wrong there, and I think it is some-
thing that is clear as day. And guess
what? It is happening under the
lights. It is happening in front of the
Cameras. It is on the front page of
the paper in print for historical preserva-
tion to the next election.

And what is unfortunate is that we
could stand by and allow this to hap-
pen and say nothing and say, you
know, the American people will re-
spond in an appropriate way of making
sure that we have the kind of leader-
sip that is willing and able to lead. We are try-
ing to lead. Guess what? We cannot
prevail, because they are in the major-
ity, and they have the majority of the
Members in this House.

If given the opportunity, Americans
will see a different kind of policy that
does not have the special interests
of the oil companies, public, through sub-
corporate welfare to the people. And
this is about corruption and cronysm.

And it was very public. It was not any
kind of clandestine operation that was
brought up and it was very public.

We are watching the same thing hap-

So the American people should be
outraged at this, corporate welfare to
the most profitable industries in the
country with your tax dollars, and the
Republicans do not have the guts to
say, well, you know, not only do you
not have to give me the money, but
you do not even have to turn over your
lives to me. We run that, and the other
store. That is what is happening right
to

Mr. Ryan of Ohio. Well, let us look.
My friend brings up Iraq, which is a
perfect example. We just talked about
corporate welfare to the oil companies;
corporate welfare to pharmaceutical
companies; tax cuts that go primarily
to those people who make over a mil-

Mr. Ryan of Ohio. We are going to
give you public tax dollars for the en-
ergy companies, public, through sub-
corruption and cronysm? Over in Iraq we
have contractors that are under inves-
tigation by our government, and the
very same Departments of Defense and
Homeland Security investigating them. Katrina goes down, hey, guess
what? Come on over here. We have a
multimillion-dollar no-bid contract for
you. Sign right here. We ask no ques-
tions. There is no ceiling. There is very
little oversight. And we will get around
to that thing of oversight. But we are the
crush so we know that you messed up.

It is almost like someone going in a
convenience store, taking out a gun,
taking a couple of hundred dollars out
of the cash register, unfortunately it is
involving billions as in Fed-
eral taxpayer dollar, they run out of
the store, the police catch them, they
say, well, you know, not only do you
not have to give me the money, but
you do not even have to turn over your
gun. Go back out there and rob another
store. That is what is happening right
to

But we are going to give them public
tax dollars to support their corpora-
tions. But there is more welfare going
go. Iraq has become a United States
welfare state. Look what is going on
here. 110 primary care centers built in
Iraq with American tax dollars. Okay.
2,000 health educators trained with the
American tax dollar.

3.2 million children vaccinated in
Iraq with the American tax dollar. Great. Super. We went in there, we
broke Iraq, we buy it. That is our re-
ponsibility. But back at the ranch, $10 billion-plus, as I have talked to a few of
our friends on the Committee on En-
ergy, we are going to give those same
$10 billion-plus cuts in Medicaid for American kids.
American citizens. $252 million cut for
health care professionals; $94 million

response after natural disaster/terrorist
attacks.
cut for community health centers in the United States of America.

Student loans. We are building 2,700 schools that have been rehabbed in Iraq; 36,000 teachers and administrators trained in Iraq. We are cutting student loans to the majority. I will make welfare. So if you are sitting on the couch listening to the 30-something Group right now, and these are all third-party validators, this is not us making this stuff up.

Cal Chobos, the conservative Republican columnist, agrees with us. You see a Republican-controlled government, one-party government spending your tax dollars, giving your tax dollars to the oil companies, to the pharmaceutical companies, to the billionaires in the world, and/or in the United States, and creating a welfare state in Iraq while you are cutting health care in education and research and development. Even the Centers for Disease Control, our conservative friends on both sides, want to cut the Centers for Disease Control at a time when we have this bird flu epidemic waiting in the wings.

We can do a better job. The Democratic Party has proposals. We want to create energy efficiently and create alternative energy sources so we no longer have to worry about being dependent on foreign oil.

And that is part of the magnetic lev trains. We want arts and sports in all of our schools for all of our kids because we recognize in the 21st century that learning a musical instrument helps you with math. And when you are good at math, you become an engineer or a scientist, and you will go out and generate wealth. We make good investments. The Democratic Party makes good investments.

We balanced the budget in 1993 with not one Republican vote. And President Clinton made a lot of tough decisions, and the Democratic Congress made a lot of tough decisions. And, quite frankly, some Members lost their seat over it. But it led to the greatest economic expansion in the history of this country. And I do not think there is an American out there that would not say, boy, I would love to go back to the late 1990s. Boy would that not be great. Portfolio was up. Everything was up that should have been up. Everything was down that should have been down.

But meanwhile, our Republican friends keep this culture of corporate welfare and corruption and keep propping up the Republican Party, instead of propping up the United States of America, and being more concerned about shaking down the lobbyists on K Street instead of propping up the United States.

The Democrats want to take this country in a new direction. We want to provide new leadership. We want to change the direction of the country, and we want to get rid of this culture of corruption and cronyism, and we want to prop up the country, not any one political party, and use the government to enhance opportunity for people in the United States.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, there is nothing more that I can possibly say about where we stand, what we are trying to do in the minority right now, what we would like to do if we had the majority with that, sir, will you give the closing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Our Web site is www.houseDemocrats.gov/Katrina. Become a citizen cosponsor to the independent commission so we can reform government the way it needs to be done.

And 30-somethingdems@mail.house.gov. We have been getting a ton of e-mails lately and a lot of support, over 40,000 citizen cosponsors for the independent commission for Katrina.

Help us change this government. Help us help the Democratic Party take this country in a new direction, a better direction, and help us get rid of this government that does nothing but corporate welfare and create a welfare state in Iraq at the expense of the American worker and the American taxpayer.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, Mr. Speaker, we would like to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us to come here in the first Democratic hour. And like I say, it was an honor to address the House.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUH. of New York). Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to come before the body and also to talk with the American people a little bit this evening about what we as a House majority are doing.

You know, I have been sitting here for the last few minutes listening to some of their plans and talk about what they were doing. And one of my colleagues was talking about we want this, we want that. I was beginning to think I was listening to one of my children name the Christmas list, all the we-wants.

And I will remind the American people that the we-wants are going to take a lot of your money. And I did not hear one single word mentioned about fiscal responsibility and spending less. And I would encourage my colleagues to come and work with us, really to work with us on this issue, because we would appreciate having them choose to propose some spending cuts. They have been going through this process of trying to come up with a slogan for 2006.

And it has been interesting to watch them talk about this slogan. I think they are going with something like We Can Do Better, Together We Can Do Better, or something of that nature.

There again, we are not hearing anything about controlling spending and reining in government. I did a cable news show last week with one of the Democratic Party. He said, well, you know, they had not been invited to join in on submitting spending reductions.

Mr. Speaker, if they are waiting for an invitation, I hope they consider this the invitation. It is in that spirit that I wanted to come down to the floor tonight and talk a little bit about the Republican security agenda and invite the Democrats to join us, because we are addressing in Tuesday afternoon. We are facing significant challenges, and the Republican majority has a clear plan on how we move forward on this.

We are focused on our national security, our economic security, our moral security, our retirement security, and we are going to talk a lot. We have been working already, the 108th, 109th Congress, and putting quite a bit of time and energy into continued tax relief, lowering energy costs, working toward affordable health care, and talking about preserving access to health care for all Americans.

You know, I am just going to have to correct one of things that one of my colleagues said. They were talking about Medicaid spending and how we were going to cut Medicaid spending. And I was kind of scratching my head. We have been sitting in the Committee on Energy and Commerce since 3 o’clock on Tuesday afternoon, now working on many of these issues.

And all we are talking about doing is slowing the rate of growth of Medicaid from 7.3 percent a year to 7 percent a year.

I think a lot of my constituents in Tennessee have, they have kind of wised up to a lot of this Washington talk, and they know that any time you talk about reining in growth, any time you talk about bureaucrats and having to live with less so that families in houses in communities can keep their money, they are going to hear talk of a cut. You are going to hear talk of a cut. My people know and understand that.

They also were saying a little bit about energy over there. I have got to make a comment there, too, and they were talking about how glorious the ’90s were. We probably would not be talking so much about energy right now if President Clinton had not vetoed drilling in ANWR in 1996. He had the opportunity to do something bold and visionary. So I say to the Democrats chose not to. And I think we need to remember that as we talk about energy costs.

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