

the Republican tax package. That is just the fact. But the top 1 percent of Americans, myself included, I suppose, and people whose incomes average \$645,000, would get \$21,000—actually \$21,306 in tax cuts.

That is not the American way. That is not why we are what we are as a country. I understand that some people do better than others in life. And I understand that some people are propelled, through good fortune or through exceptional brain power, to be in a position to make more money. Often that is a circumstance of birth and often that is a circumstance of education, often that is simply a circumstance of life. And sometimes it is simply a matter that you really did it and you deserve it.

But you cannot take something called the working middle class, people who work in steel mills, who work in factories, who work in grocery stores but who work all the time and work every day and pay taxes, and for whom every \$10 or \$100 is important, and say to them, "You don't count." You do not do that in a budget. We do not do that, at least in a Democratic budget.

So, Madam President, I appreciate your courtesy in listening to these short pronouncements on my part. But I think the budget process should begin. I think we should take the crazy idea of trying to cut \$526 billion of taxes, much less figure out how to pay for it, take it and sort of lay it outside the door and let it rest there for time immemorial. In the meantime, let us do a budget.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LITHUANIA

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise to speak this morning on an issue of great importance to American foreign policy and to the future of Europe.

This week, on March 11, Lithuanians and Lithuanian-Americans celebrated the seventh anniversary of the restoration of independence from Russia. Lithuania, for those who are not familiar, is a country of fewer than 4 million people. It is smaller than the State of South Carolina, and it is located between Belarus and the Baltic Sea. Historically, it has been the neighbor, sometimes friendly and sometimes not, of Russia and the Soviet Union. It is a nation that has had to struggle time and again for its freedom. Today, it is struggling to recover from the devastation of a half-century of Soviet occupation.

The history of this little country is very interesting. During the middle

ages, it was one of Europe's most powerful countries. In the 15th century, it was combined with Poland to create a new kingdom. In the late 18th century, when Poland was partitioned, Lithuania was divided between Russia and Prussia. The czars tried to Russify Lithuania during the 19th century, but their attempts to destroy Lithuanian culture gave rise to a Lithuanian nationalist movement supported by the Catholic Church. Ironically, it was this effort by the czars to Russify Lithuania which resulted in my being on the floor of the Senate today, because these efforts by the Russians led my mother's family to pick her up as a small girl and emigrate from Lithuania to the United States. They came here to preserve their Lithuanian culture, their Roman Catholic religion, and, of course, for the economic opportunity that the United States offered.

In February 1918, Lithuania finally declared its independence from Russia. But, of course, World War II took its toll.

In 1940, as a result of the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, Lithuania was taken over by the Soviet Union. In 1941, Hitler invaded Lithuania. After World War II, Stalin resumed his brutal repression and Sovietization of Lithuania, forbidding democratic institutions and subjugating the church. Countless thousands of Lithuanians gave their lives during the war and were then subjected to the Stalinist regime and deportation to Siberia.

But the Lithuanian national movement would not die, and it rose again as the Soviet Union crumbled. Of the many things which I have been fortunate enough to witness in my lifetime, one of the most memorable was the restoration of Lithuania's independence. On February 24, 1990, while still occupied by the Soviet Union, Lithuania held free elections to the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet. I was there on the day of the election, as part of a delegation sent by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The best efforts of the Soviets to keep us out of the country were not successful. The Lithuanian Reform Movement, called Sajudis, won the elections. Keep in mind, this tiny country was still considered by the Soviets to be part of the Soviet Union.

On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared the restoration of complete independence from the Soviet Union. In January, 1991, the Soviets struck back. A Soviet coup was attempted in Lithuania, leaving 13 Lithuanian civilians dead.

After the failed August coup in Moscow, the United States recognized the Lithuanian Government on September 2, 1991.

Since the restoration of independence, Lithuania and the other independent Baltic countries, Latvia and Estonia, have held numerous free elections. In Lithuania's case, there have been three—in October 1992, February 1993, and October 1996.

If you look at the relationship between Lithuania and the United States, it is one of mutual cooperation and support. The United States recognized Lithuania as an independent country in 1922 and never recognized the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement.

During the years of the Soviet occupation of Eastern and Central Europe, the Senate and the House continued to pass resolutions and proclamations commemorating Captive Nations Week, and asking Americans across the country to join us in recognizing the fundamental freedom and independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

In 1991, the United States recognized the Lithuanian Government, free of Soviet domination. And the United States continued to play a very important role because, even after Lithuania had restored its independence, there were 70,000 Soviet troops still on Lithuanian soil. President Clinton deserves credit for working very hard, through diplomatic channels, for the removal of those troops. When the troops finally left in August 1993, due to the President's good efforts, once and for all, the Lithuanians were free of occupation troops.

Today, however, we are debating the next chapter, and an important one in the history of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and modern Europe. We are debating the enlargement of NATO, and the question of how much of a say Russia should have in this process. This summer, in Madrid, Spain, the members of the NATO alliance will gather together to consider whether new members will be allowed to join the alliance.

All of us are aware of the important role that NATO played after World War II. NATO was the bulwark of Western democracy against the expansion of communism. The allies who came together in that alliance not only were setting out to protect themselves but to establish commonality in terms of values and culture—a commitment to democracy, a commitment to free markets. The NATO alliance has been successful. The Berlin Wall came down. The cold war came to an end.

Now we are talking about a new NATO alliance, and asking ourselves what this NATO alliance would bring to the world. Certainly more than defense, because I do not think that is the paramount concern to Europe. It would be, in the words of Secretary Albright, an effort to "gain new allies who are eager and increasingly able to contribute to our common agenda for security, from fighting terrorism and weapons proliferation to ensuring stability."

The reason I have come to the floor today is to speak about the situation in Lithuania and the challenge we face on the question of NATO membership. It is said that Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are likely to be invited to join NATO. I fully support that. My visit to Poland, I can tell you,

was dominated by discussion about the future of NATO and whether Poland would be a part of it after all that Poland has suffered in the war and since. It is only right that this great nation be brought into an alliance with NATO. I fully support that. Nor do I object at all to Hungary and the Czech Republic being considered.

What gives me pause, though, is the fact that there has been little mention by the United States or NATO allies about including the Baltic countries—Estonia, Latvia, and particularly Lithuania.

I hope those who are considering this issue will pause for a moment and reflect on the importance of NATO membership to these small countries. I hope also that they will join me in asking this administration to think anew about the issue of membership in NATO for the Baltic countries.

The Baltic countries, meanwhile, wonder about our intentions, and they worry that Russia will misinterpret our hesitation to include their countries in the NATO alliance as a signal that we still see the Baltics in some sort of "gray zone." I can tell you this: the people in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia do not consider themselves in a "gray zone." They want to be a part of modern Europe.

There are some who say that including the Baltic countries in NATO might inflame the ultra-nationalists in Russia and destabilize the Yeltsin government. I think we should listen to leaders of the Baltics who have had some experience, in fact, more experience, close at hand, than the United States in dealing with the Russians. They know that any ambiguity in U.S. policy only emboldens the radicals in Russia. They know that if we are firm and fair, Russia will accept NATO enlargement. We should be mindful of Russian views but not fearful of their reaction.

The Baltics, you see, are very fragile. This map may not be easy to see, but I would like to point out a few things of importance.

This tiny little yellow area here is still part of Russia. It is known as Kaliningrad. The Russians have held on to it even though, as you can see, it is detached from Russia. It is, of course, a port on the Baltic Sea. But, even more importantly, it is a major military installation for the Russians. The Russians have 40,000 troops in Kaliningrad today, and they frequently traverse Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania with materials and troops going to and from Kaliningrad.

Then, next to Lithuania you will see this former Soviet Republic, now an independent state, Belarus. There are 60,000 troops in Belarus, backed up by Russian troops.

So here on its west, directly south and west of Lithuania, there are 40,000 Russian troops, and immediately to its east at least 60,000 troops. While this is happening, Lithuania has a very tiny defense force. It wouldn't even be char-

acterized as an army by most modern definitions. Naturally, Lithuania is concerned about its own security.

The three Baltic States came together to talk about common defense. They want to make certain that they maintain their independence regardless of the whims of history. They are not seeking to expand their territory. They are looking for peaceful development and only defensive capacity. They are making reforms within their militaries and within their countries to be ready to join NATO. They have provided troops for NATO-led operations in Bosnia.

Let me tell you one brief story that I think is illustrative of the commitment of Lithuania to becoming a viable partner in NATO.

When President Clinton and the United States decided to move forward to stop the genocide that was occurring in Bosnia, we created what is known as the IFOR group. These were armies from allied countries coming together to try to bring peace to the Balkans, a daunting task that has challenged generations, if not centuries, of those who live in the region. The tiny country of Lithuania, with 3.7 million people, which has a very, very small army, made an IFOR commitment, sending a small group to be part of this effort. Sadly, one of the casualties in Bosnia, as the result of a landmine, was a Lithuanian soldier who literally gave his life as part of this peacekeeping effort in Europe. A curious thing happened after that tragedy, because the Lithuanian Parliament then had to vote almost immediately on whether to send more troops to IFOR.

Think about it for a moment. What would that have meant in the Senate of the United States or the House of Representatives if our country had lost proportionately as many as Lithuania had lost in this effort, and we had to then debate whether to expand the force that we had sent in? It would have been tough. Some would have said, "Wait a minute; if it means loss of life and bloodshed, perhaps we should think it over."

But the Lithuanian Parliament understood Lithuania's commitment and voted, even after the loss of this soldier's life, to expand its commitment to IFOR—to send even more troops into the area to cooperate with the United States and all of the NATO allies as part of IFOR. I think that says a lot about whether Lithuania wants to be a part of the future of the free world.

The Baltics have also welcomed the placement in their countries of what is called the Regional Airspace Initiative, which is going to increase NATO's security and be located on Baltic soil. They want to make sure that the Baltics are integrated, through this defense capacity, into all of modern Europe. All three of the Baltic countries have joined the Council of Europe, and all three formally have applied for membership in the European Union,

which is important for the prosperity of that region.

So now we come to the point where we have to ask the hard question about whether or not Lithuania and the other Baltic countries should be members of NATO. I firmly believe they should be. I think the United States should make a clear and unequivocal commitment to Lithuania, to Latvia and to Estonia that they will be part of NATO, and welcome them into this new Europe, a Europe which brings together East and West finally in a combined, peaceful strategy and alliance.

I am troubled by the fact that we have been at best ambivalent on this issue. Our official spokesmen in the State Department, the Department of Defense and other channels have been careful not to mention the Baltic countries. One of our leaders in Government has said that, "Well, we don't want to make the Russians too nervous. You know they are fearful of encirclement."

If you visited Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania today, you would be hard pressed to suggest that any of these countries have any type of motive to expand their territory or to in any way jeopardize the future of Russia. Yet a country like Lithuania, with 40,000 Russian troops in Kaliningrad and 60,000 troops in Belarus, can very well feel threatened by the current situation.

During my visit to Lithuania and Poland a few weeks ago, I met with many representatives of government from every political party. And I can tell you, Madam President, that this issue cuts clearly across party lines—conservatives, liberals, right and left and center. Those who were formerly members of the Communist Party and now a part of democratic efforts in these countries all believe the same thing. NATO is the key to the future.

I think the United States can be proud of the fact that it stood with the Baltic countries during those dark days after World War II, when they were forced into the Soviet Union and became, unwittingly and unwillingly, republics that were part of the Soviet Union. We said in the United States that we would never accept that. We viewed them as freedom-loving people. I was proud of that, proud as a Lithuanian-American whose mother was born in a small village in the southwest part of Lithuania, proud that we stood by them during 50 years of Soviet occupation. Then the moment came for their freedom, a moment that was marked with bloodshed. I regretted the fact that the United States wasn't the first in line to recognize their independence. In fact, 32 other nations in the world came forward to recognize a free and democratic Lithuania before the United States did. I am sorry that we were 33d, but I am glad that we did it. I am glad that we reaffirmed our commitment to the Baltic countries.

During the course of my visit to Vilnius, the Capital of Lithuania, I visited a cemetery with a monument

known as the Pieta. It is a monument to those who gave their lives during this recent struggle for independence in Lithuania. I was struck by the fact, as I walked along the gravestones of those martyrs to freedom in Lithuania, how many of them were teenagers, or in their early 20's, who lost their lives in the hope that Lithuania would be free. Many of them in their lifetimes had never known anything but Soviet domination, Communist domination, a domination where the Soviets tried to Russify the Lithuanian language, take away Lithuanian culture and traditions, close down Catholic churches and literally close down the press. They saw that.

I saw as well, when I visited, in Kaunas, the archbishop, His Excellency Sigitas Tamkevicius, who is considered a saint, having spent many years in a Soviet prison for the audacity of publishing an underground journal, how much this country has been through, how much it has suffered. It is not unreasonable for us as leaders of democracy and freedom in the world to understand why Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia want to be part of our peace-loving and democratic alliance.

I sincerely hope that the United States, starting first with the meeting between the President and President Yeltsin in Helsinki this coming week, and then again in Madrid this coming summer, will really try to show the initiative, to broach this discussion about Lithuania and the Baltic countries becoming part of the NATO alliance. I think it is important for us to say unequivocally that this will happen and we are committed to it, and to say as well, now let us discuss with these countries and with Russia when this will occur and how this will occur.

It should be a transparent process. By that I mean we should say to the Russians this is clearly defensive in nature. These tiny countries are only looking for the assurance that they will have freedom and great opportunity in the future.

I will close, Madam President, by saying that one of the more memorable moments in my trip to Lithuania was on Independence Day, on February 16, when on Sunday I stood in the square in front of the parliament in Vilnius and saw the people gathered singing the Lithuanian national anthem and then went to the cathedral for a Mass celebrated by the Cardinal of Lithuania. At the end of this Mass they once again sang the Lithuanian national anthem, and then closed with a Catholic hymn entitled "Maria, Maria." My brother and I were standing there and looked around and saw men and women with tears rolling down their cheeks. This was the hymn that the Lithuanians turned to in their churches many times in clandestine masses to give them hope that they could survive the occupation by the Russians, the occupation by the Nazis, the occupation by the Soviets. These men and women have suffered so much in the name of

freedom and independence, and now they are asking us today as leaders in the free world to invite them into this family of freedom-loving and peace-loving nations.

I hope I can prevail on my colleagues in the Senate to join with me in encouraging the United States to include the Baltic countries, as well as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and all the other countries that are genuinely interested in becoming peace-loving partners in NATO. I think that will continue the great legacy that really defines America.

We are not out to conquer territory. We have defied history by being the conquerors in World War II and literally working as hard as we could to rebuild the vanquished, and now we have again the chance to say as we embark on this 21st century that this NATO alliance will guarantee that a new Europe, East and West together, will be a peaceful Europe for decades to come.

I thank the Chair.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIXED SIGNALS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I was disappointed to note that the United States, alone among its allies on the United Nations Security Council, vetoed a proposed resolution urging Israel to abandon its plans to build housing for Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem. This housing initiative, which was reported last week to have been pushed by the right wing of Prime Minister Netanyahu's party, threw a cold towel on the peace process that had been so painfully promoted through U.S. intermediation.

Indeed, the President and the Secretary of State, Ms. Albright, both correctly criticized Israel's position on this issue. It is unfortunate that the President felt compelled to mix that clear signal of American displeasure with an American veto of essentially the same policy position, expressed in a United Nations Security Council resolution. American policy on this very important matter needs more consistency if the United States intends to maximize its influence and leadership on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It is unfortunate that the message of displeasure has been diluted, because that softening risks emboldening the hard-liners in Israel who act as if they do not want that process to succeed.

I believe that the policy of the administration rightly remains opposed to the recently announced settlement

initiative by the Israeli government, and I spoke out on the floor a few days ago in support of that position. It does not seem logically consistent that a Security Council resolution essentially expressing the same disapproval could in any way itself "jeopardize efforts to keep the peace process moving", as was reported by the Washington Post on March 8, 1997. Strong leadership on this matter requires sustained consistency in all foras, both national and international regarding American policy, and I hope that there will be further opportunities to make our very correct position in opposition to this new housing initiative abundantly clear.

The Israeli leader stands at a pivotal point in the Middle East. The peace process is clearly very fragile, and great efforts are needed on a sustained basis by all the parties, not some of the parties, for it to succeed. The alarming exchange of letters between King Hussein and Prime Minister Netanyahu, released publicly yesterday reveals the damage that the Israeli housing initiative is causing. Neither the U.S., nor the Palestinians, nor the Israeli people should passively allow the Israeli right wing to sabotage this process anytime it decides it has gone far enough for their taste. I congratulate the President for sending an American envoy to meet in Gaza with Mr. Arafat on the overall situation.

I make an urgent plea to Prime Minister Netanyahu to look history in the face and to take a bold step and reverse his decision on the housing matter, regardless of the merits of the initiative in his mind from a narrow geographical perspective. This decision has become the central indicator of his government's commitment to peace in the Middle East. It is clear that, regardless of any merits which may attach to the housing decision, it is causing grave damage to the peace process which our governments have worked so painfully to engender. Therefore, I urge the Israeli Prime Minister to reverse that decision. This would certainly require considerable personal courage and political difficulty on his part, but it would mark him as a true leader at a time when such leadership is desperately needed. He alone is in the position to make a crucial change in the present explosive atmosphere. The process of peace in the Middle East has reached a vital juncture, and its future is highly dependent on the action he takes now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Jersey.

THE DECISION TO CERTIFY MEXICO

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, the decision by the administration to certify Mexico as an ally in the fight against narcotics raises a broader issue. In my judgment, it is time to