

not believe the incessant propaganda that is put out by NATO on a daily basis. NATO's motives are surely suspect. I meet no one who can with a straight face claim that it was NATO's concern for the suffering of the refugees that prompted the bombing and demands by some to escalate the war with the introduction of ground troops.

Even with NATO's effort to justify its aggression, they rarely demonstrate a hit on a military target. All this fine star wars technology and we see reruns of strikes with perfect accuracy hitting infrastructures like bridges and buildings. I have yet to see one picture of a Serbian tank being hit, and I am sure if they had some classy film like that we would have seen it many times on the nightly television.

NATO must admit its mistake in entering this civil war. It violates the NATO treaty and the U.N. Charter, as well as the U.S. Constitution. The mission has failed. The policy is flawed. Innocent people are dying. It is costing a lot of money. It is undermining our national security and there are too many accidents.

I am sick and tired of hearing NATO's daily apologies.

There's nothing America can be proud of in this effort and if we don't quickly get out of it, it could very well escalate and the getting out made impossible. The surest and quickest way to do this is for Congress today to reject the funding for this war.

The only answer to senseless foreign intervention is a pro-American constitutional policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations; a policy of friendship and trade with those who are willing and neutrality with others who are involved in conflict. This is the only policy that makes sense and can give us the peace and prosperity all Americans desire.

KUDOS FOR BETTE MIDLER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, my goal in Congress is to help the Federal Government be a better partner with State and local governments, with business and private citizens, to do everything it can in promoting livable communities, because what our families really care about is that their children are safe when they go out the door to school in the morning, that families are economically secure and healthy.

There is a vital component to this livability movement that goes well beyond the crafting of Federal legislation. The most powerful livability champions out there make the message real. They are the folks who take the rhetoric one step farther and actually walk the talk. For the last 3 months I have been especially intrigued by one such person, Bette Midler, who first got my attention when she took to national syndicated television a few months back and confessed that if she

had not gone into entertainment she probably would have pursued a career as an urban planner, and she certainly has moved to the forefront in promoting livability with her personal advocacy and investment.

This was most apparent last week when she spearheaded the rescue of 112 pocket parks and community gardens in New York City from being sold for redevelopment. Had Miss Midler not stepped in, along with the Trust for Public Land and a group that she founded in 1994, the New York Restoration Project, a great number of New Yorkers would have lost the joy they have received from these gardens.

Over a third of a century ago, author Jane Jacobs captured in her book, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*, the importance of places for people to congregate over sterile formal parks, planned with even the best of intentions, in ways that do not speak to people's needs for diversity and connection.

In threatening to auction these small gardens to the highest bidder, Mayor Giuliani not only added to the evidence that he does not get the revitalization taking place in New York City, that it needs to be about more than simply adding police officers on the corner, talking tough and bribing the New York Yankees to stay in New York City.

Revitalization is most effective when it brings people together. When people invest in their communities, they feel that they have ownership in the neighborhood, and this feeling of ownership is undoubtedly the most effective deterrent to crime and deterioration.

Community gardens take little enclaves that otherwise might be garbage dumps or staging areas for crime and turns them not just into green oasis but a place where people want to go. They define community pride, engagement and involvement.

Under the guise of providing money and housing opportunities, Giuliani proposed selling off for a couple million dollars these little neighborhood gems. Put aside for a moment that the amount of money is minuscule compared to the hundreds of millions of dollars Giuliani has talked about subsidizing for a few selected businesses. Also ignore for a moment that there are thousands of run-down, dilapidated buildings and vacant lots that would be prime candidates for redevelopment in New York City.

This case illustrates the strengths of partnership and why I for one do not trust any one single level of government on its own because there is clearly enough insensitivity and ineptitude to go around.

The public which has fought so hard to establish these footholds fortunately pushed back, and luckily the partners existed in New York City that make livable communities strong and vital. They provided not just money and interest but the spark that brought those pieces together.

Today the community gardens are safe, New York City is richer and hopefully politicians like Giuliani have learned a lesson. Sometimes that just means listening to the people about what makes communities and neighborhoods work.

Congress can certainly do its part by enacting legislation to make contributions to the public easier for things like scenic and conservation easement, agriculture and timberlands and wetland conservation. The public has learned, with the help of Miss Midler and others, that it can challenge city hall and win, which may be the most important lesson of all for livable communities.

ADDRESSING THE CONCERNS OF FOLKS BACK HOME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to represent a very diverse district in Illinois. I represent the south side of Chicago and the south suburbs in Cook and Will Counties, a lot of bedroom communities and farm towns, too. When one represents such a diverse district, they learn to listen to the concerns back home and try and respond to those concerns.

I have had one very common message that I hear in the city and in the suburbs and in the country in the diverse district that I represent, and that message is pretty simple. People back home want us to work together and find solutions to the challenges that we are facing.

I am proud to say that over the last 4½ years, we have listened and we have responded to those concerns to work to change how Washington works, to make Washington more responsive to the folks back home. I am proud to say that we accomplished some things we were told we could not do. We were told we could not balance the budget. We were told we could not balance the budget and lower taxes. We were told we could never reform our welfare system, but we did.

I am proud to say in the last 4½ years that we balanced the budget for the first time in 28 years, producing a projected \$2.8 trillion surplus of extra tax revenues. We lowered taxes for the middle class for the first time in 16 years and 3 million Illinois children now qualify for the \$500 per child tax credit back home in my State of Illinois. That is \$1.5 billion that will stay in Illinois rather than coming here to Washington.

We also reformed our welfare system, which was failing beyond imagination. We reformed our welfare system for the first time in a generation. As a result of our welfare reform, we have seen the welfare rolls in Illinois cut in half. We have balanced the budget. We lowered taxes for the middle class. We reformed

our welfare system. That is pretty good.

Folks often say those are real accomplishments, but what is next on Congress' agenda? We are working to continue responding to the issues and concerns of the folks back home and we have a simple agenda in this Congress. The Republican agenda is simple: Good schools, low taxes and a secure retirement for all America, and our budget that were working on today reflects that.

I am often asked some questions in town meetings back home. One of the most important ones we addressed this year. I am often asked by folks, whether at a senior citizen's center, a union hall or a VFW, when are the politicians in Washington going to stop raiding the Social Security trust fund? That is a pretty important, basic question. Of course, Washington has raided the Social Security trust fund for over 30 years. Back when LBJ was president, Washington began that process, and bad habits are hard to break. I am proud to say this Republican Congress is going to lock away 100 percent of Social Security revenues for social security only.

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Let me point out here what this means, and I will compare the Republican budget with the Clinton-Gore budget on Social Security. The Republican budget, of course, locks away 100 percent of Social Security for Social Security. I would point out that \$137 billion of the Social Security surplus under our lockbox will stay in Social Security.

Now, the President talks about 62 percent of the surplus for Social Security, and what the President and Vice President Gore are talking about doing is spending 38 percent of Social Security on other things. That is what the folks back home call raiding the Social Security Trust Fund.

Republicans say 100 percent of Social Security for Social Security. Clinton-Gore, they say 62 percent and spend the rest on other things. We want to put a stop to that, and that is why the lockbox proposal Republicans are moving through the Congress is so important, because it is the first step we should take as we work to save Social Security. Let us lock away Social Security first before we consider any other reforms.

Another question I am often asked is no one ever talks about the national debt. Let me point out that in this budget this year, we are in a position where we are going to be able to pay down \$1.8 trillion of the national debt. Last year we paid off \$50 billion; this year we are projected to pay off \$100 billion of the national debt, and under our budget we propose the potential of paying down \$1.8 trillion of the national debt. Saving Social Security, paying down the debt.

I am also asked at the union halls and the VFWs and the other commu-

nity centers and the grain elevators in the district that I represent, when are we going to do something about the tax burden on families? Today the average family in Illinois sends 40 percent of their income to Washington and Springfield and the local courthouse in taxes.

The tax burden today for the middle class is at its highest level ever in peacetime history. Twenty-one percent of our gross domestic product goes to Washington. That is the highest level ever in peacetime history, and it is putting a tremendous squeeze on middle class families.

I believe as we work to lower the tax burden on middle class families we should simplify the Tax Code; we should work to bring fairness to the Tax Code, beginning with the elimination of the marriage tax penalty. It is simply wrong that under our Tax Code 21 million married working couples on average pay \$1,400 more in higher taxes just because they are married. Let us lower taxes by simplifying the Tax Code by eliminating the marriage tax penalty, let us pay down the national debt and let us save Social Security.

ISRAEL'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC VALUES CONTINUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BENTSEN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, as we all know, yesterday the people of Israel demonstrated their commitment to democratic values by electing a new Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, a highly respected, decorated soldier and former leader of the Israeli Army. Despite the strong differences voiced during the campaign, both Mr. Barak and Prime Minister Netanyahu deserve our congratulations for articulating thoughtful visions for the people of their country.

As he prepares to leave office, I commend Prime Minister Netanyahu's accomplishments. He stood by his commitment to take Israel down a road of less reliance on U.S. economic assistance and a greater reliance on the powerful forces of capitalism and free markets. I commend him for setting his nation on a course of economic independence. Because of his willingness to work with his fellow citizens and his demonstrated leadership, Israel is a vibrant, strong, self-reliant nation.

The Prime Minister-elect, Ehud Barak, left the ranks of the military just four years ago after a highly distinguished 36-year career as a platoon leader, tank battalion chief, senior intelligence analyst and head of the Israeli Army. As Israel's most decorated soldier, Ehud Barak is perhaps best known as the catalyst of the 1972 storming of a Sabena airliner hijacked by guerrillas at Tel Aviv's airport.

Following his retirement from the military, Mr. Barak served as the Army Chief of Staff and Interior Minister under former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, then Foreign Minister under Prime Minister Shimon Peres. When I traveled to Israel in 1997, I had a chance to meet with Mr. Barak, who was serving as the leader then of the Labor Party. I was impressed with Mr. Barak's meticulous attention to detail, commitment to important issues, and his construction of an aggressive grassroots political operation. Throughout the campaign, Barak promised, if elected, to continue Yitzhak Rabin's legacy of reviving negotiations with the Palestinians and making an impassioned personal commitment to the peace effort.

I am also impressed with Prime Minister-elect Barak's appreciation and understanding of the American-Israeli partnership, a partnership that goes beyond common political and strategic bonds. Both nations share a common set of values: freedom, individual responsibility, hope and opportunity. It is no coincidence that the birth of Israel coincided with the rise of the United States as the world's preeminent power. Our futures, both the United States' and Israel's, are tightly intertwined. Our shared traditions, which respect and value human rights, democracy, free speech, religious tolerance, are the seeds of a lasting peace throughout the world and in the Middle East.

The elections held yesterday are proof that the people of Israel are determined to withstand pressures and maintain a democracy, build a vibrant economy and achieve peace and security in the entire region. Our Nation has watched and admired a brave, determined and sometimes very divided people build a democracy under difficult circumstances that often have tested their resolve.

Throughout the past decade, Israel has lived and thrived through especially difficult circumstances: the assassination of Israel's great leader Yitzhak Rabin, repeated terrorist attacks, waves of immigrants challenging Israel's complex and the very contentious national elections. Through it all, the people of Israel stood strong, holding to its values and its belief that their country will remain strong and at peace.

I have also been encouraged by Mr. Barak's willingness to return to the land-for-peace Israeli commitments under the Wye River Peace Agreement brokered by President Clinton last October. As the Israeli government now changes hands, I am hopeful that the Middle East peace process can take meaningful steps forward.

It is critical that the United States continue to support Israel's commitment to see an end to terrorist aggression and State-sponsored attacks against its citizens and cities. We must also support Israel's desire to move the peace process by requiring that existing peace agreements be respected by