

that that was what they would get, instead of allowing a \$600 million cost overrun. Hiring screeners may have been an administrative headache, but it is not rocket science. Thousands of companies around the country could have done a better job at much less cost to our taxpayers. Most Federal contracts are sweetheart insider deals in one way or the other, but this one is the most ridiculous I have ever heard of.

Then they hired far too many people. One aviation official told me that TSA now stands for "thousands standing around." I am sure that almost all of the people who have been hired are good, honest, patriotic people, but the TSA has simply hired many thousands more than they need.

I know it is impossible to ever convince any government agency that they have hired even enough people, much less too many. Yet before 9/11, we had about 28,000 or 29,000 screeners. We were told beforehand, before the legislation passed, that we would need to hire about 33,000.

□ 1730

Right after passage, they said they would need about 40,000. Then, a few months later, they went to the staff of an appropriations subcommittee requesting 72,000 employees. There was such an outcry they quickly backed off to 67,000, and then the Committee on Appropriations put a cap on them of 45,000 that they have arrogantly ignored by hiring thousands of temporary employees. So I am told they now have about 66,000 screeners.

I had a screener come to see me at Constituent Day in my district a few weeks ago, and he will have to remain unnamed because I do not want to get him in trouble; but he told me that they have so many screeners at the Knoxville Airport and so many radios that when I walk in the airport, they radio ahead and say Congressman DUNCAN is in the airport, stand up, look busy. It was on the front page of the Knoxville News Sentinel that they were going from about 70 screeners to about 160. I am told one major airport went from about 170 screeners to over 700.

Then two members of the other body have uncovered the worst abuse of all. Apparently, 20 TSA recruiters spent nearly 2 months at a luxury resort in Colorado, a 7-week junket, that resulted in the hiring of just 50 screeners. Rates at this hotel run from a low in the high \$200s to well over \$300 a night for just an average room. The company that ripped the taxpayers off on the screeners' contract, NCS Pearson, has been replaced by the TSA after the obscene cost overrun, but according to Ms. Malkin, the firm still holds several lucrative Federal contracts.

Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to understand how anyone could be in favor of big government when we see, day in and day out, so much waste, fraud, abuse, and simple inefficiency in the Federal Government.

I realize that the government keeps growing, despite the horrendous waste, because so many big businesses are making huge profits from federal contracts and so many bureaucrats are drawing salaries and benefits on average far higher than in the private sector.

So while I have read and heard about so much waste and exorbitant spending by the Federal Government that it is hard to surprise me anymore, even I have been shocked and amazed by the spending of the new Transportation Security Administration.

Apparently I am not the only one shocked by this new Agency. Michelle Malkin, a nationally-syndicated columnist, wrote in a column carried in yesterday's Washington Times, these words: "The Transportation Security Administration is a fiscal black hole, and fiscal conservatives ought to be enraged. . . ."

She said the TSA is "sucking down tax dollars like a bagless Dyson Cyclone vacuum gone berserk."

Ms. Malkin reports that "already, the one-year-old agency has amassed a \$3.3 billion budget deficit and is demanding upward of \$6 billion for the current fiscal year."

She wrote in this column: "Never has a single government entity spent so much for so little in such a short time."

It is almost unbelievable to me that any federal agency could lose three billion, three hundred million in its first year in operation.

This has to be one for the record books.

A few weeks ago, I read in the Washington Post a report of the testimony by Kenneth Mead, Inspector General of the Transportation Department.

He said the TSA had budgeted \$107 million to hire airport screeners, but they ended up paying over \$700 million to the contractor.

The only contact I had with this contractor was when they ran an ad saying that they would take applications at a mall in my District, and then no one from the company showed up.

I received several calls from angry constituents who showed up at 7 a.m., as the ad had directed, and had driven long distances to get there.

If the TSA had budgeted \$107 million, they should have told this company that was what they would get instead of allowing a \$600 million cost overrun.

Hiring screeners may have been an administrative headache, but it is not rocket science. Thousands of companies around the country could have done a better job at much less cost to our taxpayers.

Most federal contracts are sweetheart, insider deals in one way or the other, but this one is about the most ridiculous I have ever heard of.

Then they hired far too many people. One aviation official told me that TSA now stands for thousands standing around.

I am sure that almost all the people who have been hired are good, honest, patriotic people. But the TSA has simply hired many thousands more than they need.

I know it is impossible to ever convince any government agency that they have hired even though people much less too many.

Yet, before 9/11 we had about 28,000 or 29,000 screeners. We were told beforehand we would need to have about 33,000. After passage, they said they would need about 40,000—then a couple of months later, they went to the staff of an appropriations subcommittee requesting 72,000.

There was such an outcry, they quickly backed off to 67,000. Then the appropriations Committee put a cap on them of 45,000 that they have arrogantly ignored by hiring thousands of temporary employees, so I am told they now have about 65,000 screeners.

I am told one major airport went from about 170 screeners to over 700.

Then two members of the other body have uncovered the worst abuse of all. Apparently twenty TSA recruiters spent nearly two months at a luxury resort in Colorado—a seven-week junket that resulted in the hiring of just 50 screeners. Rates at this hotel run from a low in the high \$200s to well over \$300 a night for just an average room.

The company that ripped the taxpayers off on the screeners contract, NCS Pearson, has been replaced by TSA, after the obscene cost overrun, but according to Ms. Malkin, "the firm still holds several lucrative federal contracts. These contracts total more than \$500 million—including a \$140 million deal to manage and operate three national customer-service call centers for federal immigration services."

As Ms. Malkin said: "Deeper into the homeland security money pit we go. Where the traditional watchdogs for limited government are, nobody knows."

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BONNER). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

ALTERNATIVES TO WAR SHOULD BE DEBATED

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, many times, many of us are not aware of the very special talents and the very diverse backgrounds Members have in this House. I was moved to listen more than I ever have to the words of the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS). For those Members who need to be refreshed in their memories, of course, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) is one of the valiant soldiers of the civil rights movement, one of the leaders of the civil rights movement, and one of those very privileged persons who had the opportunity to work directly with Dr. Martin Luther King. His words were particularly potent this evening, because he has just led a pilgrimage to Selma, Alabama, to acknowledge the Selma-to-Montgomery march. The march of March 7, 2003, was to acknowledge the march of March 7, 1965, when Congressman LEWIS's attempt to walk across the bridge for civil rights and the right to vote was stopped by the bloody actions of those in Selma, Alabama. Today we are seeking healing, and he is proudly one that leads a

group of Members and others back every year.

So when he speaks about peace, he knows from which he speaks. I believe it might be well for this Congress to pause and this Nation to pause for a moment just to think about the issues of nonviolence and whether or not it shames us or diminishes us to find another option to the option now posed of a war against Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I frankly believe that we have not consented to a war against Iraq; and I believe this Congress has yet to fully debate this question, a simple question of declaring war against Iraq under article I, section 8. I am asking the Speaker to bring this legislation up.

I believe that we have another option, Mr. Speaker; and it does not again diminish our respect and admiration and acknowledgment of the hundreds of thousands of young men and women already deployed, willing to offer their lives so that we might live free. It respects their choices. It also acknowledges the different strains, stresses, and tribulations that these young people are under. The story of two Marines, male and female, parents of a 2-year-old son who have to leave now, one already gone, one about to leave and writing their will to determine where that child might go.

I believe we have another option because we are united around the fact that Saddam Hussein is a bad actor, a bad leader, a horrific and a heinous actor upon people. So I believe we can find a way to win this effort against the acts that he has perpetrated by using international law. We can, through the United Nations Security Council, convene an international war crimes tribunal and indict him so that the credibility of his government and Mr. Saddam Hussein is diminished. We can leave a coalition of 50,000 troops on the border to ensure that the U.N. inspection process goes forward. We can begin humanitarian aid. We can as well regain or rebegin, regain the prominence of fighting the war against terrorism, and we can reignite the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Speaker, there are options other than war. I would ask this Congress to do its job and not be silenced, debate this question; but I ask the President to review the options in light of the courage of our young men and women and the United States military. We salute them; we praise them. That is why we are owed the duty to render the right decision on their behalf and the people of the United States of America. There is another option. I argue for peace over war. Listen to the words of the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHN LEWIS.) He knows from whence he speaks.

HONORING EDDY ARNOLD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs.

BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor a true Tennessee legend and a national treasure. Eddy Arnold is the most successful country music singer of the 20th century. His body of work, including 28 number one singles, spent more weeks at the top of the country music charts than any other artist in the field.

This March, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville honored the Ambassador of Country Music for donating his personal effects and memorabilia. This selfless donation constituted the largest collection dedicated to a single individual ever received by the museum. The "Tennessee Plowboy" generously offered more than 2,000 photographs, 5,000 radio recordings, tuxedos, guitars, and his coveted Entertainer of the Year Award from 1967.

In a brilliant career that spans 7 decades as a guitarist, songwriter and singer, Eddy Arnold has made immeasurable contributions to the popularity of country music with such hits as "I Hold You in My Heart" and, my favorite, "Make the World Go Away." Now he has made an immeasurable contribution to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. For that, Tennesseans and, no doubt, country music fans across the country, are deeply grateful.

Eddy Arnold, a living country music legend and my constituent, has enhanced his genre and the culture of America. I want to thank him for his dedication to the arts and for his invaluable gifts to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum.

H.R. 1322, A BILL TO PROTECT RETIREE HEALTH BENEFITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. TIERNEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the face of mounting evidence of a national crisis in retiree health care, and I want to announce the re-introduction yesterday of the Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act, known as H.R. 1322.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1322 will stem the tide of post-retirement cutbacks or elimination of health care benefits that have victimized millions of American retirees.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one would think that businesses and business values and basic fairness and, in fact, the law would ensure that retirees could rely on health benefits promised to them by employers. But the case is that increasingly, large profitable employers, even those who enticed employees into early retirement, have now changed and are reneging on their commitment.

These corporate cutbacks in retiree health care have reached intolerable proportions. For too long, working people have been denied health care bene-

fits that were promised upon retirement to the lack of strong laws in this area. The retirees lived up to their end of the bargain, Mr. Speaker, and now the companies must live up to their end.

To renege on these promises jeopardizes the life savings of people who are forced to absorb the precipitous decline in their standard of living and dip into their savings in order to make up for a cut or a cancellation in health benefits. Even worse, retirees with preexisting medical conditions may not be able to obtain or afford any new health coverage at all. As a result, their health declines rapidly and, in some cases, needlessly.

A recent study by the Employment Benefit Research Institute found that a 65-year-old retiree without employment-based insurance may require up to nearly \$1.5 million to fund lifetime medical expenses. That is assuming death at the age of 100 and medical inflation of 14 percent annually.

All of this is happening against a precipitous drop in personal savings. According to the AARP, which published "How Americans Save," the United States savings rate has been steadily declining over the last 25 years. The Economic Policy Institute reports that in September and October of 1998, personal savings rates for Americans consisting of contributions to individual savings accounts, as well as employer and personal contributions to 401(k)s and IRAs and similar pension plans, dipped below zero for the first time since the Great Depression. The United States Department of Commerce reports that at the beginning of the 1990s, households saved on average about 8 percent of their disposable income. By 2001, the proportion of income set aside for savings had fallen below 2 percent.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1322, the Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act, would reverse these recent trends and bring common sense and fairness back to retiree health. With certain limited exceptions, the bill would prohibit employers from making post-retirement cancellations or reductions of health benefits that retirees were entitled to when they retired.

In addition, the bill would obligate employers to restore benefits taken away after retirement, unless the employer can demonstrate substantial business hardship if compelled to restore the benefits.

Boosting a profitable bottom line would not qualify as a substantial hardship. While many employers are crying hardship today, Mr. Speaker, the hard truth is that many were aggressively cutting employee benefits in the midst of the economic boom of the 1990s when profits were high.

Basic fairness dictates that we ensure that the promises that have been made to those whose life's efforts have contributed to the great economic prosperity of our Nation are kept. We can ill afford the collapse of private