

one of the fallen sons of the 18th Congressional District in Houston, Texas, whose funeral today was commemorated and celebrated by his family and friends and by the city and by those who loved him.

Tomas Sotelo, Jr., Army corporal, lost his life in Iraq on June 27, 2003, fighting for the values and virtues of this Nation. This young man, barely 21 years old, lost his life in battle. Today was his funeral at his beloved Reagan High School, and I had the honor of saluting him at that service.

But more than that, I think it is appropriate to come today to raise up this young man for he was well admired and respected. In getting to know his family during this very troubling and trying time, I can say they love this country; and this family gave the ultimate sacrifice, their loving baby son.

Corporal Sotelo is immediately survived by Mr. and Mrs. Tomas Sotelo, Sr.; his brother, Jose; and his sisters, First Lieutenant Flor Lopez and Erica. Sitting in their living room, I got to know the family and heard them talk about the love and friendship and fellowship that this family engaged in. I heard the mother tell me that she had spoken to her son just 3 days before his death, that he always told them that he missed them and he loved them. He was never far from their hearts and minds.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we be reminded as we stand in this body that we have an obligation to those young men and women who now are in Baghdad. We have an obligation to them to be reminded of their willingness without question to give the ultimate sacrifice, and we owe them not only the tribute and salute on the day of their death and funeral, we owe them a tribute as we conduct ourselves in determining the future that holds for this country and for Iraq.

I am told by Tomas' friends that he was a person of great humor, always lively and always engaging in some activity to make people smile or laugh. He loved Reagan High School, and graduated in the year 2000. He was a member of the ROTC. Let me say how proud I was to be able to have worked with the family to hold his funeral ceremonies at Reagan High School. I thank the Houston Independent School District for their courtesies in making every arrangement for that to be possible today.

□ 2000

Let me acknowledge his grandparents, who traveled more than 24 hours by bus from Mexico to be with his family. And let me acknowledge the fact that though this family may not have had its original origins in this Nation, they stand equal to any of us by having given the ultimate sacrifice, the loss of their young and their most beloved son.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is with great humbleness, great sorrow that I ex-

press on behalf of the United States Congress our deepest sympathy, for on this day there are conflicting emotions, the emotions of having lost its fallen son and hero, a recipient of the Purple Heart and Bronze Medal for his heroic achievements, and, of course, the ultimate sacrifice. And yet I stand here representing the fact that this young man, this Army corporal, Tomas Sotelo, Jr., was a hero of the 18th Congressional District of the State of Texas and, yes, the Nation. And might I say as he was a member of the Howitzer Battery, Squadron 2, Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Polk, Louisiana, that as he lays with the angels, we will not forget him, and we will simply thank him and bid farewell to this young man, dying in the prime of his life, being reminded that we will never forget him and that we will continue to thank his family for the ultimate sacrifice that they made.

Might I say, Mr. Speaker, in closing that he remains a true American hero, and we will tell his story over and over again so the young people of his high school will know that a hero walked this way.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Army Corporal Tomas Sotelo, Jr., a hero to the people of the 18th Congressional District of Texas and to the people of the United States of America.

Corporal Sotelo died last week while valiantly serving his country in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Corporal Sotelo served his country as a member of the Howitzer Battery, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Polk, LA. Corporal Sotelo is also a cherished resident of Houston, TX.

Since his days as a youth in Houston, Corporal Sotelo has been dedicated to serving Americans as a member of our uniformed services. He was a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps at Reagan High School in Houston, TX, where he received his high school degree. Dedicated service runs deep in the Sotelo family. Corporal Sotelo's sister is a First Lieutenant in the Armed Services as well.

As with every brave member of our military who has died in service to our country, the United States of America owes Corporal Sotelo an immeasurable debt of gratitude. His willingness to put himself at risk to create a world of peace will never be forgotten. He made the ultimate sacrifice by giving his life in service to our Nation during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he has contributed immeasurably to the freedom and security of both Iraq and the world.

Corporal Sotelo epitomizes the best of the United States of America—bravery, selfless service, dedication, and honor. Corporal Sotelo possessed all of these attributes, and many more, in abundance. Corporal Sotelo's life and sacrifice should be celebrated by all Americans, and his contribution to this country should be remembered always. He will truly be missed.

To the family of Corporal Sotelo, I extend my deepest condolences and sorrow at the loss of their loved one. The memory of his bright life will remain an inspiration to all of us.

So today, Mr. Speaker, I ask every Member of Congress, and every American to join me in

paying tribute to the life and courage of Army Corporal Tomas Sotelo, Jr.—a true American hero.

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

(Mr. KOLBE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. GUTKNECHT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SOCIAL SECURITY'S COMING CRISIS

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

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about Social Security's coming crisis. The actuaries and trustees of the Social Security Administration have long understood, at least for the last 15 years, the challenges facing our Social Security program. With the impending retirement of the large baby-boom generation starting around 2012, there will be a shift in the proportion of workers paying into Social Security compared to those retirees drawing benefits. As a result, there will not be enough money as benefits going out will exceed taxes coming in by about 2015.

Recently I met with White House staff and political director Karl Rove to encourage Presidential leadership and Republicans and Democrats in Congress to deal with the coming crisis. It is easy to put off. There is even a greater need to face up to the Social Security problem now with the probability of more money being spent for a very expensive prescription drug benefit that probably is going to be added to Medicare.

Let me talk about what is happening to the population 65 years old and older. It is going to increase from currently 37 million today to 75 million in 2035 and to 95 million by 2075, so a huge increase in the number of retirees while the birth rate is going down, so fewer workers to pay their in taxes to cover those benefits. This population will grow much faster than the workers due to increased life expectancy for seniors and lower birth rates. Because Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system, with workers' payroll taxes going immediately to pay benefits to seniors, these demographic changes are going to lead to the program's insolvency in a little over 10 years unless something is done.

The options for Social Security are straightforward, I think. We can increase payroll taxes, which are already

too high. Seventy-five percent of American workers now pay more in the payroll taxes than they do the income taxes. We can cut benefits, or, instead of using all the extra money coming in now from Social Security taxes for other government spending, get a real rate of return on payroll taxes we already collect.

It is obvious, to me at least, that the last option is best, but it cannot work unless we give money time to grow with interest. If we wait another decade to act, there will be no choice but to take drastic action.

I have introduced my own reform proposals in each of my last five terms in Congress. They have been based on slowing down the increase in benefits for high-income retirees and having a real rate of return on some of that extra money coming in. I am working on the final aspects of this year's bill, which I plan to introduce in the next 2 weeks, and as I finalize provisions to make the system more fair for women in this bill.

One thing I have learned over the last decade is that time is running out for reasonable solutions. As I have introduced each new bill in each new session of Congress, the way to solve the problem has been more drastic as we have been giving up the extra funds coming into Social Security that are dwindling, that are running out. It is this situation that gives me such a sense of urgency to act so we can avoid burdening our children and grandchildren with more debt, more taxes, and a failing Social Security system.

Many people are concerned that a Social Security system with worker-owned accounts is unsafe because people might invest poorly or lose their savings. I have studied the problem as chairman of the bipartisan Social Security Task Force and think that investments can be limited and protected as they have been in other countries such as Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Chile. My bill requires the government to start paying back what has been borrowed from the trust fund, and that current payroll taxes go someplace safe, earn interest and end up keeping Social Security solvent.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, government officials here in Washington need to act on Social Security, but they are too often focused on the next election to deal with problems that are still a decade away. The truth is that Social Security is headed for a cliff, and if we begin to turn and slow down now, we can avoid it smoothly. If not, a panicky swerve and screeching brake is coming. Let us avoid that. Let us stand up to our responsibility and deal with Social Security.

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

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AFRICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, we are members of the Congressional Black Caucus here tonight, and we stand here tonight to speak on the state of Africa as the first day of President Bush's trip concludes. The President's trip shows a level of commitment that surprised many of us when we read in the newspaper that he was intending to visit Africa, but African journalists recently said Africa appreciates the words, but is awaiting the deeds.

Many people have written Africa off as a place that has too many grave problems, and that it is irrelevant to the United States' interest. Indeed, there are still a lot of people whose views of Africa are certainly limited by disasters and civil wars. However, engagement with Africa is a vital U.S. interest. From the war on terrorism to the supply of critical resources, from the campaign against threatening diseases to the opportunities for economic trade and investment, Africa is a global player. We ignore the continent at our own peril.

If we had paid a little more attention to Africa and Sudan, where Osama bin Laden lived from 1993 to 1997, recruiting and planning the al Qaeda movements that terrorized our U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and then went on to organize the Taliban and to have havoc wreaked through Afghanistan, if we had paid attention to Africa, if we had looked at some of the requests for us to intervene in some way by assisting John Garang and the Sudanese Liberation Movement with trucks and telephone equipment and other things they were appealing to, perhaps Osama bin Laden would have been put out of existence, because the liberation movement from John Garang and his organization could have defeated the Khartoum government which gave haven to Hamas and to al Qaeda and many of the other terrorists. By our ignoring Sudan, where 2 million persons have died and 4 million have been displaced, where food has been used as a weapon, if we had decided that that was an important country for us, then we perhaps could have avoided many of the things that we see today as our soldiers are in harm's way in Iraq and we continue to move through Afghanistan and Africa towns.

I will talk briefly between our speakers, but I do want to quickly bring focus to our main concern, my main concern tonight, and that is the situation in Liberia. On July 2, I wrote a letter to our Secretary of State and a week before that had the opportunity to be in his presence and asked the Secretary of State if attention could be given by the Bush administration to the country of Liberia. First of all, the Liberians have been asking us to come

in and assist. People are in the streets with American flags and signs asking President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell to come to their aid, and people are saying, why should we be concerned about Liberia? There are 50 sub-Saharan African countries on the continent. Why should we be concerned?

I think many of our citizens in this country and it appears many of our lawmakers in the House and in the Senate have no knowledge at all of where Liberia's beginning came from. It was in 1822 that President Monroe, the Monroe document, President Monroe said that we should have a return to Africa movement and free black men. Many people have the opinion that these were simply illiterate slaves, ex-slaves that went to Liberia, but these were free men, some slaves, but free men, lawyers and businessmen, who went to Liberia to start that country in 1822. And in 1847, Liberia became a republic, started by African Americans who returned to Africa, to Liberia, to start this republic.

Their Constitution was based after the United States Constitution. Their laws were based on laws of the United States of America. There were very strong ties between the United States and Liberia. In World War II, the West African country allowed American troops to be positioned on their soil. Again during the Cold War Liberia was an important ally when it served as a leading U.S. base for intelligence activity against Moammar Ghaddafi of Libya and other threats to the United States. Even Samuel Doe, even though he came to power in a bloody coup, the United States in the midst of the Cold War supported the government because Liberia served such a great interest to the United States during World War II when the Pacific region was cut off for rubber supplies. Liberia with Goodyear Rubber Company that had been established in Liberia for decades, for perhaps close to a century, Liberia was there to help the U.S. war effort.

So when people say why should we go there, there are many problems around. We should go there, and the reason that the British have asked us to intervene, the reason that President Kofi Annan of the United Nations have said the United States should lead a peacekeeping force, these are because Liberians, the world, look at the United States as the power that could come in and change the situation.

□ 2015

So I wanted to give that brief background of the country of Liberia and to say that is why this particular country is different, if we want to remove ourselves from other countries in Africa.

As I conclude my portion and will yield to the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, I would like to say that in Sierra Leone currently the British went in. They went in and they prevented the RUF, the terrible group that terrorized people in Sierra Leone,