

practices, I am quoting, "did not strike an appropriate balance between the efforts to assist community development and the need to assure," and this is the part that I just, again, I insist, when you read things like that, you wonder why the Democrats insist with such passion to raise the taxes on hard-working American taxpayer. Because this says, again, that there was no balance, no appropriate balance between the efforts to assist community development and the need to assure that the Federal taxpayers received reasonable consideration for property transferred to the local CROs. In fact, the audit says, we found that the taxpayers were frequently shortchanged in this process.

Yet, the Democrats want to raise the hard-working American people's taxes to do more of this kind of thing.

The audit continues, it says, In February 2002, a rig was, a drill rig was sold to the local CRO for \$50,000 that is now being offered for sale by an out-of-state equipment broker for \$3.9 million. You better believe the taxpayer was shortchanged and, yet, the Democrats insist on wanting to raise the taxes of the American people. It said that this group transferred hundreds of pieces of equipment, including trucks, office machines and trailers, purchased, by the way, by taxpayers, to the CROs for \$1 per transfer. And this is the part which is even harder to believe, Mr. Speaker.

It said, it provided laboratory equipment to the CRO that was needed at another department site, ultimately causing the Department to spend \$2.5 million to replace the equipment that they had basically given away. Another \$2.5 million to purchase that equipment a second time because it was given away. Nothing happens.

Now, the President is trying to change that, and he is aggressively trying to change that. We are going to have a debate tomorrow in the Committee on the Budget where we are going to try to stop this abuse. We are going to try to cut waste, fraud, and abuse. I hope that our dear friends on the Democratic side this year, for a change, do not propose amendments to raise taxes, to increase spending, but will join us in trying to cut waste, protect the American taxpayer. I do not have great faith, because they have not done so. That is not in their culture and their tradition.

I hope they do so, because the American taxpayer is fed up with waste, fraud, and abuse. They want help in cutting that waste, fraud, and abuse. All of us are going to have a great opportunity tomorrow in the Committee on the Budget in the markup.

I hope our dear friends on the Democratic side will not side with the constant increases of taxes, and will side with us to cut waste, fraud, and abuse, to seriously try to control that part of the budget, not increase taxes, not increase spending, spending more money, more good over bad over good over bad money, but will join us to not raise

taxes as they have always wanted to do, but instead will join us to keep the taxes low, to keep the child credits intact, to keep the death penalty tax from going up. As one of our colleagues said, there at least should be no taxation without respiration. And they will have an opportunity tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, let us see what they will do. I hope that they will join us in fighting for the taxpayer, not fighting for more waste and more tax increases.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

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

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I would like to address my colleagues from Texas and Florida who have just spoken and called themselves the Waste Watchers, and they listed all of these wasteful actions of government, and then they said that Democrats want to raise taxes. I would like to remind them that their party controls the presidency. Their party controls this House. Their party controls the Senate. And the last election in Florida demonstrates that their party controls the Supreme Court. If there is all of this waste, why does not their party get rid of it? Why blame the Democrats for something that their party is responsible for doing? I just point out that the Republican party is in charge and, therefore, the Republican party is responsible for the waste that my colleague detailed before us tonight.

I would like to speak tonight about veterans health care. I attended a Committee on Veterans Affairs meeting today where the Veterans of Foreign Wars spoke before our committee. And those veterans are asking why it is that we are spending billions and billions of dollars to Iraq. \$87 billion the last time we got a request from the President. He is going to come back and ask for probably \$50 billion more following the November election, and yet, we are nickel and diming our veterans.

We have said priority 8 veterans can enroll in the VA health care system. The President actually sent us a budget during this time of war, and in the President's budget, he is asking that for many of our veterans, the cost of a prescription drug be increased from \$7 a prescription to \$15 a prescription. Now, for a veteran that is on a fixed income and may have 6 or 8 or 10 prescriptions a month, that is a heavy, intolerable burden.

The President's budget also asks that there be a user fee imposed upon veterans, a user fee of \$250 per year, just so many of our veterans can participate in the VA health care system. And then we have a request in the President's budget to increase the cost of a clinic visit for our veterans. We are piling burden upon burden upon burden on the backs of our veterans. I simply do not understand why we would do this.

In a time of war, when we are creating new veterans, many disabled, veterans with terrible injuries, veterans who have lost their arms and legs, many have been blinded, terribly disfigured, these are veterans who have newly fought for our country, and we are giving them a VA health care system that is woefully underfunded.

I simply do not understand why the President does not step up to the plate and put his actions behind his rhetoric and say, I am willing to pay whatever it takes to provide adequate health care for the men and women who have fought and suffered for this country. I call upon the President tonight to rethink his priorities. Rather than spending money to send a man to Mars, we ought to be spending money to take care of our veterans.

I have shared this with my colleagues in the Committee on Veterans Affairs. A couple of weeks ago I went to Walter Reed Hospital. I visited a young man from my district who joined the military when he was 17 years of age. On his 19th birthday, while standing guard duty in Baghdad, a truck bomb exploded and removed a large part of one side of his face. This young man who is only 19 years of age was at Walter Reed getting reconstructive surgery on his face. He is just one of thousands, and there probably sadly will be thousands more in the future.

This Congress, this President, those of us of both political parties, should put the needs of our disabled, sick, and needy veterans at the top of our priority list. I call upon all of us, myself included, to make our veterans our number 1 priority.

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

(Mrs. MILLER of Michigan addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

REAUTHORIZATION OF THE TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ACT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to discuss the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to transportation, we are indeed at a crossroads in this country. We have the intersection of the demands for creating the type of infrastructure which will facilitate commerce and move our citizenry, and trying to achieve some type of rational spending limits within our Federal budget.

Back home in my area of north Texas, we face a silent crisis. This crisis is unrecognized by residents until

they find themselves in an unbearable commute to work or unable to make the necessary connections between home, work, and the other activities that consume our daily lives. North Texas has experienced an increase in traffic over the past 3 decades, which is a result of unprecedented population and employment growth. Added to that is the underinvestment in Federal transportation dollars for my area.

The time is now to make necessary investments in our transportation infrastructure. In Texas, our transportation needs outstrip available funding 3 to 1, and these are not trivial funding needs. These relate to supporting international trade transportation, streamlining the environmental process, and expanding innovative financing techniques. Handling taxpayer dollars with care is, in fact, one of our highest callings in the House of Representatives. That obligation is enshrined in the Constitution. Our charge as congressional representatives is to protect dollars taken from the taxpayer by, in fact, streamlining and improving activities of our Federal Government, not just to simply spend and dispose of those tax dollars. And sadly, when Federal tax dollars are not handled with care, important Federal programs such as our transportation programs find themselves being hurt and neglected.

Last year, shortly after my election to my first term in Congress, I was very fortunate to be chosen to be a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and I wanted to be certain that the United States Department of Transportation was ensuring the most efficient business practices within the agency. So I requested a meeting with the Department of Transportation Inspector General, Mr. Kenneth Mead, to discuss the business practices of the agency and how Congress could better facilitate removing inappropriate expenditures related to transportation funding.

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The Department of Transportation has not changed the way the agency disburses transportation funding to State and local entities since President Eisenhower was in office. The Inspector General recommended that if one cent had been saved on every dollar spent over the last 10 years in transportation programs, the Department of Transportation would have had an additional \$5 billion to spend.

This \$5 billion would equate to the amount of funding needed for four of the eleven major transportation projects currently under way in this country. Clearly, greater efficiency within DOT could have an enormous impact on more efficiently spending taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Mead shared with me examples of how transportation projects could be used as examples or models of government efficiency. In the State of Utah in preparation for the Winter Olympics, Interstate 15 needed substantial im-

provements. By streamlining the design build process on that stretch of roadway, Interstate Highway 15 in Utah was completed ahead of schedule and under budget and available for individuals traveling to the Winter Olympics that year.

Similarly, in north Texas, the Dallas area rapid transit system worked within their budget last year and actually returned over \$21 million in transit funding to the Federal Government. Unfortunately, there are examples of transportation projects that are not carefully managed; and as a result, dollars are not wisely spent.

The Ted Williams Tunnel of the Central Artery Project in Boston, Massachusetts, known affectionately as the Big Dig, is perhaps the poster child for inefficient Federal spending in a transportation project.

The General Accounting Office has estimated that from fiscal years 1998 through 2001, the Highway Trust Fund Account lost over \$6 billion because of the ethanol tax exemption and the general fund transfer. Using the Department of the Treasury's projection of gasoline tax receipts, the GAO has estimated that the Highway Trust Fund Account will not collect \$13 billion because of the tax exemption from fiscal years 2002 through 2012. There is an almost \$7 billion shortfall from the general fund transfer between the same years.

Prior to the last reauthorization bill in 1998, the Highway trust fund earned interest on its balance, which was paid by the general fund. If the Highway trust fund had continued to earn interest on its balance, the Department of the Treasury estimates that the Highway trust fund would have had an additional \$4 billion from September 1999 through February 2002.

Between modifying DOT's practices within State and local governments and reevaluating the true purposes of the Highway trust fund, I believe we can work together to ensure our Federal Government is more effective and more efficient to the American taxpayer and that we indeed have the funds necessary to pay for our projects.

If we are unwilling to make the monetary investment and the necessary policy changes, I am afraid our vision for our Nation's highways will be that of a congestion-bound commuter sitting in a traffic jam watching the bridges and roadways crumble before our very eyes.

I think, Mr. Speaker, a very worthwhile goal would be to allow Americans to spend as much time in family discussions at the dinner table as they currently spend trying to get home.

TAX CUTS AND THE DEFICIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). 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, I came to the floor of the

House to address the concerns raised by my colleague, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS). But, Mr. Speaker, I just have to respond to some of the comments and debate that I just heard by my friends on the other side of the aisle.

It is interesting to call the Democrats the tax and spend party of America. And I recall that when we finished the work of the 1993 budget resolution and the 1997 budget resolution going into 2001 after President Clinton left office, the spring of 2001 saw this Nation with somewhere between a \$5 and \$7 trillion surplus.

Today as I stand here and on the eve of the Committee on the Budget's meeting tomorrow, addressing the questions of veterans health care and Medicare, Social Security, the threat that this administration has given to cutting Social Security, we are in a \$551 billion deficit based mostly upon very misdirected tax cuts by this administration on the backs of hard-working men and women.

To the 1 percent richest we have given all of the tax cuts, and we are digging a hole deeper than we could ever remove ourselves from and eliminating the needs of all Americans as relates to the services that this government has so aptly done before and having a balanced budget.

So I would just ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to return to their administration and their committee meetings and try to explain to the American people how we have gone down such a slippery slope.

Let me also say that when it comes to the job creation that occurred in the 1990s, this administration and Republican Congress is a dwarf, if you will, compared to the enormous steps and strides that were made under the leadership of the Democrats. 21,000 jobs that were made just in this last month, in terms of job creation, over 3 million manufacturing jobs that have been lost. And the 21,000 jobs were government jobs. No private sector job was made in the last month.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARD HAITI

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, let me now move to my comments that are associated with those of Mr. CONYERS. I again ask this administration for full investigation on the removal of a duly elected democratic president from Haiti, President Aristide and his wife.

President Aristide's most recent press conference in the last 24 hours again restates the fact that he was removed from the country without his consent. He was coerced; he was seemingly threatened and frightened into making a decision.

In a hearing that was held last week and questioning Representative U.S. Assistant Secretary Noriega on this question, rather than ask the question directly, he proceeded to be directly rude, if you will, and also to the extent of refusing to answer the question or be