

from three deep shocks. It is suffering from the deep shock of the dot-com collapse, of the 9/11 strike, and finally the corporate scandals, which are now being tried in our courts.

Mr. Speaker, the Republicans and the President have charted bold initiatives that are pulling us out of the economic recessions that began in the late 1990s and early 2000. Those recoveries must be sustained. That tremendous job growth in March is an indicator of what lies ahead, 308,000 new jobs in 1 month.

Mr. Speaker, we have 138 million jobs in this Nation, but every single person who needs a job and a career should be able to find it. And with the policies that this administration and this Congress have passed, we are on the road to recovery and providing careers for every person that looks for them.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURNS). The Chair must remind Members to avoid improper references to the Senate.

IRAQ AND RECENT REVELATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) is recognized for half the time remaining before midnight.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be joined here this evening by my colleague, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) and another of my colleagues, the gentleman from the State of Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) as we talk about what is happening in Iraq, the needs of our troops, and what the American people need to know. Much of the information is just now becoming clear to us as a result of Mr. Woodward's book, which became available to the general public today.

□ 2230

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my comments by making reference to a comment the President made in his most recent press conference when he made reference to what he would say to the troops. In that statement he said, "We will provide them what they need." That sounds like a rather direct and simple statement, but the truth is we have not provided our troops in Iraq with what they need, not in terms of equipment certainly, equipment that has the potential to save lives and to avoid serious injuries.

Mr. Speaker, the war began in March 2003. Soon after that war began, I received a letter from a young soldier from my district who is a West Point graduate and a gung-ho Army guy, and he started his letter by saying, Congressman, I am so proud of the Army. I am so proud of what we are trying to do here to help these people. But later in his letter he said to me, my men are

wondering why they have not been provided with these life-saving interceptor vests, which became available, I believe, in 1998. They cost \$1,200 to \$1,500 apiece. They are made with Kevlar with pockets in the front and back where ceramic plates can be inserted which will stop an AK-47 bullet. They are life-saving equipment, and yet we send our soldiers into battle in Iraq, and thousands and thousands were without this equipment.

Now, the war began in March. I received this letter from this young soldier in the early summer. I wrote the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld a letter sharing what I had been told by this young West Point soldier, and asked him when our troops would be provided with this life-saving equipment. He wrote me back. I got a letter in September from the Secretary telling me that he expected that our soldiers would be fully equipped with this life-saving equipment in November. Within a day of getting the letter from Secretary Rumsfeld, I received a letter from the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Myers, and in his letter General Myers indicated it would be December, not November as Secretary Rumsfeld had said, but it would be December before all of our soldiers were equipped with the interceptor vests.

Then before we left this city for our Christmas vacation, our holiday vacation, the Pentagon held a briefing, and in that briefing we were told that it would be January before our soldiers were equipped with these life-saving vests. I remind my colleagues that the war began in March, and we are being told that it will be January before the soldiers are provided with life-saving vests. Lo and behold, after I came back to this city after the holidays, and I was continuously troubled that this problem had not been solved, so I wrote Secretary Rumsfeld another letter reminding him that the self-imposed deadline had passed.

Finally, finally, in March of this year, I received a letter informing me that finally all of our soldiers had been equipped with this life-saving vest, 1 full year after the war began.

Now we have a similar problem because many of our soldiers are being killed and wounded in Iraq because they are driving around in Humvees that are not up-armored Humvees. In other words, they do not have the proper armor that will protect them if the soldiers are attacked while on patrol. Soldiers are driving in Iraq with unarmored Humvees. I am concerned about this, and I say to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) the only company that has a sole contract with the Pentagon to provide these up-armored Humvees and the kits to armor those already deployed is an Ohio company, O'Gara-Hess.

O'Gara-Hess officials came to my office, and they told me under their current contract with the Department of

Defense, they are being asked to produce 220 of these up-armored Humvees each month. However, they are capable of producing up to 500 a month. The Pentagon says there are about 4,000 of these Humvees in Iraq that need to be so armored to protect our soldiers, and it will probably be sometime in 2005 before it is all done. The question that I would ask: If the President was standing where you are standing, I would say to the President, Mr. President, this is a life-saving matter. Why are you not directing your Pentagon to provide our soldiers with this protection as quickly as possible?

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, the answer would be, as has been enunciated in a series called The Spoils of War on Marketplace. Members may be familiar with the program Marketplace. It is on the radio and follows the National Public Radio news, All Things Considered, the afternoon edition of it. There is a business broadcast called Marketplace which reviews the market decisions, the business activities of the country, and in their series entitled The Spoils of War, Members will find that the money which otherwise might have been spent, according to the contract that your company represents, to provide armor for the Humvees is now going out at the rate of tens of millions of dollars a week, perhaps a month, in graft and corruption through the Bank of Iraq, with nothing in the way of any kind of accountability under the Provisional Authority, Mr. Bremer's Provisional Authority.

This is being done today. They are done with DGs, or director generals, of the various Iraqi ministries. They are the equivalent of under secretaries. They go into the bank and walk out with cardboard boxes full of cash. Corruption is in the hands of clerks who simply rubber-stamp the action, and the American companies that are over there taking the money are paying bribes, are involved in mass corruption, and this is where the money is going. This is what the Provisional Authority is involved in. This is what is happening.

We cannot respond to you and your constituents in Ohio and those people in Ohio who are capable of providing armor for our troops because we have to make sure that those who say they were on our side, those who say they were the sources of Iraqi information and intelligence and upon whom we could rely are the very ones who are involved up to their eyeballs in corruption and graft in Iraq and Baghdad itself to the detriment of our own troops' capacity to be able to defend themselves.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I wish there could be the kind of sunlight that our distinguished friend, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) has

said. Sadly, it is impacting your constituents and your company, but let me say what it really means to the American people.

He is asking the real question who is in control? Who is providing the fire-wall to ensure that the young men and women who have committed themselves to putting themselves on the front lines, for whatever the cause. We know there are young men and women on the front lines. Might I say there are also civilians who are there, and some of them are hostages. Today one of my companies announced that three of their employees were found dead. We know there are hostages still held. We want to offer our prayers for those families, and the military families as well; but who is in charge?

Before we went off on break, I went to Walter Reed Hospital and saw the results of unreinforced Humvees and saw the results of the misuse of dollars in as much as rather than having the resources to ensure that land mines or the explosive devices are not utilized against our troops because maybe they are shorthanded, we are in the crux of confusion with not enough resources to be able to restore Humvees. Soldiers that I visited showed me limbs that were lost. When I was in Iraq, they showed me that they were reinforcing them with sandbags. One soldier said that he did not get hurt as badly as he might have because they had used sandbags.

Mr. STRICKLAND. I received a call a few days ago from a soldier returning after 14 months in Iraq. He said, "Congressman, your Ford Explorer that you drive around is better armored than the Humvee that I drove around Iraq." The fact is so many of the wounds and the deaths are occurring because of these devices that are planted in the roadways, and our soldiers are driving over them, and they are exploding, and there is nothing in that vehicle to protect them.

These up-armored Humvees have steel plating in the bottom and on the sides. They can even reinforce the windshield so that the windshield itself is impenetrable. It can be done. The President said to our soldiers, we will provide you what you need, but the President is not providing our soldiers what they need.

Regardless of what people feel about this war, Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, the one thing we should be able to agree upon is if we are going to send our soldiers into harm's way, we provide them with every bit of equipment that they may need to be safe. Why we are not doing it, and why we are not doing it as rapidly as possible, I do not know.

MS-NBC had a TV program about this last week. They identified the problem, and they indicated steps were being taken to correct it as quickly as possible. I can tell Members tonight, steps are not being taken to correct this problem as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, if I were the President, I would get on the phone to Secretary

Rumsfeld, and I would say, fix this problem as quickly as it can be fixed, regardless of what it takes, 7 days a week of work, 3 shifts a day, whatever it takes. Get our troops the equipment they need to be protected, and do it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE).

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. In that context, I can tell Members as someone who was part of the first group to go into Iraq right after the initial attack on Baghdad, going from the Baghdad airport to Saddam Hussein's palace where Mr. Bremer was being installed and displacing General Garner, and we were there the day after he had taken control there, we said to him at that time, you can have all of the equipment in the world, but as I said to him, Mr. Ambassador, driving from the Baghdad airport to Baghdad itself and to this palace that we now occupy, you are going to have to have 10,000 soldiers who guard that highway. I do not care what kind of equipment and armor you have, you do not arm a Humvee and then send somebody out to play lottery with their lives. No matter what the equipment is, when you only have a strip of tar coming across the desert, no lights, no protection, nothing, I said it is going to take 10,000 soldiers.

The plain fact of the matter is when General Shinseki, who had responsibility for the well-being of his soldiers, indicated as chief of the Army that it would take hundreds of thousands of soldiers, hundreds of thousands of Army and Marine personnel and support in order to initiate and sustain such an attack and deal with the aftermath, he was entirely correct. We need not just more equipment, we need a political policy that provides a foundation to bring this to a resolution.

□ 2245

And in order to accomplish that, we have to have sufficient personnel unto the date, and the Secretary of Defense and the President consistently have denied this to our people in the field and indicated to me shamefully all along if they wanted more, all they have to do is ask. We know what the message is. The message is they are not here; they cannot be there. And why? I will tell the Members. Because many members of our committee, Republican and Democrat alike, and when I say our committee, the Committee on Armed Services, have tried for several years now to increase the number of people in the Army and the Marine Corps, that is to say that can be recruited and retained as active-duty forces. It is called end strength. What is the end strength? The end of the numbers that we have in the Armed Forces. We said, absent a significant increase in the number of Army troops and Marines available, we inevitably would have to call on Guard and Reserve.

I beg to differ with the gentleman's remarks and the gentlewoman's remarks in one sense only, the phrase

"our young men and women." Let me tell my colleagues something. Tune into the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer every night on PBS, and respectfully and with dignity they close every program in silence with the pictures and short biographies of the people who have been killed, and chills run down my arm as I reach out to say it, and we see over and over again sergeant so and so, 43 years old; master sergeant somebody, 50-something years old; 38 years old. These are teachers. These are police officers. These are fire fighters. These are Guard and Reservists. They are not young men and women. Not that being young in itself makes one a candidate for these pictures, but that is who we tend to think of. This is a volunteer force, and the Guard and Reserves are volunteers, and they are being shamelessly exploited in this sense. We now have a draft in this country. We have a draft by default because the Guard and Reserve are being pulled into active-duty service and their terms of enlistment are being extended arbitrarily by the Department of Defense.

Therefore, I conclude, and thank the gentleman for yielding, by saying, yes, we have to provide the equipment; but we have to provide the people and the policy behind it that will allow us to resolve this issue.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, a point well taken because I have had three of my constituents killed in this war. The last one I heard about today, a 21-year-old Marine who had served time in Iraq came home for a brief period of time and was married, was sent back, and was killed in an explosion last Saturday, 21 years old. Earlier than that, a couple of months ago, a 20-year-old, but a 37-year-old as well with three children, a 15-year-old son and two young daughters. So my friend is correct. Young people, middle-aged people are losing their lives.

And I would just say this before I yield to my friend from Texas. This has been the most costly month of this war. We are not through this month yet, but we have already lost over 100 precious American lives just this month, well more than a year after this war started. And I just wonder if the President had told the American people before we went to war that it was going to cost \$150 billion plus billions and billions and billions more in the years to come, if it was going to cost more than 700 precious American lives, if it was going to result in about 3,500 to 4,000 being seriously wounded, if we were going to be there not for a year or 2 years, but perhaps 5 or 10 or more years, if there were no weapons of mass destruction, if he had said to the American people Iraq was not responsible for the attack upon our country and we have no reason to believe there is a connection between Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorism network, I just wonder under those circumstances what the reaction of the American people would be.

But the fact is that Vice President CHENEY, we now know as a result of Bob Woodward's book, and Mr. Wolfowitz and Richard Pearl and others had decided that this is what we needed to do and so they manipulated and distorted and exaggerated and shaved the truth, and we find ourselves now in a situation where our troops are not being well equipped, not being well equipped in spite of what the President says in his press conference, not being well equipped, and I believe that those who were responsible for persuading this President to take us to war under these circumstances were immature in their understanding of history, were naive in their understanding of what war is all about, and to this very day refuse to acknowledge their mistakes.

Some may say, why talk about the past? We are there now. We have got to deal with this. And that is true. We cannot just leave. We are there, and we have got to deal with this terrible situation. But the reason we need to talk about how we got into this situation is because those who got us there are still in power and they want the ability to make the decisions for the future. They want the ability to make decisions about what this country is going to do with our military, with our foreign policy, years into the future. And that is why we need to talk about this issue, because the American people need to learn the truth, and they need to know the complete story.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Ohio's remarks, and of course the gentleman from Hawaii has made a very pointed statement. I guess my optimism is that all of them are young men and women with futures before them, and I recognize that we embrace that population of youth, which ranges from the early teens or the late teens all the way up to the ages that the gentleman has cited, each and everyone of them have committed themselves to going forward to provide the kind of protection for this country and to uphold their oath.

I guess I rise today to follow up on several points that remain. But in particular I just want to take a very quiet moment to acknowledge that this Nation is not filled with wimps. There is no one that would step aside when the Nation's, if the Members will, dignity and honor need to be defended. None of us would run away from defending a Nation that had been attacked. None of us would go against the efforts to fight the war on terrorism. In fact, we have been united in the war on terrorism. This Nation has rallied in World War II, in the Korean War. We even rallied in the Vietnam War. We asked hard questions. It was controversial, but we were united. But we understood that we needed to learn a lesson from Vietnam. We were united, even though there were political differences, ultimately in the Gulf War, and it was one

of the largest collaborations that we have seen around the world.

What I really struggle with here in these days of the Iraq war are several points, and the gentleman has made them. But, first of all, I have struggled with the direct and pronounced and distinct misrepresentations to the American people. We have yet to find weapons of mass destruction, nor can we find the connection to 9/11.

And then my good friend from Hawaii has said it very clearly. We have young soldiers there. In the headlines in The Washington Post, "Disappointed troops face extended tour with the need to get over it." Part of their extended tour is the very fact of what the distinguished gentleman has said, not enough troops; and so therefore we are keeping those who are bruised and battered and torn and worn; yet their spirits are responding to our call. But we are keeping people over there who have, in fact, done their service. And this particular battalion is now going to have to stay an extra 4 months.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, would the gentlewoman agree then that that is a draft by default?

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, that is a draft by default. He made an excellent point. And in the shadow of the draft by default is the constant dying of these soldiers for lack of equipment, for lack of a plan. For there are many of us on this floor that have agreed with the war resolution and disagreed with the war resolution.

I have been to Iraq. Most of us or many of us have been to Iraq. And what we all agree with is that there must be a plan to follow through either on an exit or for the maintenance and reconciliation of peace.

My good, distinguished friend has already said there is corruption there, that money is flowing in and out that cannot be accounted for. And so the safety of Fallujah is not the only question we have in mind. It is the question of what is the plan. What is the plan to understand the people in Fallujah and to understand, once the governing council makes a deal, whether or not the citizens of Fallujah are going to adhere to it? It is to understand that we cannot put different groups in a battalion of Iraqis, Shiites, and Sunnis and others, and then ask the question when they go into battle why they dispersed and either go in alliance with those who are fighting our troops. Because this administration does not have a plan. And because they do not have a plan, in the city, in the metropolitan area of Houston over this last weekend, we lost 11 individuals in that area, 11 loved ones, 11 personnel in that area, 11 families mourning.

So this is not a question now of politics as much as it is what is the future of this war. What is the recognition by this administration that people are dying and that they are not in any way objecting to dying for a cause, but the question is can the administration in

good faith suggest there is a cause, suggest that we have a plan, suggest that we have a solution to be victorious.

And let me just say this: the gentleman had it right, and the headline reads in The Washington Post, which is taken from the Woodward book, "Cheney was unwavering in desire to go to war."

Let me just say this: my understanding is that we have three branches of government, the judiciary, the executive, and the legislature. I have never been told that a declaration of war, decision to war, is that of one person, be that person the Vice President of the United States or maybe even one Member of Congress, who has the right to send this Nation into war. So I am at a loss as to the power of the Vice President to singularly take the United States into battle. He has no solution now. I do not know whether Mr. Wolfowitz has a solution. Certainly Mr. Rumsfeld, who indicated a couple of weeks ago he was surprised with the response, and this happens to be the Secretary of Defense who is over our United States military, he is telling us he is surprised, while mothers' children are dying or fathers' children are dying. What an outrage.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that bothers me about this administration and its apparently overwhelming desire to go to war was the fact that according to the Woodward book that in January the President and I believe Mr. Rumsfeld met with Prince Bandar, this Saudi ambassador, this prince, in the White House and informed him of our plans to go to war with Iraq, and according to Mr. Woodward, this happened before the President even told our own Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Mr. Powell is now disputing that account, I believe. But the fact is why would the President discuss his plans to go to war with this ambassador from Saudi Arabia before he informs the Congress of the United States and talks to the American people about this?

Fifteen of the 19 pilots that were involved in the attack upon our country on September 11, 2001, were Saudi Arabian citizens. There is an unusual relationship between the Bush family and the Saudi royal family. It is starting to come out. I do not know if that has anything to do with the fact that a few days after the attack upon our country, Saudi citizens were allowed to be flown out of this country at a time when all of the other private aircraft were grounded and planes went all over this country picking up Saudi citizens and some relatives of Osama bin Laden and flew them out of this country before they were thoroughly questioned and vetted by the FBI. Why would that have happened? It is almost beyond belief.

□ 2300

Now, Mr. Woodward implies in his book that there may be a secret deal

between this administration and the Saudi Government regarding the cost of gasoline; that they have been asked to lower the price of oil before the election so that the election prospects of President Bush may be enhanced.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if it is true, but I know that is what Mr. Woodward says in his book, and Mr. Woodward is a very credible author, widely respected journalist, who had access to Colin Powell and to the President, and he makes that accusation in his book.

Now, the American people are paying outrageously high gasoline prices today, outrageously high. Secretary Abraham, the Secretary of Energy, was before my committee not many days ago, and we asked him in that committee meeting, has the President called the members of the Saudi royal family and asked them to do something about these outrageous oil prices?

Well, apparently not. In fact, the Saudi family cooperated with OPEC in voting to cut production, which has had the effect of raising prices. So during the spring and summer, the American citizens are paying these outrageous gasoline prices, and, apparently, if Mr. Woodward is correct, maybe in late fall we will find that the Saudis suddenly decide to increase production, thereby lowering the cost of gasoline and making the President a hero. Now is when the American consumer needs help with these high gasoline prices, not in September or October.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. If the gentleman will yield a moment on that, I just want to ask a question at this point: Would the gentleman agree then that the President of the United States is all for free trade, unless it happens to be with oil, and in that instance then he seems to have no problem at all with a cartel being able to decide how much it is going to produce, when it is going to produce it and how much it is going to charge for it?

Would the gentleman agree that when it comes to free trade, that is a foreign term to the President, that is a foreign term to the free trade people in this country, who want us to be able to send our jobs overseas, want free trade and the free circulation of international funds for the purpose of that trade, except when it comes to oil and the oil cartels?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, there is only one other exception, and that is prescription medications. The administration does not believe in free trade when it comes to prescription medications, because we can trade everything else with Mexico and Canada except medications, and the pharmaceutical companies do not want that.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. I yield to the gentleman the point that international robbery from pharmaceutical companies is right up there next to, if not parallel exactly, with the oil cartels.

Mr. STRICKLAND. I thank my friend, and I yield to my colleague the

gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, this is overwhelming in terms of the mounting evidence that we have seen presented over the last couple of days and weeks that goes to the point that I made, that the decision to go to war was somewhere outside of the constitutional parameters that we should adhere to.

Frankly, we were misrepresented to in terms of making a decision on this floor, and then we have come to find out that maybe even in the executive branch, the appropriate officials were not given at least the opportunity to give and take, and that this was in fact the singular decision of at least one individual, and then maybe two or three others. So we have a real problem.

If I might, as I close, say this: I am going to apologize to the American people. We know that the 9/11 Commission hearings were held over the last 10 days, and a number of administration officials came forward.

I guess I come from the old-fashioned home training. My parents and grandparents always said that there is some dignity in an apology. It does not in any way suggest that you are weak, that you have no strength. In fact, it is all about character, that you can acknowledge that you have made a misstep or mistake. Then you begin to gather around so that you can embrace ways of improving your good condition.

When I see those men and women of all ages in the military hospitals losing limbs, multiple limbs, quadriplegic, blinded in both eyes, heads dented in from wounds, I wonder what I can say to their children, looking for them to come and play Little League or football, their wives, their mothers and fathers.

So I just want to come to the floor this evening and join my colleagues, but I want it to be known that I apologize on behalf of this country and am ashamed by the fact that officials went before the 9/11 Commission, and I know that the two are distinct in some sense, 9/11, of course, referring to the tragedy of 9/11 in New York and in Pennsylvania and in Washington. But it was overlapping, that as the 9/11 was used for us to go into Iraq, and we lost those precious lives and we should have been committed to a vast war against terrorism, bringing in all the allies that we could muster, so that we would be able to stomp out the devastation of terrorism. Yet we got distracted, and now we have men and women dying in Iraq, and we are at a loss to find out what the cause is.

We are hearing that there is infiltration of corruption with dollars that we have sent over there. We are understanding that no matter if you are in a convey of civilians, even the civilians are not safe. Family members who have sent civilians over just to get an honest day's earnings for an honest

day's work are in jeopardy of their lives. Even our corporations who are working over there with their personnel are jeopardized because they are not getting a fair shake to be able to do the work they were supposed to do and as well to have their personnel protected.

So, I would just say to my colleagues, I want to thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), first of all, for giving me this time to join him and to join the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE), and be able to say that together in this Congress we have got to find a way to restore the constitutional parameters and to restore the authority of the United States Congress to ask the hard questions; to support the United States military, as we have done collectively, to provide the resources; to ask the President why, and to expect, I might say, an apology, which does not in any way diminish the Commander-in-Chief's role of leading the troops; but to be able to say that with all that has come out, I know we have made some missteps, and I apologize to those who have lost their lives, their family members, bereaved members who now have to be left alone.

There is one final point I want to make, and maybe the gentleman did not hear it, but I want to get the transcript so I am not misstating, because I thought I heard in the press conference some words about "I am disappointed in some of the performances of the troops." I am still trying to research that, the President's press conference. I was shocked that I might have heard those words. I cannot imagine how can you can be disappointed in some of those performances when they do not have all of the equipment they needed to have.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to end on one note and make it very clear, I am apologizing, and I am not ashamed of doing so. I believe that this Congress needs to stand up and take responsibility for how we are going to gain dignity by responding, if you will, to the needs of the United States military in the crisis that they are in in Iraq and provide them the necessary equipment and plan for them to be able to exit in dignity and to have the success of the rebuild of Iraq with an expanded coalition, what we should be engaged in at this time.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, the gentlewoman from Texas made a very, very strong point of the necessity, I believe I am quoting her correctly, that we have to find a way. We have to find a way to get this message out. We have to find a way to get our message, we have to find a way to engage the American people in a discussion and a dialogue. That is what we are trying to do here.

To the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), if you would indulge me for a moment in yielding, I think it might be apropos that we do take upon

ourselves the admonition of the gentlewoman from Texas. We have to find a way.

This is our way. Not everyone may understand what it is. They may be going up and down the television and see what is going on. This is called Special Orders. Special Orders means the regular business of the House, that is to say the scheduled business of the House, is completed for the day. This is our opportunity as Representatives, this is the opportunity of the 435 of us, who have had the faith and trust of our constituents placed in us, to come to the floor and engage in a dialogue not just with ourselves, but with the American people. Because part of the difficulty has been is the American people are watching this on television, or reading it in the newspaper, participating, if you will, at a distance, as to what is taking place, unless and until, of course, it hits you full force because a loved one has been hurt or harmed or killed, or someone that you know has had that experience. So it happens sporadically, and, from the point of view of the cosmos, indifferently around the country at various times.

So we are here on the floor, and I might say to those tuning in, we are here on the floor of the House of Representatives, surrounded by the galleries. In fact, our good friend the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO), the distinguished gentleman from Illinois has a group of his constituents in this gallery right now observing our proceedings.

□ 2310

He is explaining to them as we are speaking now what it is we are doing on the floor here. It does not matter that the Chamber is not filled right now.

We spent our time this afternoon naming post offices. I was happy to do it. A good friend of mine had one of the post offices named after him. I was pleased to cast my vote for it. A wonderful opportunity to show our expression of what we would say in Hawaii is "aloha" for our good friend and others. We were happy to do that.

But our business here in these Special Orders is to engage the American people as best we can with that which we have before us. And as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO) now is talking with his constituents here in the gallery, this is the freedom granted to us by the Constitution that we need to take advantage of, that we were obligated to take advantage of.

So the regret to me is, as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO) no doubt has pointed out, right behind me here is the press gallery. Empty. Night after night empty. Now, maybe they can say, well, they are watching on television, if they care to.

But who wants to pay attention to Special Orders? Well, I will tell my colleagues what happens in Special Orders. Not just this kind of discussion, but my good friend, the gentleman

from Michigan (Mr. SMITH), night after night engaged in a conversation on the Social Security trust fund, what it takes to make the Social Security trust fund.

In fact, he just walked in right now. That is synchronicity. I did not know he was coming. Did my colleague happen to hear what I had to say? I do not know whether the cameras are on us or not. But the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) has just come in.

I cite him as an example, as a prime example of someone who has faithfully come to the floor to explain his position on the Social Security trust fund, the implications of it for our country. That is the kind of thing that needs to be done. That is what this is about.

This Iraq Watch that we have faithfully committed ourselves to since the beginning of our concern that this war was going off on the wrong track, that this was taking place, that is why we are here. That is why I appreciate the gentleman yielding. I appreciate the fact that our good friend, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. COSTELLO), and his constituents have observed us this evening, have seen democracy in action.

I am here to tell you as far as this gentleman is concerned, that I am going to take advantage of this opportunity that we have here on the floor and continue to exchange in the kind of dialogue that I hope will illuminate the issues of our day so that we can get a resolution on behalf of these brave men and women who are serving our country.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE), for joining us and thank my friend, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE), in closing so the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) can have his time to talk about his concerns.

I go back to something that I mentioned earlier in this time together and that is the fact that this very night we have young soldiers and middle-age soldiers in Iraq driving around in Humvees that are not armored. It puts them at greater risk. This problem can be solved much more quickly than the Pentagon is willing to solve it.

I talked to a radio personality back in my district today and she said, "Congressman, what can the people listening do about this?" I said, "Call the White House. The message ought to be this: Mr. President, provide our soldiers with armored Humvees as quickly as possible because life and limb are at stake."

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURNS). The Chair must remind Members to avoid improper allusions to visitors in the galleries.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND GOING DEEPER INTO DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for the time remaining until midnight as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, as the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) said, yes, we have had many conversations about Social Security including the stealing of the extra trust fund surplus that has been coming in. We have never been quite square with the American people.

I would yield to my colleague.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to join the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH). As one can see, the aura that he exudes when he comes to speak about Social Security must have been so powerful that the rays literally leapt out and said to me, say that the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is coming.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I think that the people of Hawaii are still wide awake and listening to this debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to comment tonight not only on Social Security but what I consider a huge challenge for this country, and that is going deeper into debt and increasing the spending of the Federal Government and sacrificing the increased burdens of that increasing debt in addition to the kind of high taxes that it takes to accommodate this kind of spending and this kind of servicing of the debt.

The first chart I have is a pie chart that I wanted to sort of show how the Federal Government is spending \$2.4 trillion. And we see the largest piece of this pie is Social Security, spending 21 percent of all Federal spending; and that is going up.

In 1983 we had the Greenspan Commission that gathered together because Social Security was going broke, and what they decided is to dramatically increase taxes, payroll taxes, our FICA taxes, for Social Security and at the same time reduce benefits. And that is the challenge for Social Security, that is the challenge for Medicare, that is certainly the challenge for Medicaid, the three major programs where Members of Congress have continued to make promises over and above far beyond our ability to pay for them in the future. And that is the problem with extra pressure on increasing taxes and increasing debt on these kind of unfunded liabilities.

We see the other pieces of the pie. Defense is 20 percent; 2 years ago it was 19 percent.

Interest. Look at this issue of interest on the debt. It is now 14 percent of total spending. Within 6 to 8 years that amount of the piece of pie that interest consumes servicing this increasing national debt is probably going to double.

Now, interest rates right now are almost at record lows. We know that interest rates eventually are going to increase. And so increasing interest rates