

magazine. Let me read the first paragraph.

The roots of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal lie not in the criminal inclinations of a few Army reservists, but in a decisions approved last year by Secretary of War Donald Rumsfeld to expand a highly secret operation which has been focused on the hunt for al Qaeda.

He wanted to move it over to Iraq. "Rumsfeld's decisions embittered the American intelligence community, damaged the effectiveness of the elite combat units, and hurt America's prospect in the war on terror."

This one paragraph alone ought to be enough to have the Republicans on their feet demanding an investigation. Instead, Republican leaders in this House remained silent as each new revelation damages U.S. credibility around the world, not to mention the morale of our soldiers.

The stories place Rumsfeld, Under Secretary Stephen Cambone, and Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz in the decision-making roles in the scandal. Is that true? The American people and the world need to know.

Denials by Rumsfeld's spokesman will not silence the calls for truth. Indeed, if Secretary Rumsfeld has no prior knowledge, he ought to be the first person demanding an impartial inquiry by the House of Representatives. The time has come for full disclosure, not carefully orchestrated photo ops.

I call on the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives to begin an impartial and open investigation into the atrocities that occurred in Iraq. The American people are resilient. They are resilient enough to face the truth. So is everyone else who has nothing to hide.

ARE YOU BETTER OFF NOW THAN YOU WERE FOUR YEARS AGO?

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, between now and the end of this session of Congress I will continue to ask the question, Are you better off than you were 4 years ago? And I think whether you answer that question by reference to war and peace or education or access to health care or any number of topics, the answer is clearly no. But tonight I would like to answer that question specifically by reference to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, when President Bush took office, he inherited a \$236 billion budget surplus and an economy that had created 22 million jobs during the 8 years of the Clinton administration, 1.6 million jobs in the half-year alone.

When President Bush took office the projected budget surpluses were enough to cover the costs of Social Security during the baby boomers' retirement years, and the country was experiencing the biggest drop in child pov-

erty in a generation and the lowest poverty rate in 20 years. Four years later under President Bush, the President is looking to create his first net job. Meanwhile, 8.2 million Americans are looking for work. The unemployment rate is 30 percent higher than it was when President Clinton left office; 2.2 million private sector jobs have been cut on President Bush's watch; and 2.7 million manufacturing jobs have been shed.

One of the major reasons for the current jobs recession is the increased exporting of high-paying white and blue collar jobs overseas. Consider several examples from the township of Edison, the largest town in my congressional district. Earlier this year the Ford plant closed leaving more than 900 New Jersey employees without jobs. Last year the Frigidaire air conditioner plant closed in Edison and shifted production to Brazil leaving 1,600 unemployed residents in Edison.

You would think the Bush administration would be concerned about these job losses; however, President Bush and his economic advisers view the movement of American factory jobs and white collar work to other countries as a positive transformation that will in the end enrich our economy. And for those Americans who have jobs, many have seen their household incomes decrease over the last 4 years by an average of almost \$1,500.

These cuts in income coupled with skyrocketing increases in insurance, health care, gas prices at a 23-year high, and college tuition increases averaging 28 percent have made it extremely difficult for middle-class Americans to make ends meet. And yet the President tours around the Nation touting his accomplishments. Based on these numbers, how can President Bush say America's middle class is better off now than it was 4 years ago? He simply cannot.

Consider, Mr. Speaker, also the government spends \$900,000 more each minute than it takes in thanks to a historic reversal in fortune during the last 4 years. Under President Bush's guidance and the policies of the Republican Congress, we have gone from historic surpluses to historic deficits, numbering in the \$400 billion range this year alone.

My friends on the other side of the aisle say it is not their fault that a war, a recession and a terrorist attack are to blame. I have actually heard them call it the perfect storm. But those excuses, in my opinion, ring hollow. Republicans are in charge of the White House and both Houses of Congress. So what are they doing about the challenges facing Americans? Absolutely nothing.

Do Republicans have a plan to create jobs or to reduce the deficit? No. Do they have a plan to stop the outsourcing of American jobs like those at the Ford and Frigidaire plants in my district? No. The only thing they seem to have a plan for is giving tax cuts to those who need them least.

Americans are facing record job losses, record deficits and record debt, and yet President Bush's only economic answer seems to be more tax cuts.

Mr. Speaker, in my opinion it is time the Bush administration realizes that shipping jobs overseas and cutting taxes for the wealthiest elite in our country will not create jobs. President Bush and Congressional Republicans have had 4 years to turn this jobs recession around, and they have failed.

Democrats, on the other hand, are fighting to create economic opportunity for all Americans. Republicans are just standing in the way. So I ask once again, are we better off than we were 4 years ago? The answer certainly with regard to the economy is a resounding no. And I think we can say that for so many other aspects of what we have experienced here in the last 4 years.

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

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California 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 New York (Mr. HINCHEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

JUSTIFIABLE COMPENSATION

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 probably will not take the full 5 minutes because I am going to be joining my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), a little later for a Special Order. But there was something that I wanted to point out that I think is relevant to every one of us who serves in this body.

Following the exposure of the prisoner abuse in the prison in Baghdad, our Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, has said that he believes that the prisoners who were abused should be compensated by our government.

Now, I do not have any real problem with that if in fact the abuse can be verified. But what puzzles me greatly is the fact that there have been other prisoners held in captivity in that part of the world, and I am talking about American prisoners, American POWs, who were held during the first Gulf War by the Iraqi regime and some 16 of those ex-prisoners who were held by the Iraqi regime and treated terribly. They have described the abuse they endured while they were being held during that first Gulf War, and following

that they brought suit against the Iraqi Government. And they laid claim on the right to compensation, and it has been reported that our government had some \$1 billion, perhaps even more than \$1 billion which we had frozen. These were Iraqi Government assets which had been frozen, and these American ex-POWs having been tortured at the hands of the Iraqi regime asked the courts to grant them compensation. And lo and behold the courts, my understanding is, made the right decision and said that they were entitled to compensation. And they were hoping to be compensated from these frozen Iraqi funds. And lo and behold, and this is almost shocking, I believe, the Bush administration opposed these ex-POW American veterans from receiving compensation from the Iraqi Government, although we had the funds that could have been used to compensate them.

Those funds, it is reported in the press, those funds have now been sent back to Iraq for the rebuilding of Iraq. Now, the question that I would ask the President is why would this administration support the compensating of Iraqi prisoners who were held in an American prison and were subject to abuse and would oppose compensation for American soldiers who were held in an Iraqi prison and abused? It just seems like a double standard that is difficult to explain. And so I believe the American people should be aware of this. And they should hold this administration accountable.

If the Iraqi prisoners who were abused should be compensated, then certainly the American prisoners who were held by the Iraqi Government and subjected to terrible abuse, they should be compensated as well.

I think this is a stark contradiction, but I do not think it is inconsistent with the way this administration has treated veterans when it comes to other benefits, and we will be talking about that a little later. But I felt like this situation was egregious enough, the contrast was stark enough that the American people should be aware of it.

CARING FOR OUR VETERANS

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

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight with my two friends, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) from Niles in northeast Ohio and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) from a district that runs from Portsmouth, along south from the Ohio River, up east including parts of Mahoning County near Youngstown. We will talk about the treatment of veterans in this country and the problems that we have seen, and the strength of the veterans administration, the good things it has done but how it really has fallen short, a Fed-

eral agency that has done remarkably good work for so many, but fallen woefully short in the last couple of years.

I want to continue the theme that the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) mentioned, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT), others, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) earlier this week, Are you better off today than you were 4 years ago? And I think this theme particularly is reinforced when asking about veterans. Are veterans in this country today better off today than they were 4 years ago?

And I think we will see as the evening goes on in the next 30, 40, 50 minutes or an hour, how the veterans really have been shortchanged by this administration, how the Veterans Administration does not work as well as it did. Our benefits to veterans are not nearly as adequate, never really generous, as they used to be. I want to talk about that, whether veterans are better off today than they were 4 years ago.

As I said, I am joined by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND). Last week Secretary Principi and President Bush announced that they would close three Veterans Administration hospitals in the United States: one in Mississippi; one in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area; and one in Brecksville, Ohio in northeast Ohio. The Ohio facility serves 48,000 veterans in our region of northeast Ohio.

I find it ironic and a little sorrowful that as we head into Memorial Day next week, as we prepare to dedicate the World War II memorial, that the President and Secretary Principi and his administration announce plans to close VA hospitals. Prior to Secretary Principi's announcement, I, along with the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) sent a letter to the Secretary asking him not to close the Brecksville hospital.

Our letter echoed the sentiment of more than 5,000 veterans who signed petitions; it echoed the sentiment of several thousand more who came to rallies and meetings and wrote us letters and made phone calls to us saying this VA hospital in Brecksville, one of the best in the country, treating homeless veterans, a model for the country in treating veterans with mental illness, protesting that this hospital be closed.

I met with hundreds of local veterans who voiced their opposition, as has the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) and as has the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN). Instead of listening to the men and women who served this Nation, the administration is foisting upon American veterans a plan that will force them to travel further and wait longer for health services they depend on.

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In the case of Brecksville, they are closing a facility with a leading rep-

utation for mental health services, and for the last 43 years Brecksville has pioneered innovative, nationally recognized programs and services for homeless vets and veterans with mental illnesses.

Since 1971, Brecksville has offered inpatient mental health services, including acute substance abuse treatment and acute and long-term psychiatric care, to veterans from all 50 States.

We are creating new veterans. The irony of closing these three hospitals, the irony of cutting veterans benefits, health and education benefits, which has happened in this House of Representatives on this floor and with this President, the irony of doing that, the irony of closing these hospitals that lead up to Memorial Day is every day we are creating more veterans in this country as soldiers return from Iraq, sometimes with scars, emotional scars, physical scars, mental scars, where they really do need treatment.

Approximately one-third of the adult homeless population served their country in the armed services. On any given day, as many as a quarter million male and female veterans are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of the year.

For many homeless and mentally ill veterans who struggle with local public transportation, closing Brecksville will double, even triple, the number of miles they will be forced to travel.

The administration made big promises to American veterans. George Bush can hardly go anywhere without singing the praises of our men and women in uniform, even though, as the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) has pointed out many times on the floor, they sing their praises but do not provide them with safe drinking water, did not provide our soldiers with body armor, do not outfit our Humvees with metal plate armor underneath the Humvees and on the door of the Humvees, so that they are much more dangerous.

There is hardly a day goes by that the President does not in one of his fund-raising speeches around the country, which are almost daily, that he does not, the President, sing the praises of our veterans.

At the same time, this administration has cut veterans benefits, cut education and health care benefits, raised the price of prescription drugs, and now, strike three, is closing these three hospitals which are serving hundreds of thousands of veterans.

When I think about a veteran in my district who originally was paying a relatively small copayment per drug per month, that copayment has tripled, and now the administration wants to double that copayment again. It is just amazing to me the President of the United States would do that in a time of war.

It is especially amazing when you look at the price of drugs in Canada,