

A FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a bill of the House of the following titles:

H.R. 5005. An act making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, for additional disaster assistance.

MAJOR TOPICS IN THIS FALL'S ELECTION

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

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, there seem to be three major topics which will be determining factors in this fall's elections, and these are: the conflict in the Middle East, the economy, and values in cultural issues. I will attempt tonight to discuss each one of these areas, hopefully in a somewhat accurate, factual, and dispassionate manner. I will start with the situation in the Middle East.

One thing that we often notice as we watch the nightly news is relatively little discussion of Afghanistan; and by almost any measure, Afghanistan has been a major success. The Taliban has been removed from power, the Soviet Union left Afghanistan after several years of war, unable to conquer the Taliban; and we took them out in a matter of weeks with a loss of roughly 100 troops. The terrorist training camps have been destroyed. Terrorist funding in Afghanistan has been largely disrupted, and the terrorist leadership has been rendered largely ineffective throughout that whole country, which is roughly the size of Texas. The country is reasonably stable and has been stabilized with a very small coalition force of approximately 15,000 troops, again in a country the size of Texas.

This is a remarkable achievement. The Loyal Jurga, the constitutional convention, has been accomplished. Even with all of the rival warlords and tribal factions, they did come up with a constitution that is pro-democracy and seems to represent all factions within the country. So it was a remarkable achievement.

Karzai is certainly a very effective leader. They will have general elections on October 9, and certainly Karzai will have some opposition. But if he is elected, and I think that he will be, we will have a very powerful ally. And I think most people would have to say that this was an almost unheard of accomplishment in a period of a little over a year and a half. So Afghanistan has been a truly amazing accomplishment and one that I think that we can be very pleased with.

There are still some negatives there. There still is somewhat of an opium

crop, and that has to be dealt with. A few hundred Taliban and al Qaeda forces are still active, but most have been driven back into the mountains.

Iraq, of course, is another subject; and we have heard that discussed by two or three other speakers on the House floor this evening. There is no question that there is a great deal of controversy about weapons of mass destruction, and there is no question that some of the intelligence that we have received regarding weapons of mass destruction has not been accurate.

I would say that most of the Members of this House at one time or another were invited over to the Pentagon, and we went over in groups of 10 or 15 or 20 or 30, and we were shown aerial reconnaissance photos of Iraq. Most of these were satellite photos. They were remarkably clear. You could read a license plate from outerspace because of the clarity. We were told, and I believe that the people giving us the briefing absolutely believed what they were saying, that this building here was where anthrax was being created, this was where foot and mouth disease was being experimented with, these trucks were going here, and these ammunition dumps were here and so on.

The problem was that our intelligence on the ground was very ineffective. We were relying heavily upon Iraqis for our information, and many of those Iraqis had an axe to grind. They wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein; and, therefore, whether they deliberately did it or not, I do not know, but obviously some of the information that we received was not very accurate. So this has been certainly a major concern.

However, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and most U.N. countries had very similar intelligence, and that is why we had 17 United Nations resolutions based on the assumption that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. So this was certainly not a miscalculation that was done by the United States alone.

One of the main difficulties that we had was that intelligence spending in our country was cut during the 1990s; and, as a result, the expenditures on intelligence were roughly cut in half, and that certainly reduced our capabilities. So there is plenty of blame to go around, and many people have been busy pointing the finger over the last several months. However, the key issue at this point is not what happened in the past, but where do we go from here.

While I was in the Middle East, I had a conversation with a young captain from Nebraska, my home State, and this young man's name was Christ Ferdico; and he said two things that made sense to me. First of all, he said, you know, it is better that we fighter terrorists here in the Middle East than fight them in the United States. So he was saying that by being on offense, we have occupied the terrorists' attention and resources, and there is no question

that we have. Some people have said we have made the world a more dangerous place. But, obviously, the financial resources, the military resources, a lot of the planning has been diverted from this country and other countries to the conflict in the Middle East, so we have not had an attack in this country since 9/11. It does not mean we will never have another attack, but it certainly means that we have, to some degree, diverted some of the attention from this country.

The second thing this young man said to me which I found to be interesting and I believe to be true, he said, I hope the American people do not lose patience. We tend to be a very impatient Nation. We want our problems solved yesterday. We sometimes do not want to pay a very great price to achieve something. And so the impatience of the American people certainly is a concern. Again, we heard some of that debate earlier from some of the other speakers.

We have lost at this point approximately 1,000 soldiers in Iraq. One is too many, and every one of those soldiers from my district that have been lost I have attempted to call their wives, their husbands, their parents and talk to them personally. It has been very interesting because I thought at some point I would run into bitterness or run into acrimony. Certainly there was sorrow, but there was also pride in every one of those phone calls. Every one of those families said, you know he really believed or she really believed in what he or she was doing. They were really proud of the effort, and we are very proud of them and their willingness to sacrifice.

In the Civil War, Mr. Speaker, we lost roughly 400,000 troops. At Antietam it was 20,000 in one day. During World War II there were approximately 450,000 soldiers who died. In Korea, roughly 50,000. In Vietnam, 60,000. In those two conflicts we really do not have much to show in any way by way of accomplishment. That is not true with this particular conflict that we are involved in today.

So, again, I do not want to in any way minimize the sacrifice of those 1,000 soldiers; but it is important historically to keep this in perspective in terms of what has been accomplished and in terms of the loss of life, which has been relatively small when you look at all of the wars that have been fought over the history of our Nation.

A few months ago, I talked to soldiers in Afghanistan, in Kuwait, and in Iraq. We visited the hospital in Ramstein, Germany, Landstuhl, where most all of the casualties, the seriously injured troops from the Middle East were taken, and then more recently here at Walter Reed. I was really amazed at how positive they were. Some had been seriously injured. Some had even lost limbs, arms or legs. The prevailing sentiment was that they wanted to get back to their units.

Now, many of them would not be able to do that. And I thought at some point

I would run into somebody in all those travels that would tell me, you know, this was a terrible mistake. We should not have done this. I do not know why you put us over there. That did not happen. So there seems to be a great deal of pride and a great sense of mission on the part of these young people.

So some might pose the question: Well, why would they feel that way? Has anything good happened? We talked a little about Afghanistan; but in Iraq, for instance, more than 20,000 reconstruction projects have been completed and a great many of them have been with the aid of our troops. Crude oil exports are estimated to be \$8 billion worth of exports in 2004, which would be approximately prewar or maybe even exceeding prewar levels.

The average household income in Iraq has doubled over the last 8 months. Most Iraqis feel very good and very confident about their economic future. Businesses are springing up where normally there was no free enterprise at all previously. Today, there are more than 1 million automobiles more in Iraq than before the war. We have cleared roughly 17,000 kilometers of waterways for irrigation in 2003. Thirty to forty percent of the marshes drained by Saddam are now restored.

In the health care area, 85 percent of the children have been immunized. Most of them had never been immunized previously in their lifetime. All 240 hospitals in Iraq are now open and functioning. There are 1,200 clinics in operation, and 30 times more money is being spent in Iraq today on health care than under Saddam. His people had abysmal health care under his regime.

As far as education is concerned, 2,500 schools have been rehabilitated. New desks and books have been brought in, and 32,000 new teachers have been trained. School attendance is up by 80 percent in Iraq, and in a great many of these schools girls are there for the first time. Iraq has the highest illiteracy rate of any Arab country, roughly 77 percent in the female population, so for the first time many of these young women are attending school.

Power generation continues to be a problem, but still we are generating more power today than before the war. There is still occasional brownouts or blackouts, but it is better than it was.

There are 230,000 police, military individuals, guards, that have been trained. Most of them are employed, some are still in training; but we do feel that a great deal of progress has been made in that respect.

Of course, everyone knows there has been a transfer of power to the Iraqi interim government. These are very, very brave people. They are under constant attack and surveillance, and we have to hope that they can be somewhat successful. Elections will be scheduled this January, and of course that will be a tremendous milestone. The whole Middle East, I believe, is

looking at this experiment to see whether it can be successful or not, and that is why we see so many attacks from the insurgents. They absolutely do not want to see a democracy succeed in that part of the world.

The gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. DUNN) and I have formed something called the Iraqi Women's Caucus. Sounds like kind of a strange thing for a former football coach to be involved with; but we, in a conversation, came to believe that women tend to be a little less violent than men, and currently 60 percent of the population in Iraq is female because so many men have been killed. So we thought is there anything that we can do to help the Iraqi women be elected to office, or at least a certain percentage of them.

□ 2115

So we have brought Iraqi women to this country to teach them about democracy, about how they might be elected to public office, and some minimal funding has been given to these organizations. I have tried to spend time and speak to each one individually. Some of them are highly educated and speak English, some of them I speak through an interpreter, but the prevailing sentiment I get is things are better now. One lady said, we do not understand what all of the uproar is about weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein was the ultimate weapon of mass destruction.

Many of these women had family members who were killed, had seen rapes in front of their families, had undergone and seen tremendous atrocities. They feel almost unanimously the Iraqi people are relieved and grateful to see Saddam Hussein gone.

They also say that the future is brighter now. They feel definitely things are better, and they see some light at the end of the tunnel.

So the major sources of information that I have tried to use as I evaluate that situation is a little bit of personal experience, but mostly what I have gleaned from talking to the soldiers who have been there and who are there and talking to Iraqi citizens who are there now, I feel that the picture I have gotten is quite different than what we get on the nightly news. Certainly not all of the news is good, and I do not want to hide our head in the sand and pretend everything is perfect. There is no question that security over there is very problematic, and the Iraqi women tell us that. The Iraqis we talk to say that security is the number one issue that they are faced with. But still, a tremendous amount has been accomplished.

A Gallup poll done a few months ago in Iraq clearly said that 80 to 90 percent of the Iraqis see a brighter future. About 80 percent would like to see some type of democratic government, a parliamentary type of government like they see in Europe, or something like what we have, and most of them would like to see their country no longer

under a coalition force. But they also realize it is too soon; this is something that cannot be done at the present time.

As I look at the situation, I feel that failure really is not an option, because if we were to pull out of Iraq at this time, number one, we will have dishonored the nearly 1,000 soldiers who have lost their lives. As I have talked to their families, as I have mentioned, it would be a terrible thing to talk to one of those families and say, we are leaving now, and the death of your soldier really went for naught. I do not think we can afford to do that. They felt there was a meaning and a purpose in going there, and we have to honor their lives by making sure that there is a favorable outcome.

Number two, we will condemn thousands of Iraqis to death. Almost any Iraqi who has helped the coalition will certainly be sentenced to some type of very poor future, probably death. There is a strong likelihood of a civil war breaking out, which would be a bloodbath, and we promised the Iraqis that we would not do that. After the first Gulf War, hopefully we learned our lesson. So we have told them we will stick with them and see it through.

The third thing that would happen if we pulled out is this country would become more vulnerable to terrorism, because any time you show terrorists that their methods are successful, it only invites more terrorism. It does not involve appeasement, it does not solve anything, it only escalates the problem. We cannot allow them to see that terrorism works.

We have heard a great deal about Abu Ghraib and some of the things that have not gone well in Iraq, but I would like to tell Members, Mr. Speaker, about a young man named Troy Jenkins and what he did last April. Troy Jenkins was one of our soldiers. A young Iraqi girl apparently either had in her hands or was standing near a cluster bomb, and no one knows for sure whether she was innocent and did not know what she had, and apparently Troy Jenkins assumed she did not know. He threw himself on that cluster bomb and saved that girl's life and probably several of his comrades. We do not hear much about Troy Jenkins and the soldiers who have been willing to risk danger every day to do some of the reconstruction projects.

I think it is well that we remember that there have been many acts of heroism. Some great things have been accomplished. It has not been a universally successful operation, but still more good has occurred than bad.

The second thing I would like to talk about today, Mr. Speaker, which seems to be a matter of some controversy, is the economy. As with the war in Iraq, we find that perception often does not match reality. Some characterize the economy as being very poor. We hear this being discussed all of the time. I would like to mention just a few factors which I think are important to consider at this point.

Referring to this chart on my left, interest rates currently are the lowest in the last 40 years. Of course, low interest rates generally stimulate economic growth and investment. Inflation is again at historic lows. The Producer Price Index is roughly 1.5 percent over the last 12 months. There was a time not too many years ago when we had double-digit inflation. No economy can sustain that type of inflation. The inflation level now is very low. Productivity expanded 5 percent over the last 4 quarters. We think that is the highest in the last 20 years.

In the manufacturing sector, which we hear a lot about, employment reached a 30-year high in May. So the manufacturing sector is recovering, and employment is certainly rebounding.

Housing, homeownership was 68.6 percent last quarter. That means more than two-thirds of Americans now own their own home, an all-time high. Again, that is an encouraging sign.

Members may say if all of these things are true, what is the problem with the economy? There has got to be something wrong. The thing that we hear most often is the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate is out of sight, and people simply do not have any jobs. So we might again refer to a chart here.

During the decades of the 1970s, for that 10-year period, the average unemployment rate was 6.2 percent. During the 1980s, average unemployment went up to 7.3 percent. During the 1990s, which was an exceptionally favorable period of economic activity, if we listen to most people, particularly some Members speaking on this floor, the unemployment rate was 5.8 percent. Today, in 2004, the unemployment rate is 5.4 percent, lower than any one of those decades. If we average that 30-year period from 1970 to 2000, the average unemployment rate was 6.4 percent. Today it is 5.4 percent. That is not perfect. Mr. Speaker, we would like to see that down around 4.5 or something like that, but it is very difficult to get there. It certainly is much better than it has been historically for the last 30 years. I think that is important to realize.

Mr. Speaker, unemployment runs roughly 9 to 10 percent in the European Union. Many of us feel that the European Union countries are doing well, but their unemployment rate is roughly double what we are currently experiencing. We added 144,000 new jobs in July. So over the last 12 months, we have added 1.7 million jobs in this economy. Some will say, but since the President took office, we are still down about 700,000 jobs. We lost about 2.5 million, we got 1.7 million back, so this President is a failure. I do not necessarily think that is true, because we had 9/11. We had a recession going on when the President took office, and we had the corporate scandals. So a lot has hit this economy, but it is certainly going in the right direction. It looks like it is recovering.

In 2003, and this is something that very few people have stopped to think about or talk about, we had more Americans employed at the end of 2003 than at any time in history. What has happened is some of those roughly 2 million Americans who lost jobs started to work for themselves. So we had more people employed when we went to the household survey than ever before. So we talk about lost jobs, but many people have started their own businesses and are not destitute or out of work.

Another myth which has been circulating here recently is that all of the tax cuts that were passed have not impacted the middle class. Some have said that the middle class is now paying more than before the tax cuts. That is absolutely not true. Every segment of the tax-paying economy is paying less in taxes than before the tax cuts. So currently an average middle-class family making \$35,000 or \$40,000, a wife, husband and two children, pays today \$1,948 less in taxes than before the tax cuts. If you are making \$35,000 or \$40,000, and you have \$2,000 less to pay, that is significant, and that is going directly to the middle class. So whether you are talking about the top bracket, the middle bracket or the lower bracket, if they paid taxes before, they are paying less today. So it is important to realize that the average American citizen has received a substantial tax cut.

The most troubling factor, I think, as far as the economy is concerned which faces this country is well within the domain of Congress, and that is high energy prices. That is the one thing that we continually see affecting jobs, the stock market, and the economy in general. So I would like to address that very quickly because it affects trucking, airlines, agriculture, individuals, and yet one of the most discouraging things to me is we cannot get an energy bill passed in this Congress. The House has passed an energy bill, we have passed the conference report, but still it has not passed the other body. Until it becomes law, we all have failed to some degree.

I would like to flesh out briefly for one second some of the main provisions of the energy bill which I think would be so important as far as the economy is concerned. This is really something that lies at the feet of not Republicans or Democrats, it is all of us.

A key part of the energy bill is renewable fuel standards which provide for solar energy, wind energy, ethanol, and biodiesel. These are all ways to avoid being so dependent on foreign oil. Also, hydrogen fuel cell research and development is part of the energy bill, and most people feel this is the wave of the future. It is environmentally friendly and leaves no greenhouse gases. So if we want to develop hydrogen fuel cells, we need an energy bill because this is the stimulus that will cause this to happen.

In Alaska, the natural gas pipeline, we have tons of natural gas. We have

thousands of tons of natural gas in Alaska at the present time, and yet we are experiencing a tremendous shortage of natural gas in this country today. So it affects fuel prices, it affects heating prices, fertilizers and all of the different things which impact our economy. If we can build that pipeline from Alaska bringing that gas down here, our economy is going to recover very quickly.

□ 2130

It is going to take a little time, 2, 3, 4 years; but it needs to be done. Then, of course, tax incentives to increase energy production. This country basically has not done much in exploration for additional oil reserves, energy reserves, nuclear power over the last 20, 30 years because of environmental regulations. We have to have some incentives to get this thing going again. Our refinery capacity has been reduced by roughly 30 percent over the last 15, 20 years. With those reductions, we put ourselves in a bind. We are now 60 percent dependent on foreign oil. We cannot continue to operate that way because projections have that going from 60 percent to 70 percent within the next few years. The buck stops here. It stops with Congress, and the blame game and partisanship is inexcusable. It simply needs to be done.

On balance, Mr. Speaker, having said all of this, I think it is important to realize that this is the strongest economy in the world. Regardless of what anyone says, it is not perfect; but the economy by most measures, by most standards, is very strong at the present time and appears to be getting stronger.

We have talked a little bit about the Middle East, and we have talked about the economy. The last topic I would like to cover has to do with the third significant factor, I think, which will bear upon the upcoming elections and that has to do with the culture. I was privileged to hear British Prime Minister Tony Blair speak in this Chamber a year ago. One comment that he made made particular sense to me. He said this: "As Britain knows, all predominant power seems for a time invincible but, in fact, it is transitory." What he was saying, I believe, is that there is sort of an illusion. When you are on top, when you are the predominant country in the world, the most powerful country in the world, it seems like that will go on forever. But he says, Great Britain has experienced this, and we know that this is transitory, that all power is eventually transitory. It does not last forever.

I would like to explore that thought a little bit tonight because history teaches that most of the world's great powers are not overcome by external military force but, rather, disassembled from within. Let us examine three such instances. First, we might take a look at Rome. That is a long time ago, about 2,000 years; but it certainly was the most dominant civilization. As a

matter of fact, it ruled the whole civilized world at one time about 2,000 years ago and appeared to be invincible, but eventually it fell from preeminence.

Some of the incidents that are given by historians are a little disturbing. They said there was a general decline in morality. There was increasing corruption and instability in the leadership of the Roman Empire. An increasing public addiction to ever-more violent public spectacles. In the Roman Colosseum, as you know, the masses had to be entertained, and it got bloodier and it got bloodier. Increasing crime and prostitution and a general population that became more self-absorbed, apathetic and unwilling to sacrifice for the common good. I do not know if any of that rings home or not, but to me it is a little disturbing when you read that list.

Then, of course, Great Britain, the British Empire, dominated the world from the late 1600s through much of the 1800s, and this is what Tony Blair was talking about. That empire eventually slowly crumbled. The reasons given by historians were that they lost the national resolve to maintain their territory, which was spread all around the world, a great colonial empire, the values that led to ascendancy eventually were eroded and the spiritual underpinnings shifted in that nation.

Then Russia more recently, only 20 years ago, one of two great superpowers at that time, in a matter of months Russia disintegrated before our very eyes. Alexander Solzhenitsyn reflected on this fall when he observed this: "Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia." He said this: "Men have forgotten God. That's why all of this has happened." Marx and Lenin had dismantled Russia's religious heritage and their value system and Russia, even though it continued to do well for a number of years, had a broken foundation and eventually collapsed like a house of cards with nothing to sustain it.

Some of the common themes of these three great world powers and their historical collapse would be the following: citizens are less willing to sacrifice for others and for their country, citizens become more self-absorbed, a greater desire for the state to provide for their welfare, less personal responsibility, a weakening of commonly held values, and a decline of spiritual commitment.

What does all of this have to do with the United States and our present situation, Mr. Speaker? We certainly have the most powerful military. We have the strongest economy and the most stable government of any nation in the world today. And so it is easy to think that we are truly invincible. However, as Tony Blair stated, "As Britain knows, all predominant power for a time seems invincible but, in fact, it is transitory."

Is there reason for concern? Is there any reason to think that maybe we ought to pay attention to the current situation? I would say that there are some things over my previous 36 years spent in coaching and working with young people that have given me pause. I would like to mention some of these trends that I find disturbing. The young men that I worked with from roughly 1962 through 1997 were more talented each year. Yet they showed more signs of distress, more personal struggles. We spent more time with them off the field than we used to, and with some players off the field was really more intensive than on the field. There was less moral clarity as time passed and just generally a higher level of troubled young people.

This chart that I am going to show you reflects some of the dysfunction that we have seen and an alarming trend. From 1960, the number of juvenile court delinquency cases increased by between 400 and 500 percent, just a steady upward trend, until the late 1990s. Several factors, I believe, contributed to these changes. First of all, family stability has eroded considerably. In 1960, the out-of-wedlock birthrate, Mr. Speaker, was 5 percent, one out of every 20 young people born. Today, the out-of-wedlock birthrate is 33 percent, one out of three. And so one-third of the young people coming into our population have two strikes against them. Some of them somehow or another adapt, weave their way through, make it okay; but it is much more difficult.

In 1960, the great majority of children lived with both biological parents. Today nearly 60 percent of our young people will spend at least part of their youth without both biological parents. So at least half, and maybe more than half, of our young people have suffered some major trauma in their family life. Only 7 percent of today's families are traditional families. I use quotation marks around the word "traditional" because only 7 percent today are traditional. A traditional family would be where one parent, primarily the father usually, works full-time and one parent, usually the mother, but not always, would be home with the children. And so when the children come home from school at 3 o'clock, generally nobody is home and so the hours from 3 to 6 are the most dangerous and the most troubled hours of the day for our young people in our culture at this particular time. Parents spend 40 percent less time with children than they did a generation ago. The divorce rate has increased 300 percent since 1960. This is a big one, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-four million children today live without their real father.

Fatherless children, according to research, show the following tendencies: number one, they are more likely to be abused, girls or boys. They are more likely to have mental and emotional problems. They are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. More likely to

commit suicide, commit a crime, or be promiscuous. The foundation of our culture, the family, is under assault. The family is the basic social unit. Some are surprised when there is concern about how marriage is defined. Many people say this is bigotry, this is religious fundamentalism, this is narrow mindedness.

The concern that I have and I think a great many people have is not against anybody. The concern is for children, because it takes a mother and a father to create a child. According to nearly all of the research I have seen, and there is a lot of it, to have an adequate family and to have a healthy child, the best chance you have is to have a father contribute to the rearing of that child and a mother contribute to the rearing of that child. It takes both, each one, a male and a female, to contribute something to the stability and the education of that child. We feel that it is important that we think this through, because some countries have redefined marriage. As they have done so, we have seen less traditional marriage, we have seen more children born out of wedlock and more children living in dysfunctional situations. If you want to preserve the culture, if you want a strong country, you absolutely must have strong families. You must have children who grow up in a healthy way.

Mr. Speaker, that is one reason why many of us have some concern about this particular issue. The family structure, the launching pad, is certainly not as stable as it once was. There are some discouraging signs. The difficult thing now is that we are taking those young people from that launching pad and we are releasing them into an environment that is much less friendly than it was 30, 40, 50 years ago.

In 1960, when I first started coaching, working with young people, drug abuse was almost unheard of. Today, of course, drug abuse is of almost epidemic proportion. Even in rural areas, an area I represent, methamphetamines, which are tremendously destructive, are very common. Another type of drug which oftentimes flies under the radar screen is that of alcohol abuse involving underage drinkers. A National Academy of Science study shows that alcohol kills 6½ times more kids than all other drugs combined. And so we are scared to death of cocaine and ecstasy and methamphetamine, and we should be; but when all is said and done, roughly 6½ times more children die from alcohol abuse than all the other drugs put together.

Alcohol underage drinking costs the U.S. \$53 billion annually, roughly 2½ times what we spent to rebuild Iraq. We have 3 million teenage alcoholics. As I said, by far the biggest drug problem, and one of the major concerns is that children are starting to drink at younger and younger ages. The average young person today takes their first drink of alcohol at age 12.

Unfortunately, underage drinkers tend to binge drink. They drink on average, at an average sitting, twice as much as an adult; and, of course, alcoholism is achievable much more quickly under those circumstances. Alcohol and the drug issue is a big issue.

In addition, we have the most violent Nation in the world for young people, the highest homicide rate, the highest suicide rate, and the second-place country is not even close. Pornography has exploded. There are over 1 million porn sites on the Internet. According to the London School of Economics, nine out of 10 children ages 9 to 16 have viewed pornography on the Internet and mostly unintentionally. Corporations such as AT&T have in the past been involved in the hard-core pornography business. Some of our more respectable businesses, and I say respectable in quotes, have gotten into this business.

Many of us are somewhat dismayed by the way the FCC is regulating obscenity on the Nation's airwaves. I would have to say they are doing better. They have made some attempts to see things differently since the Super Bowl; but it took that, the Super Bowl half-time show, to get their attention. Video games, of course, are very violent. Some of them are very antisocial and of course much music, some television, many movies are graphic. The content of some of these media programs simply could not have been presented to the public 30 years ago.

I have grandchildren ages 5 to 12, and I guess anyone who has young children or grandchildren is concerned about this. The family is less stable, the environment is more threatening, and our value system has shifted. Stephen Covey in his book, "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People," reviewed all of the literature that had to do with success during the history of our Nation. He came up with something that was rather interesting. He said during that first 150 years of our Nation's existence, all of the research and all of the articles that he could find, nearly all of them, defined success in terms of character traits. A successful person was honest, a successful person was hardworking, faithful, loyal, compassionate and so on.

Then he said about 50, 60 years ago, things began to shift. What he noted was that success was no longer defined in terms of character.

□ 2145

Success had to do with material positions, how much money one had, how much power one had, how much prestige or celebrity one had. So it is very possible under this current definition to be labeled a success and really not be a very good person, not be a very sound person.

So character apparently today has very little to do with whether a person is called successful or not. And, of course, we have seen a discouraging lack of integrity in the business world:

Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing. We have seen some of it in the press, some of it in athletics, some of it in the church, some of it in politics in the last few years. So the value system has shifted.

Philosophically, the predominant world view that we see today in our culture is something called postmodernism, and it is especially prevalent on college campuses. And what postmodernism says is that there are no moral absolutes; everything is relative. So in the right circumstance, theft is okay; incest is certainly understandable, excusable; murder, adultery, treason. There are no moral absolutes. One's truth is one's truth. My truth is my truth. And there are no standards to which we can hang our moral compass.

So in view of the family breakdown, the decline of the culture, and shifting values, this is an extremely difficult time to be a young person, perhaps the most difficult time in our history, and we are asking them to weave their way through a minefield littered with alcohol and drug abuse, harmful video games, music, TV, movies, promiscuity, gangs, violent behavior, and broken homes. And I think it is important that we pay attention to this because this has to do with the strength of our culture. So this is one reason, I believe, why the President has seen a real need for mentoring, because in the absence of caring adults in the lives of young people, mentoring seems to be about the next best thing that we can do.

So a mentor is someone who cares unconditionally. A mentor is one who affirms, who says, "I believe in you, I know you can do this," and everyone at some point needs affirmation. And a mentor is one who provides guidance, who tells someone that they have this talent, and they can see them going to a community college, that they can see them developing their artistic ability or their athletic talent or their music or whatever. Everyone needs somebody who sees something in them. So we need to pay close attention, as no culture is more than one generation away from dissolution.

Two hundred years ago, de Toqueville made an astute observation, and this is what he said: He said, "America is great because America is good," and he was referring to the large number of churches and civic clubs and youth groups and individuals reaching out to help those who were less fortunate when he said this. And he was referring to the inherent decency of the American people. He was referring to the basic ethic, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And de Toqueville wrote 200 years ago, as I said, and I guess the question we have to ask is, are his observations true today? Some are; however, there are certainly disturbing signs of change.

I will conclude today, Mr. Speaker, by discussing a couple of concerns that I have with the courts, and I think, as I go through this, I would like people

and the Speaker to consider, as the election approaches, what candidates, what people would be most likely to address some of the dysfunction that we have discussed here, some of the concerns that we have about our culture, and some of the things that our young people are enduring.

In regard to the first amendment, we have found that there are some court decisions that at least some, including myself, would question.

In 1996 Congress passed the Communications Decency Act, that was the overwhelming majority of people in this body, that made it illegal to send indecent material to children via the Internet. But in June 1997, the Supreme Court overturned portions of the law. They said this: "Indecent material is protected by the first amendment." So indecent material is protected.

In 1996, the Child Pornography Prevention Act outlawed child pornography, including visual depictions that appear to be of a minor. In other words, this was simulated, computer-generated child pornography. In April 2002, the Supreme Court declared this law unconstitutional and overturned the law.

In October 1998, the Children Online Protection Act was passed by Congress, signed into law, and it prohibits the communication of harmful material to children on publicly accessible Web sites. The Supreme Court refused to rule on the 1998 law, and it prevented it from being enacted.

The 106th Congress passed the Children's Internet Protection Act, which requires schools and libraries that receive Federal funds to use Internet filtering to protect minors from harmful material on the Internet. In May 2002, a Federal court declared the law unconstitutional.

So free speech, indecent speech is protected, while many of our women and children are being attacked, because 80 to 90 percent of pedophiles and rapists use pornography on a regular basis.

So the argument is what people see and what they hear really does not harm anybody. This is just something that is out there in space. And if that is true, then why do we spend each year as a Nation billions of dollars on advertising? The reason is obviously that what people see and what they hear and what they read does affect behavior. It has a great impact on behavior. So there is some concern about these issues.

Another first amendment issue that is a major concern is the issue of separation of church and state. Many people assume that that is in the Constitution, separation of church and state, but actually what the Constitution says in the first amendment is this: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." So the establishment clause simply says that Congress, this body, cannot create a state religion and cannot prevent

somebody from practicing a religion. That is what it says. So we have taken that and run with it.

So in 1962, the Supreme Court ruled the following prayer as being unconstitutional, and this is what the prayer said: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our teachers and our country." I do not want anyone to believe that I am saying that a teacher ought to get on a PA system, or the superintendent, or a teacher ought to get up in class and proselytize or try to promote a particular religious agenda. I do not believe that at all. But it seems to me that many of the rulings that we have had have taken us far afield from what the Founding Fathers originally espoused.

Benjamin Franklin said this: "We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in the political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little, partial local interests; our projects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword down to future ages."

And he goes on to say this: "I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business." So that is the inception of why we have a prayer on the House floor and in the Senate every day before we begin business. And obviously Ben Franklin was one of the Framers of the Constitution, and yet he did not seem to see that prayer was to be abolished.

George Washington said this: "The propitious," or favorable, "smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a Nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained." So when he talks about eternal rules of order and right which Heaven has ordained, obviously he is talking about some immutable principles. He is talking about some values which do not shift with the sands and the whims of individuals. So he obviously would not agree with postmodernism.

David Barton, the historian, says this: "Franklin had warned that 'forgetting God' and imagining that we no longer needed his 'concurring aid' would result in internal disputes, the decay of the Nation's prestige and reputation, and a diminished national success. Washington had warned that if religious principles were excluded, the Nation's morality and political prosperity would suffer. Yet, despite such clear words, in cases beginning in 1962, the Supreme Court offered rulings which eventually divorced the Nation, its schools, and its public affairs for more than three centuries of heritage. America is now learning experientially what both Washington and Franklin

knew to be true; we are suffering in very areas they predicted."

So in referring to the establishment clause, I would like to just make a couple of observations: In 1992, that the Supreme Court ruled that an invocation and benediction at a graduation ceremony in a high school was unconstitutional. The Court held that a minute of silence in a school was unconstitutional. In a minute of silence, somebody might look out the window, somebody might think about their history test, somebody might say a prayer, but certainly this was not infringing, I would not think, on anyone's religious principles. In a student-led prayer at a football game, the students had voted that they wanted a prayer before the football game, a student would lead the prayer, and the Supreme Court said that is not constitutional.

So the thing that has happened is that we have seen some jurists who seem to have taken what I would say great liberty with the Constitution. So the Constitution is increasingly interpreted as a "living document," in quotes. So the Constitution is not interpreted as it was written, but rather as Justices believe it should be written and as it has become. So this "living document" hypothesis has changed things dramatically.

The makeup of the courts and the will of Congress will greatly influence whether we continue to drift further from our spiritual heritage or draw close to those values upon which our Nation was founded. I believe that November's elections will directly influence not only the makeup of the Congress, but also ultimately the nature of the courts, and this is something I think we need to pay close attention to.

So there is no question that we are engaged in a cultural and spiritual struggle of huge proportion. Much is at stake. I can only hope that the principles upon which this Nation were founded remain preeminent.

THE STATE OF OUR ECONOMY

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my Republican colleague's remarks, and I do have a great deal of respect for the gentleman, but I have to take issue, I should say, with some of the comments he made.

First of all, as much as he discussed about how the situation has improved in Iraq, and I am not sure that that is the case, but he did talk about how the U.S. has spent so much money on Iraq, in reconstruction in Iraq, and hospitals, schools, other activities, the bottom line is that much of that money I think would have been better spent here.

When I was home during the district work period, I think most people know that the Congress was in recess from the end of July during the time of the Democratic convention until last week during the Republican convention, and I heard constantly in my district office at the forums that I held, at the open houses at my offices, about the problems that Americans were facing, people who had lost their jobs, people who had tried to find another job and found another job that paid less or did not provide the same benefits, people who had lost their health insurance; and I really do not believe that the situation the gentleman described about the economy is at all rosy.

The economy is not doing well. The average person is really feeling squeezed because what is happening is they work harder, and, as the gentleman mentioned, productivity is up, but wages are not keeping up with it, and Americans find themselves working harder, earning less money, and facing increased costs for gas, schools to send their kids to college, and health insurance.

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They are really not very optimistic about the future of the economy, because the situation seems to be getting worse over the last 4 years.

So this evening I wanted to really pose, and I see some of my colleagues are here, so I would like to start with some of them, but I would really like to pose the question about whether or not over the last 4 years Americans' lives have improved or gotten worse. I think for most people, the answer is definitely that they have gotten worse.

When you ask people are they better off today than they were 4 years ago when President Bush began his Presidency, the answer is no, they are not better off. I realize that my Republican colleagues spend a lot of time talking about how the situation has improved in Iraq; but, frankly, I think in many ways the money that has been spent in Iraq for reconstruction, for sewers, for hospitals, for education, has been spent at the expense of what could be done here, because as we know, many Americans really face increased costs and the inability to access health insurance, the inability to send their kids to the college of their choice, the inability in many cases even to be able to find an apartment or to pay for the gas so they can go to work.

I know that I do not want to always be pessimistic, I like to think optimistically, but the picture that the Republicans paint and the picture painted at the Republican convention last week about a rosy America and things getting better and jobs being more available, these things just simply are not true. The economy is not doing well. The job situation is not good. Most importantly, Americans feel increasingly that they work harder and that they have to pay more and that they get less.