to me because she had a friend in another part of the State who lost everything, absolutely everything.

Mr. Speaker, Floridians have hope because they know that we as public servants will not forget them. They know that we will work to the fullest of our abilities to see that they receive the relief that they so desperately need.

I would like to take a moment to certainly applaud FEMA, the SBA, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and so many other organizations that have coordinated relief efforts in our State. There is a wonderful group in my district that is called the Christian Contractors of America, and these are very dedicated, skilled workmen who go out and assist people. I had one constituent who had a tree land on her house and somebody misinformed her that FEMA would take care of the tree. Well, FEMA does not go around cutting down trees. But this great group of Christian contractors we were able to call and, without a doubt, they are there to help. They were there long before the storm, helping people, helping people living in substandard housing. I can think of another example where they helped a battered spouse who had all the windows knocked in.

Organizations such as this, certainly the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, all of the church groups that opened up their doors if they had power and they provided food and they provided air-conditioning and they provided shelter and respite, and a place to come where the community could all come together.

Mr. Speaker, we must answer the needs of Florida and other States. It is not just Florida that gets hit by hurricanes, as Alabama is about to find out, as North Carolina found out last year. I joke with my sister; she lived in North Carolina in Morehead City and she was tired of all the hurricanes hitting there, so she decided to move down to the panhandle of Florida. Well, guess what? She is about ready to be hit by another hurricane.

All of the members of the Florida delegation, regardless of which party we belong to, do not forget our commitment to our constituents. Florida must be helped, and I am sure that Congress will take action.

IRAQ WATCH

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

FLOODING IN OHIO

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I was sitting here listening to my colleagues from Florida talking about the disaster that Florida has experienced, and I thought about my own experience in Ohio over the last 2 or 3 days. Ohio is a long way from Florida, but Ohio has been affected, seriously affected by the results of the hurricane, the flooding that has occurred in a number of Ohio counties, which has absolutely been devastating.

In Columbiana County, where I was earlier today, one small township, it is estimated that they have public damages of between $400,000 and $500,000. Many roads have been completely washed out. The day before yesterday, I was in another county in my district, Belmont County, a little town called Ness, and in that community there were homes that were completely destroyed and demolished, homes where people will never be able to return to live because they were so terribly damaged. And the damage was caused, in large part, by rain that occurred as a result of the hurricanes that had come in and through Florida.

So it is true that we are very sympathetic with the good people of Florida who have suffered so deeply. We are happy that help and hope is on the way for them. But just this day, I faxed a letter to the White House asking the President to act expeditiously on a request for a Federal declaration which has been sent to him by Ohio's Governor, Bob Taft, asking that these communities in Ohio which have been so terribly, terribly affected be also declared a Federal disaster area, so that appropriate Federal resources can be made available to them.

We need FEMA to come in, to provide temporary housing. I spoke just the day before yesterday with a lady nearly 80 years old who lived by herself, whose total monthly income was $655 a month. She also was receiving, I think, $70 per month in food stamps. But her home had been literally destroyed. Her medicine costs were very high, and she was asking what kind of help would be available. And I told her that as soon as the offices opened this morning, Monday morning, that I would be on the phone to the office of FEMA here in D.C. When I contacted them this morning and asked about the request that Governor Taft had submitted for one of the counties, for Columbiana County in Ohio, we were told that the request was under consideration.

But the fact is that we can wait no longer. There are people who are living in cars. There are children who are being kept in fold-out campers. People are without water. We are concerned about the spread of disease. The bottom line is people are suffering terribly in Ohio. I call upon the administration, the President, to recognize what people are going through there.

The geographic area is much smaller than that which was affected in Florida, obviously; but I would contend that there is no one in Florida that has suffered any more than some of the people that I represent. Because when you have lost all that you have, all of your material possessions, when you have no clothing, no personal items, no furniture, when your home has been destroyed and you are with nothing, you are in desperate circumstances; and those are the circumstances that exist across part of Ohio tonight. I am hopeful that by tomorrow I will get a positive response from the President and the White House, and my hope is the help from the Federal level will be flowing into Ohio just as it is flowing into Florida.

I would also like to note, Mr. Speaker, that even the Red Cross has diverted so much of their personnel and their equipment and their resources to Florida that I am afraid that many of my constituents will fall between the cracks, so to speak, and that their terrible plight will not be expeditiously and properly recognized by our Federal Government.

IRAQ

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight, and I will be joined later by some of my colleagues, to talk about Iraq and what is happening in Iraq. This is an effort that we began literally several months ago, myself and some of my colleagues, coming here to the floor to talk about the policies that we are pursuing in Iraq and trying to point out some of the concerns that we have.

I would just begin our Iraq Watch tonight by sharing an editorial from the Columbus Dispatch, which is the capital city newspaper in Ohio. The Columbus Dispatch has been publishing since 1871. They ran an editorial this past Saturday in observance of the anniversary of September 11. I see my friend, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT), has joined me. Before I yield to him, I would just like to share some thoughts from the Columbus Dispatch because I think they are very relevant to our discussions here regarding Iraq.

The editorial is entitled, ''Remember Everything.'' It begins this way: ''Three years ago, 3,000 people were murdered in coordinated terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. Yet, the man who orchestrated those atrocities remains free. For what he did, Osama bin Laden should be dead or in U.S. custody. No evidence suggests that he is dead, and he is not in custody. Because he remains free, extraordinary security precautions surround today's Ohio State football game.'' And, as I said, this is an editorial that appeared last Saturday when Ohio State was playing Marshall University.

So the editorial says: ''These security precautions will surround today's Ohio State football game, considered a terrorist target because 100,000 spectators will be gathered in the heart of a State that is key to the Presidential election.''

The editorial continues: ''Because bin Laden is at liberty, election and law enforcement officials nationwide are busy planning extra security at polling places on November 2. Because bin Laden has not been captured, the Nation's Capital and national monuments, including the Statue of Liberty, have been militarized and fortified. The Bush administration can claim that bin Laden and his cohorts are on

the run, but bin Laden and his cohorts plausibly can claim the opposite. All bin Laden has to do is point to the armed men and surveillance helicopters around Ohio Stadium.''

□ 2200

How did the destruction of bin Laden slip so far down the Nation's to-do list, the Columbus Dispatch asks? Why are the bulk of U.S. military and intelligence assets tied up in Iraq, which pose only a hypothetical threat, while pursuit of the man who slaughtered thousands of Americans on their own soil is on the back burner? Where is the anger, asks the Columbus Dispatch? Where is the anger?

The September 11 victims were not killed by a natural disaster, such as a hurricane, which cannot be brought to justice and against which rage is futile. They were killed by a man. A man can be made to pay a price. Why has he not paid?

The Columbus Dispatch continues in their editorial. This is the question that President Bush should be answering today and tomorrow and every day until November 2. And the Columbus Dispatch asks, where is Senator JOHN KERRY, who loudly proclaims his determination to strike back at any attack on the United States? The attack has occurred. Where is his pledge to make apprehension of bin Laden dead or alive job number one?

The Dispatch continues. Would bin Laden's death eliminate terrorism? Well, of course not. Quick victory over this kind of nihilism and barbarism is impossible, but every day that bin Laden remains free is a defeat for justice and for civilization. His continued existence, his ability to poison a seemingly impotent world, incites and encourages his followers and imitators.

Now, this is what we have heard from the heartland of America, from Columbus, Ohio, from the Columbus Dispatch newspaper, and I would just point out that the President told us, Mr. Speaker, at one time soon after the September 11 attacks, when bin Laden had been identified as the person responsible for attacking our country, the President told us he can run but he cannot hide. But the fact is that he ran, and thus far he has hidden successfully, and somewhere on God's Earth tonight bin Laden is planning the next attack upon our country.

Tonight, now, I ask my colleagues in this Chamber, why did we divert our attention from Afghanistan and from Osama bin Laden and focus on Iraq? At the Republican National Convention in New York, they talked a lot about September 11. The President gave a 63-minute speech and never once did he mention Osama bin Laden. Never once did the President mention the man who is responsible for attacking our country and who today, tonight, is free planning the next attack. I think the American people deserve an answer to that.

Why, after all of the resources that we have spent, some $200 billion, the over 1,000 lives that have been lost, the nearly 7,000 soldiers that have been wounded, why do we not know where bin Laden is and why have we not captured him and why have we diverted our attention from the effort to find this man? He is the enemy of America. He is the one who attacked us, and yet, somehow, his name is not uttered by our President anymore, and there seems to be no real attention directed toward bringing him to justice.

Now, the fact is we heard a lot about Saddam Hussein.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield.

Mr. STRICKLAND. I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I can, because the reality is that long before September 11, this White House, this President, this Vice President, whose picture was on the November 2003 edition of Newsweek, had an obsession with Iraq, and I would submit that the best evidence of that obsession is revealed in a book by a noted journalist by the name of Ron Suskind, who sat down with the former Secretary of Treasury, Paul O'Neill, and did, if you will, an overview of Secretary O'Neill's experience in the Bush-Cheney White House.

As Secretary O'Neill indicated, he was taken aback by the first National Security Council meeting, and he attended those in his capacity as the Secretary of Treasury, that was held one week after the President was inaugurated, and it quickly turned to the issue of Iraq. There were no threats emanating from Iraq. There were no statements emanating from the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein relative to an attack on the United States or any of our allies. In fact, if you remember, the Secretary of State himself, Colin Powell, later on some time in February described the Iraqi military in terms that turned out to be absolutely accurate, they were forthright, they had been significantly degraded, but one week after the President was sworn in the dominating subject of the first National Security Council meeting was Iraq.

Then subsequently, on February 27, Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill relates at another National Security Council meeting that the Vice President, this gentleman here, DICK CHENEY, had a map spread across a conference table where there were discussions about the divvying up of oil fields and concessions among private corporations and Nations, presumably our allies. That was February 27 of 2001. So right from the beginning it was this obsession about Iraq.

Now I do not know and I am not going to suggest what the motivations were, but it was about Iraq from the beginning. I have posed this question to individuals in the administration. No one has ever denied the accuracy of those anecdotes that were related by the former Secretary of Treasury, a person whose integrity is beyond reproach, who stated it clearly and unequivocally. So we had this proclivity, this propensity, this obsession with Iraq.

Then, of course, 9/11 came, and the terrorism czar at that time, Richard Clarke, made the statement that after listening to the Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Under Secretary Wolfowitz he was aghast because he interpreted their immediate response as an opportunity to intervene militarily in Iraq, as opposed to really deal with those who not only had visited probably the most horrific act in our lifetime upon the United States, and clearly, what we have seen is a diversion of attention from those who were the proximate cause of a national tragedy that occurred on September 11 of 2001. We diverted all of our attention, most of our resources to Iraq, rather than dealing with the genuine, accurate war on terror.

Mr. STRICKLAND. It is almost incomprehensible that the person who was responsible for attacking our country, who has claimed responsibility, who has boasted in claiming that responsibility is a person who is free tonight. He ran and he hid, and the President does not even utter his name. It is as though we have forgotten that the real enemy, the real architect of the attack upon our country was Osama bin Laden. He has been referred to as Osama bin Forgotten, and it is quite sad to me that we have not been able to bring to justice the leading terrorist in this world.

As we contemplate a possible terror attack on this country, there has been discussions that it may happen before the election, that it may happen around the inauguration of the next President. We are not afraid that that attack is going to be directed and masterminded by Saddam Hussein. He is in jail. We are concerned about al Qaeda. We are concerned about the terror network that was established by Osama bin Laden. We are concerned about Osama bin Laden and his effect.

Just this week we heard from our military leaders in Afghanistan that they believe Osama bin Laden is actively calling the shots, even today, and yet, as I repeat, during the Republican Convention in New York, with all of the discussion of September 11, it was as if the person responsible for September 11 was unknown. The President did not utter his name during a 63-minute speech.

This is the man that we should be going after. He is the one responsible for killing nearly 3,000 of our citizens. He is the one that is heading up the al Qaeda terror network. He is free tonight somewhere on this Earth. We do not know for sure, but I want to tell my colleague I think we would have had this man in custody if we had not diverted attention and resources and our intelligence apparatus away from the hunting of Osama bin Laden to Iraq.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, when we can focus on Osama

bin Laden and al Qaeda, but as the President has done, to suggest that the world is safer because of our intervention in Iraq is absolutely, to quote a very prominent Republican conservative pundit, absurd. It is just simply absurd.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Every day, sadly, tragically, we are losing soldiers in Iraq. It is almost as if it is no longer news when we lose one or two or three or seven at a time. It is almost as if we have become numb to that reality. We are up to well over 1,000 now. Senator MCCAIN has indicated that he thinks we could be in Iraq for 10 to 20 years.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Again, and that is a very dangerous scenario, not just the observation by Senator MCCAIN but the fact that as time moves on, it becomes part of the regular order. Yeah, we lost seven Marines just recently in Fallujah. It is on the front page. Over an extended period of time it will end up on page 2 and then page 5 and page 7, and because not many of us are sharing in the sacrifice tragically we become immune to the real costs of this debacle in Iraq.

It is simply not just costing us hundreds of billions of dollars, but it is costing us thousands of American lives and the impact on American families. I know that my colleague and I, as we visit our districts, meet constituents that have lost loved ones in Iraq, and that on a personal level is most painful, but the danger is that we as a people collectively put it in another place in our minds, in our experience.

□ 2215

You know, our policy in Iraq can only be described as a failure. We failed. We went to Iraq based on false claims. We failed to find weapons of mass destruction. We clearly demonstrated that there was no evidence of any operational relationship between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. That was confirmed by the 9/11 independent commission. The administration failed to create broad international support for the effort.

The truth is we are there alone now. Yes, the British are there, even though a majority of the British people are opposed to the policy and opposed to the war. But other than the British, yes, there are token forces there, but we are carrying the brunt.

Mr. STRICKLAND. If I can speak to that issue.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Of course.

Mr. STRICKLAND. The President frequently says we have this coalition; and it is true that there are a number of countries, for one reason or another, some of them maybe with very noble reasons, who support us in our policy there. But the fact is that we have somewhere around 135,000, 135,000 American troops there. The next country with the largest number of troops is Great Britain; and they have, I believe, less than 6,500. Most of the other countries have a few hundred troops.

It is the American troops that is the target. We are losing the lives. We are paying the bill. About $200 billion thus far.

Mr. DELAHUNT. By the way, Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, I find it very interesting that the President and DICK CHENEY, who according to this headline in Newsweek sold the war to the President and within the administration, keep referring to the vote on the $87 billion as somehow demonstrating a lack of support by Senator KERRY for our troops.

Does the gentleman remember during the course of that debate that the President of the United States threatened to veto the $87 billion?

Mr. STRICKLAND. If we paid for it.

Mr. DELAHUNT. No, if we insisted that at some time in the future the Iraqi government paid back to the United States taxpayer a portion, a portion of that $87 billion. The White House insisted on a gift, a giveaway, if you will, of American tax dollars, never to be repaid to the American people.

Mr. STRICKLAND. If I could reclaim my time, Mr. Speaker, during that debate on the $87 billion, the vast majority of the people in this country, according to public opinion polls, felt that we should provide assistance in the form of a grant, a grant that would be paid back to our citizens once Iraq was stabilized. And the gentleman is right, the President said that if we did that that he would veto the bill.

Mr. DELAHUNT. The President did not want to make a loan; he wanted to make a gift.

Mr. STRICKLAND. That is right.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And the rest of the world, in terms of their dollars representing their taxpayers, insisted on a loan. It is only the United States of America that provided a gift, not a loan, but a gift, to the interim Iraqi government to begin the process of reconstruction.

Now, again, I think we all share the view that there is a responsibility on the part of the United States to assist. But why a gift? Why a giveaway? And the President said that if we made it a loan, he would veto it. So, clearly, the Republican majority here managed to secure enough votes, both here and in the Senate, to make a gift rather than insist on collateral.

Remember the Under Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, when he promised the American people that the cost of the reconstruction of Iraq would be paid for with Iraqi resources based on their huge oil reserves? Does the gentleman remember that?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Yet, when the time came, that was a promise that this Vice President and this President reneged on.

It is the American people that are building roads in Iraq, it is the American people that are building affordable housing in Iraq, it is the American people that are building hospitals in Iraq, it is the American people that are building brand-new ports in Iraq, it is the American people that are providing practically universal health care coverage in Iraq, it is the American people that are funding jobs in Iraq; and they are never going to get paid back.

How about doing that for the American people, President Bush and Vice President CHENEY?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Well, as someone said, it does not make sense for us to be opening firehouses in Iraq while we are closing firehouses and laying off firefighters in this country.

But the fact is this $87 billion vote is being used in the most political way, and there have been accusations that somehow when Senator KERRY opposed that, that he was opposing body armor for our troops. I would just like to point out something that I have shared with my friends here in this Chamber before. The war started in March of 2003. We did not have that vote on the $87 billion until months after the war started. Our troops were initially sent into battle without body armor. And that was a decision made by Secretary Rumsfeld and ultimately the responsibility of the President as the Commander in Chief. We sent our troops into battle without body armor.

Now, that is a fact that cannot be disputed. And it took the Pentagon one full year, from March of 2003 to March of 2004, to provide me with a letter stating that finally, after a full year, our troops had been equipped with body armor.

I questioned how many of our troops were unnecessarily injured or wounded or how many lost their lives simply because this administration sent them into combat without body armor. That was not a money problem; it was a planning problem. And the letters that I received from Secretary Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Myers, verified that it was a supply problem. They did not order that equipment in a timely manner. Months passed leading up to this war when those orders could have been placed. That body armor could have been available at the time the war started, but it took 12 full months for this administration to make sure that our troops were fully protected with body armor.

And even tonight, now, Mr. Speaker, we have troops in Iraq driving around in Humvees that are not armored in a way that will provide them at least some protection from these roadside bombs that are maiming and killing so many of our soldiers on a daily basis.

Mr. DELAHUNT. It is interesting, and I think it is important that we remind ourselves and others that, yes, we are members of the minority party. We are Democrats. But this is, in many respects, and it is our concerns I am referring to, they are bipartisan in nature.

I read something just recently where, again going back to the cost of the war, that $87 billion that the President keeps referring to that he insisted on

being a giveaway as opposed to a loan, Bob Barr, who served in this House and who was probably one of the most conservative Members in this institution, in this branch during his service here, observed that in the midst of the war on terror and a $500 billion deficit, Bush proposes sending space ships to Mars.

This really underscores also the folly of what we are doing in terms of driving up our own deficits that will burden generations of Americans and that are structural in nature, which means that something catastrophic is waiting for us unless we address them. And, clearly, we have not seen any response from this White House about addressing them.

But in addition to that, a recent September 10, 2004, article by Doug Bandow, who is a senior Fellow at the Cato Institute and served as a special assistant to President Reagan and was a visiting Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, had this to say: ''Bush's foreign policy record is as bad as his domestic scorecard. The administration correctly targeted the Taliban in Afghanistan, but quickly neglected that nation, which is in danger of falling into chaos. The Taliban is resurgent, violence has flared, drug production has burgeoned, and elections have been postponed.

''Iraq, already in chaos, is no conservative triumph. The endeavor in social engineering on a grand scale, a war of choice launched on erroneous grounds, has turned into a disastrously expensive neocolonial burden. Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction, contrary to administration claims, and no operational relationship with al Qaeda, contrary to administration insinuations. U.S. officials bungled the operation, misjudging everything from the financial cost to the troop requirement. Sadly, the Iraq debacle has undercut the fight against terrorism.''

Let me repeat that: ''Sadly, the Iraq debacle has undercut the fight against terrorism.''

Just recently, by the way, the Institute for Strategic Studies, again a conservative think tank, in a recent study warned that the Iraq operation has spurred recruiting by smaller terrorist groups around the world.

Now, we talked earlier about Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Well, the reality is that it is like the parable in the New Testament about the fishes and the loaves: they are everywhere. The incidence of terrorism in this world has increased dramatically. We saw what happened recently and again tragically in Russia.

Mr. STRICKLAND. If the gentleman will allow me to reclaim my time, it seems, and I think this is verified by the September 11 Commission, that al Qaeda has gone from being an identifiable group to becoming a philosophy and an idea and a movement. And the fact is our policies have spread terror around the world. We now have Taliban/al Qaeda operatives in Iraq. There is no evidence that they were there before we invaded that country.

There are now huge cities in Iraq referred to as ''no-go zones,'' where our troops cannot enter those cities. They are under the control of al Qaeda and Taliban operatives. Huge geographic areas of Iraq that we liberated, supposedly, are now under the control of terrorists, terrorists that prior to our invasion of Iraq were not in that country. We have created a breeding ground for those who hate us.

□ 2230

We may be there 10 years, 20 years, no one knows. How many more deaths are going to result from these failed policies? We have already had over a thousand. Ohio lost two soldiers last week, a 19-year-old man and a 36-year-old man. How many more?

Now we stand here and talk about this. Some may wonder why go over history, why talk about past failings and past circumstances.

Mr. DELAHUNT. To learn from them.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Because the same people who have brought us to where we are tonight, who have created this debacle that we face in Iraq, the same people who have made the decisions which have led to this terrible tragedy and loss of life and horrible injuries, these same people want to remain in charge of the decisionmaking apparatus of this government. I think it is fair to ask: What will they do next? They have acted in the most naive manner. The Vice President and others indicated that we would be welcomed into Iraq.

Just yesterday we had helicopters that fired on a group of Iraqis that were celebrating around a dysfunctional piece of U.S. military equipment. Many of those people laughing and dancing around were children. They were children. You could see their pictures, they could not have been more than 10 or 12 years of age. What are we doing in Iraq, we are creating hatred toward our government. That hatred is spreading around the world. That does not make us safer.

I believe the President has an obligation to stand up and admit mistakes, but there is a difference between an irrational pursuit of an ideology that is failing. What we need are mature leaders that will act upon a rational basis to secure friends around this world and help us extricate ourselves from these terrible circumstances.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, we have been joined by the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE), and welcome back to Iraq watch. We noted the gentleman's absence last week. And I see the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) has also joined us, but I want to get back to what I think is important, and that is the bipartisan nature of the criticism of this administration. It would be misleading to those watching us tonight to think this is a partisan diatribe. It is not that. It is a genuine concern about the direction of this country.

And it is echoed by others. Let me give three quotes. Crossfire host Tucker Carlson said recently, and I think many Americans have observed him on PBS and Crossfire. He said, ''I think it is a total nightmare and disaster. I am ashamed that I went against my own instincts in supporting it.''

William Buckley, an icon within the conservative movement said, ''With the benefit of minute hindsight, Saddam Hussein was not the kind of extraterritorial menace that was assumed by the administration 1 year ago. If I knew then what I know now about what kind of situation we would be in, I would have opposed the war.''

I think it is important, too, to quote what I thought was a very courageous statement by a friend of ours, a former colleague who is highly regarded on both sides of the aisle. He was the vice chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and was a leading member of the House Committee on International Relations, and we know him well, is Doug Bereuter.

He sent a letter to his constituents announcing his retirement from Congress. He began by saying, it was a mistake to launch the invasion of Iraq. He said, ''As a result, our country's reputation around the world has never been lower and our alliances are weakened. Now we are immersed in a dangerous, costly mess, and there is no easy and quick way to end our responsibilities in Iraq without creating bigger future problems in the region and in general in the Islamic world.''

I respect that. More and more we know that our colleagues on both sides of the aisle are expressing their concern.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, one observes today the discussions taking place in the press by members of the Armed Services with respect to whether or not political considerations are involved in whether we can attack or not attack, whether we retreat or do not retreat, whether we engage in collaborative activity with insurgents with regard to the possible upcoming elections, or whether we regard them as criminals to be taken and prosecuted, perhaps even shot and killed.

Those issues do not know a Democratic or a Republican origin. Those young soldiers, and some not so young soldiers from the Guard and Reserve, are not making distinctions between Republican oratory and Democratic accusations with respect to this election. This issue has to be decided on November 2. The people of this Nation have to come to a conclusion electorally as to whether or not they want the present direction to go on or whether they want to move in a new direction.

I contend and I tell Members this as a member of the Committee on Armed Services, a committee on which we do our level best to subsumed and submerge our partisan differences, yes,

they come forward, I am not going to pretend otherwise or be so naive to think that can always happen, but the plain fact of the matter is when it comes to our votes, we try to figure out what is in the best interests of this Nation and what is in the best interests of the Armed Services. The question arises publicly now as to whether or not our armed forces have to pay first allegiance to political considerations.

Whether one is a Democrat or a Republican, Democrats and Republicans voted for the resolution that constantly comes up with respect to whether one supports the war or does not support the war. That is no longer an issue. The issue is the direction it has taken since the war commenced, and that is where I feel we have to make a break. This is what has to be decided November 2. We have to make a fundamental decision as to whether we are going to let the chaos and the destruction taking place today continue, the brunt of that chaos and destruction having to be borne by members of the Armed Services.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, what the gentleman said was summed up just recently by a senior American diplomat in Baghdad. Obviously he insisted on anonymity but this is what he said about actually what is happening in Baghdad and Iraq today. ''This idea of a functioning democracy here is crazy. We thought there would be a reprieve after sovereignty, but all hell is breaking loose.'' This is without doubt a debacle. This is the chaos the gentleman referred to. And the sad part of it is despite opposition to the invasion of Iraq, if there had been a coordinated plan, if there had been a relationship between the Department of State and Pentagon rather than just simply the domination of those within the Department of Defense and excluding those that had experience similarly elsewhere in the world, maybe we would not have this problem. But we had Wolfowitz, we had Doug Feith, we had Secretary Rumsfeld who, according to Richard Clarke and others, pushed out the Department of State, would not allow them in at the table to discuss the post major combat phase.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE) but before I do, I would like to say the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) absolutely spoke the truth when he said this Nation will make a decision on November 2 regarding whether or not they want to tolerate the continuation of our current policy or whether or not they think we should change course.

The President says we either have to stay the course or cut and run. Well, I think there is a third possibility and that is to change course. The fact is if there are mothers and dads listening to us tonight who may feel disconnected from this war, who may feel they have no part of it, they do not know anyone who is participating in it, they do not know anyone who has lost a life or been seriously injured, but if they have a child, they should listen because if this administration continues its current foreign policy, I believe it will be mandatory that we impose a military draft. We cannot maintain our personnel numbers with this current foreign policy without imposing a draft. We can no longer continue forever to keep our reservists and our national guardsmen on active status. We cannot withdraw soldiers from all over this world simply because of what is happening in Iraq. So every American should be engaged in the same kind of discussion we are having tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE).

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk tonight about three types of amnesia that I am afraid are infecting the executive branch's policy, and those three symptoms of amnesia are makings us less safe.

This weekend I went to the VFW Post in Redmond, Washington, where a group was holding a car wash to raise money to send incidentals, CDs and telephones and suntan lotion and the like, to our service personnel in Iraq. The thing that was interesting is the people who were there, including the wives and sisters and fathers of the people who are serving in Iraq, and one woman who lost her son in Iraq who came out to the car wash to help her fallen son's former colleagues in Iraq, and what was amazing to me, while these people are pulling together, there is this kind of amnesia developing to forget the loss and casualties we are suffering in Iraq. It is slipping from page 1 to page 3 to page 12 to outside of our consciousness. Frankly, I think the President could do a better job of reminding us of the loss we are suffering in Iraq rather than trying to belittle it or say it is a minimal thing.

I have heard people argue that a thousand people lost in America is not that many. I just challenge for them to say that if they had been to the car wash and talked to the mother that I did. One person who did not have to die in combat is too many.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, the first death was too many, and every death that has followed has been too many because for that individual and that individual's loved ones, it will absolutely be the most devastating experience they will ever endure.

□ 2245

I do not think we should develop that type of amnesia.

The second amnesia that I think is very dangerous to us is to some degree the executive branch is developing amnesia about who actually attacked us, which was al Qaeda. You have talked about this earlier, I believe. But we cannot have the Commander in Chief leading us in this war to preserve our security and not identify who the enemy was that actually attacked us and go a year now without identifying the name of the person who is Osama bin Laden that the President refuses to even say. That lack of leadership has infected to some degree our efforts to track down and cut off al Qaeda.

Let me give you an example in the real world how that is. I found out a week ago that we have more employees in the Department of Treasury tracking down American tourists who go to Cuba than we do Treasury officials trying to cut off the money going to Osama bin Laden. What kind of prioritization is that? Why have we developed amnesia about how deadly al Qaeda is?

Another piece of amnesia. We have loose nukes all over the former Soviet Union, all this fissionable material that we know al Qaeda wants to get. But we cannot get the cooperation of the executive branch to put money into the system we have for vacuuming up those loose nukes and keeping them out of the hands of al Qaeda.

Why has this amnesia happened? It is pretty clear. The executive branch took their eye off the ball of Osama bin Laden and put it on Iraq. And this amnesia is a more dangerous situation rather than a less dangerous one.

Let me just suggest why I think the President has been successful to some degree in conflating Iraq with what happened on September 11. That is, that we have all sort of, I think, gone down a little primrose path calling this the war on terror. I am not sure that is the right nomenclature for us to use for this reason. It is really important to realize who your enemy is. Our enemy is a person and a group, not a tactic. Terror is a tactic. It is not a country, it is not a group, it is not an individual. It is a tactic. Calling this a war on terror frankly is a little bit like calling our response to Pearl Harbor a war on torpedo planes. Torpedo planes were a tactic. They were not the enemy. We need to call this what it is, a war on al Qaeda and a war on some fundamentalist Islamic movements that are way out of the mainstream of Islamic belief in this world and have perverted that faith and taken advantage of it for their nihilistic ends, and that is an enemy we need to keep in our sights.

Mr. DELAHUNT. See, this Vice President has to link the war on terror and the war in Iraq. Even though there is no linkage. That has been confirmed not by partisans here on the floor but by the independent September 11 Commission. Because, if you cannot link the war on terror to the invasion of Iraq, then why did we go into Iraq? For political purposes, you have to create, you have to morph what occurs and what is occurring in Iraq into the overall war on terror, because this is the premise that was used by DICK CHENEY when he sold the war.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. That is the issue that I raised with respect to November 2. Let us face it. No matter who you are in this country, a vote is going to take place on November 2. That man

has to answer and his boss, the President of the United States, has to answer for why in Afghanistan today there is no governmental entity at all other than that which exists under the direct protection of what amounts to a praetorian guard of the United States in Kabul. The rest of the country is under the sway of warlords and the Taliban is resurging, the Taliban is resurging and more opium is being grown, more dope is being sold, more financing for the Taliban is taking place than ever before.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But he is probably one of the most skillful political minds in the country and just recently he made the statement, if you vote for the other candidate you will die. That is basically what he said. A vote for KERRY is a vote for terrorists. Nobody accepts that. But that is the need to make the link, because he was wrong, he cannot admit he was wrong. Do you remember David Kay, who they sent out to learn and to find out where the weapons of mass destruction were, came in front of a Senate committee and said, we were all wrong. This individual, this Vice President, must have blanched because it did not suit his world view, his political agenda.

Mr. INSLEE. There was a very startling occurrence that happened yesterday in this regard. Secretary of State Powell said there was no link to 9/11 to Saddam Hussein. Yet the Vice President continues in this effort.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friends for joining me for another hour of Iraq Watch. I look forward to continuing this next week.

THE FACE OF THE TERRORIST FOE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDO) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. TANCREDO. Mr. Speaker, there are, of course, a wide variety of views and opinions on the situation that we now face in Iraq and around the world. I am compelled to come to the floor tonight to talk about one aspect of this, I suppose, not necessarily to take sides in this debate that has been going on for the last hour but to look into the nature of the foe that both we face and much of the civilized world faces. When you look into the face of the foe, of the enemy, what you see is pure, unadulterated evil. That evil manifested itself just a short time ago in a faraway place, in Russia, more specifically in a small community and even more specifically in a school in that community, where people devoted to a cause, to a set of ideas, decided that one way to advance that cause would be to enter this small town in Russia and to take hostage the children and the parents and the teachers in this small school. Because it was the first day of school and as is the custom in this area, parents and even grandparents will accompany their children to school for the first day of opening festivities. So they knew they would have a large congregation of people, all there to enjoy the day, parents there to encourage their children, children looking back at their parents and grandparents for that encouragement. Something that goes on, of course, an event, an activity that goes on throughout the world in many different countries and in many different ways but essentially that same expression of support and hope and love that we see throughout the world.

These people, acting under the guise of ideology, decided to go in and take these folks hostage, because it would be an act of terror almost unparalleled. In fact, I will say unparalleled in the annals of human history. They did so and hundreds of people died, most of them children. The most innocent among us died horrible deaths because terrorists decided to take an action that they believed would advance their cause. It has not advanced their cause. We know that. The civilized world has reacted in horror and disdain and has in every way imaginable sent the message to those who perpetrated this crime that your cause is not advanced. We see you for what you are. You are, in fact, evil incarnate. Evil does exist on this planet. It prowls. It looks. It strikes. It struck in Russia and hundreds of people today, thousands of people there, millions of people around the world, are in mourning and in grief for what happened.

There will be people who will try to suggest that even though this was a horrible event, the people who perpetrated this had just cause, that they had been ill treated in the past by the government of Russia going back to the czars. Certainly it may be true that there were injustices and that in fact horrible things have happened in the past. But nothing, Mr. Speaker, nothing, nothing that I can conceive of or I think for the most part anyone in the civilized world can conceive of could justify the acts that were taken in Beslan by these terrorists. Nothing can justify that. No amount of rationalization, no amount of historical injustice, nothing can justify the taking of the most innocent lives, not just the taking of their lives but the torture of these innocent human beings for days before the lives were taken. Nothing can justify the horror that was inflicted upon the community in Beslan. Nothing.

My community, the place in which I live, is Littleton, Colorado. Several years ago, we experienced an event of unimaginable horror in our little community. I know what that did when two individuals went into a school, Columbine High School, and killed their fellow students and teachers. I know what happened. I know the kind of trauma that existed and that everyone had to deal with, not just even the parents of the children involved but the entire community. I know how long it lasted. I know that to this day we have not found a salve that could, in fact, heal those wounds, even to this day. We still gather in April to pay our respects and to remember the dead and to express our condolences to the parents and families of those who survived.

So I know a little bit about the pain that I know exists in this community of Beslan and, of course, in surrounding areas. I know that there are no words, that no one, not Presidents or Premiers or no one can ever, ever, ever state what would be necessary in order to salve all the wounds that now exist. But we try, because we have nothing else. We have no other way. Today in my district, in Littleton, Colorado, in the Columbine school area, children are signing posters, preparing notes of sympathy that I will collect from them on Thursday and then I will take with me to Russia the next day. We hope to be visiting Beslan and we hope to be able to express the sympathy of the people in my district and they, of course, represent the bulk of the world who are heartsick at the events in Beslan. We need to talk about it more, although it is very difficult to do. It is extremely painful to even discuss these things, I know. But it is important for us to do so. It is important for us to try to think about what motivates people to do what they did, what the terrorists did there and what the rest of the world must do in response to it in order to not fall victim to the same kind of barbarism. It is an incredibly difficult challenge we all face, the world faces. How it is that we can respond? What do we do in the face of such evil?

□ 2300

What defenses do we prepare? What armies do we send into the field and where? What are the things that we tell the people in our own country that can make them feel more at ease and safer as they tuck their children into bed at night? Because these things we face, this evil that we face, really, is powerful. It feeds upon a number of emotions that are difficult to deal with.

Yet we must do so. We must think about what kind of defenses we can erect, how we can defend ourselves, what do we do around the world, and what do we do even in our own country. What are the principles and ideas that we live by that we can extol? How can we convince the rest of the world that there are ways to live in peace with each other regardless of the faith that one ascribes to? How can we exist on a planet if there are hundreds of millions of people who believe that if one does not believe in their God, if one does not accept their principles of religious ideology, that they do not deserve to exist and that they are, in fact, some sort of threat to them?

These ideas have to be fought with ideas. We have to talk about who we are in the United States and in Western Civilization. We have to talk about