

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, humorist Frank McKinney Hubbard once said, "Don't knock the weather. If it didn't change once in a while, nine out of ten people wouldn't start a conversation."

Unfortunately, extreme weather is nothing to laugh about. Tonight, I would like to talk about the underfunding of the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, and how we have failed to protect our Nation's citizens against harsh winter and blistering summer elements. Lyndon Johnson once talked about building a "Great Society." But we cannot have a "Great Society" if we only provide tax breaks for the wealthy while ignoring the suffering of the poor in America.

LIHEAP was enacted to assist low-income citizens who pay a high proportion of their household income to meet their immediate home energy needs. Low-income households spend 14 percent of their annual income on energy expenditures, compared to non-low-income households, that only spend 3.5 percent. In fact, two-thirds of the families that utilize LIHEAP assistance have annual incomes of \$8,000, forcing them to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

From 1995 to 2004, the average number of cold-related deaths was 27 annually. Meanwhile, my colleagues from the south note that during the same time period, the average number of deaths from heat was 237 annually. The point is that LIHEAP should be available to offset high energy costs in both winter and summer.

The hardships of high energy bills this winter can be visibly seen on the face of an elderly grandmother shivering in the cold of her living room or having to cut back on medicine to keep the heat on. Savings are used up, credits ratings are destroyed, and children are increasingly vulnerable to sickness and ill health. This is not the policy of a great society.

The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association's most recent survey on the impact of rising energy costs on poor families illustrates this troubling reality: 32 percent sacrificed medical care; 24 percent failed to make a rental or mortgage payment; 20 percent went without food for at least a day; and 44 percent said they skipped paying or paid less than their full home energy bill in the past year.

Since 2003, the price of heat to heat one's home has risen tremendously as the price of natural gas has risen by 45 percent and heating oil has risen by 50 percent. As a result, those who use natural gas to heat their home could see their average heating costs spike from \$750 to \$1,100 this year. For those who use home heating oil, like me, last year's expenditure of \$1,200 could jump to as high as \$1,600 this year.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle contend that Congress has increased funding for this critical program in recent years. They point to the \$2 billion in the fiscal year 2005 and the

\$5 billion authorized this year in the energy bill. However, there are three problems with this argument, or as I like to call it "the triple whammy."

First, we have to understand the \$5 billion authorized in the energy bill was cut to \$3 billion in the House's pre-Thanksgiving budget reconciliation bill. Second, the \$3 billion figure will be further cut to around \$2 billion by the appropriators, because that is the figure they are pushing for to effectively flat line the funding for LIHEAP. Third, take a look at this graph. You can clearly see that even when appropriations increased for LIHEAP, the purchasing power, and that is what is critical for these funds, actually decreased for LIHEAP recipients. Inflation in heating oil and natural gas prices actually decreased purchasing power by 42 percent since the program's inception in 1982.

Ironically, during this time of inadequate LIHEAP funding, oil companies are boasting record profits, some as large as 255 percent. This situation is so bad that some of our Senate colleagues recently wrote a letter to the nine big oil companies and asked them to donate a part of their profits to help low-income people cover these increased energy costs.

Only one response was received, from Citgo, a state-owned Venezuelan company controlled by Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela. Chavez took this public relations opportunity to promote his socialist world view as counterpoint to the United States capitalist world view.

Specifically, he is using profits from Venezuelan-based Citgo to make friends in the United States and attempting to illustrate the failures of American democracy. Citgo has provided discounted heating oil this winter to low-income residents in Massachusetts. Twelve million gallons of heavily discounted heating oil was donated to low-income communities across the State of Massachusetts, helping consumers save between 60 and 80 cents per gallon. This is a total savings of \$10 million to \$14 million which will occur this winter.

While I am certainly appreciative of this gesture, by having to accept Venezuela's charity, we are playing into Chavez's hands. We cannot effectively promote democracy and free markets around the world if our policies here at home reflect a callous disregard for our poorer citizens.

Close to home in my State of Maryland, we will need about \$84 million in Federal fuel assistance, that is more than twice the amount originally anticipated to help low-income residents heat their homes this winter. The Maryland Energy Assistance Program says it will need \$51 million more to cover rising energy costs.

In conclusion, I call upon my Republican colleagues to forego or at least delay the additional tax cuts for the warm and the wealthy. Instead, I hope my colleagues on the right side of the

aisle will fully fund the \$5 billion promise in the energy bill for low income energy assistance.

IRAQ SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps difficult for some to comprehend the extent of our successes in Iraq because they are focused on isolated incidents rather than looking at the totality of our efforts. So to fully grasp how far Iraq has come, it is necessary to take stock of these successes.

My stepson, Doug Lehtinen, and his fiancée, Lindsay Nelson, are serving in Iraq right now. They are marine officers flying F-18s along the Syrian border. They know that the security component of our efforts in Iraq is the cornerstone for our mission for victory.

Iraqis are playing an ever-increasing role for providing for their own security. The Iraqi army and police forces are growing larger and are better trained and they are more effective than ever. The Iraqi army and security forces grew from just one operational battalion in July 2004 to more than 120 today. Many critics note that only one battalion is rated at what the U.S. Army categorizes as a level one, fully independent degree of operability. However, over 40 are at level two, which are capable of fighting, with some support, usually just logistics or artillery support from our coalition forces.

All of these units are patrolling their own areas of operations, and the cities of Najaf and Mosul are now patrolled exclusively by Iraqi security forces, as are large portions of the city of Baghdad. And there are also roughly 80 battalions, both police and military, identified as category three and are currently fighting alongside our U.S. and coalition forces.

As a result, the United States military recently transferred more than two dozen U.S. established bases to Iraqi control. In addition, there are now currently 25,000 Iraqi special police officers who can conduct combat and commando operations as well as routine policing duties. Also, there are 75,000 Iraqi police officers trained and equipped.

And looking to the future, Mr. Speaker, the current plans include establishing 10 Iraqi army infantry divisions. That is 160,000 soldiers, 135,000 regular police officers, 9,000 border police, in addition to the current force of 18,000, and 3,000 additional highway patrol officers in addition to the current level of 3,000, by the year 2007.

Today, thousands of young Iraqis are volunteering, volunteering for service, and they are training to become soldiers and police officers at several facilities throughout the country of Iraq. As a result, over 225,000 Iraqi soldiers and police officers will be available to

provide security for Iraq's nationwide election in just under 2 weeks. Yes, the third successful election which will take place in just a few days.

Today, Iraqi security forces are strong enough to garrison and control cleared areas, as recently illustrated in the leading role taken by the Iraqis in the successful September 2005 offensive in Tal Afar. Both U.S. and Iraqi forces have enjoyed additional successes in eliminating insurgent strongholds in Fallujah, in Mosul, in Najaf, in Samarra, and in many other smaller towns along the Syrian border.

The increasing effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces has inspired optimism among the Iraqi people, and this is reflected in the growing number of intelligence tips from Iraqi civilians. According to reports in March 2005, Iraqi and coalition forces received 483 intelligence tips from Iraqi citizens. This figure rose to 3,300 in August and to more than 4,700 in September. This has translated into further public confidence in the security situation in Iraq.

Simultaneously, the increasing effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces has caused fear and derision within our enemies' ranks. Significant success securing the Syrian border, previously a sieve for Iraqi and foreign insurgents, has made it tougher for Syrian-based insurgents to orchestrate or support attacks in Iraq. As a result, homicide bombings by Islamic jihadists has reportedly been down 30 percent since the October constitutional referendum.

So the military and the security components of the strategy are laid out in the national strategy for victory in Iraq, as stated by the President, and it is due to the commitment of fighting men and women like my stepson, Doug, and his fiancée, but also thanks to the brave men and women of the Iraqi security forces who continue to fight for their emerging democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to look at the situation in Iraq, look at the threat posed by Iraq under the regime of Saddam Hussein, then look at Iraq today. There is no question that we are succeeding.

U.S. DETAINEE POLICY IN IRAQ

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

Mr. MEEHAN. Well, Mr. Speaker, if so many of these Iraqis are ready to come up and to provide the security, the police work in the country, then surely there should be no problem with putting American forces into the background instead of having them up front.

The reality is that we have missed a lot of opportunities in Iraq because of a failed policy. Our own State Department polls say that 80 percent of Iraqis view the United States as an unpopular occupier. That is right, an occupier. Forty-five percent of Iraqi citizens

think it is morally okay to attack American troops. So if, in fact, Iraqis are ready to keep security in their own country, surely now is the time to let them do that.

We should have had, as General Shinseki said, more security forces in from the beginning. He said a few hundred thousand troops. And if we had had them there, maybe we could have won the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people from the beginning when Saddam Hussein fell. But the Pentagon and the civilian leadership thought General Shinseki did not know what he was talking about and they put him out to pasture. But the truth is, he knew what he was talking about.

There have been other mistakes made. In April of last year, the shocking photographic evidence of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib became public. In an instant, America's new image in the war on terror was published around the world with photos of Iraqi prisoners being subjected to cruel, unusual, and degrading treatment.

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A report by Major General Antonio Taguba found "numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses," constituting "systematic and illegal abuse of detainees" at Abu Ghraib. And, unfortunately, Abu Ghraib is only the most publicized case of torture in Iraq.

Regrettably, it has become clear that torture of detainees in United States custody is not limited to Abu Ghraib or even Iraq. Since Abu Ghraib, there have been increasing reports of torture. Most recently, The Washington Post broke a story of secret CIA detention centers around the globe where prisoners were being sent for questioning.

Under the leadership of President Bush and Vice President CHENEY, the United States has given up the moral high ground that we used to occupy as an international leader.

Last month, President Bush defended U.S. interrogation practices, proclaiming, "We do not torture." However, he has refused to back up these words. Instead, he and his administration have vehemently opposed a provision that would specifically prohibit the use of torture as official U.S. protocol.

They supported legislation that would strip the right of detainees being held by the United States to the writ of habeas corpus, an 800-year-old legal procedure grounded in the Magna Carta. Instead of denouncing torture is never acceptable, the administration seems to continually be looking for exceptions to the rule.

In the now-infamous "torture memo," along with other documents, the Justice Department sought to carve out an increasingly narrow definition of detention. Instead of firing administration officials, like Alberto Gonzales, who referred to the Geneva Convention as "quaint" and "obsolete," we have a President who pro-

moted him to the chief law enforcement officer of the United States of America, Attorney General.

By accepting this behavior, the Bush administration has not only hurt America's credibility around the world; but it has put our soldiers at risk.

I have joined forces with a number of my colleagues to try to change this course. However, the leadership in this body has kept us from being heard. We have tried to obtain documents related to Federal investigations of detainee abuse in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo; but our efforts have been shut down by the majority in this body.

Mr. Speaker, 173 Members of this body have signed onto the Waxman legislation to establish an independent commission to investigate these abuses; but nearly 6 months after being introduced, this bill languishes in committee without even a hearing from the majority.

President Bush and the majority did not want the independent 9/11 Commission. They have also opposed independent commissions to investigate the Federal response to Hurricane Katrina. But just like the revelations that came from the 9/11 Commission, an independent investigation into our detainee policy would help us all in the end.

It is time to investigate these abuses. It is never too late to regain our credibility around the world. I call on my colleagues to stand up against torture by standing firm to the belief that the United States has held for generations, that no individual in U.S. custody be subject to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, any time, any place, anywhere.

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

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

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, there are two things I want to address tonight, both terribly disappointing to me as a freshman Member of Congress.

As a former judge who sent hundreds or thousands of people to prison for felony crimes, I have heard and seen all kinds of stories. But the one that played out last week makes me both heartsick and very angry. A valiant Vietnam veteran, a man of courage and daring, a Navy pilot, a defender of this country, an ace, a true military leader by example, pled guilty, basically, to accepting bribes to push defense contracts to contractors who may not have been entitled to them.

For those of us who have served in the military, we know what it is to requisition supplies, equipment or services and get quality in response. On the other hand, we also know what it is to receive supplies, equipment or services and wonder who in the world got their bank account padded or their