

they have been taxed at ordinary income tax and had to pay self-employment. This is their retirement. This is their nest egg they have pulled together. And a correction that we will make tomorrow will affect so many of those songwriters that are in Memphis and Nashville and down in Austin and in those areas because it will allow those catalogs to be sold and those individuals to pay a capital gains tax like other small business owners, there again, leaving more money and more of that nest egg for them as they retire and as they are seniors, and allowing them to look at how they do things better, how they grow those small businesses. I yield to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. HENSARLING. And it is just so important that everybody realize this connection between preserving tax relief, preventing a tax increase and preserving our jobs. Again, over 4 million new jobs created in this economy since we passed tax relief. Why would we want to go back? Why would we want to take that tax relief away and pass a huge tax increase, because that affects real people all across America.

Let me give you another example. I talked earlier about the fact that we are enjoying the highest rate of homeownership in the history of the United States of America. I mean, home ownership, part and parcel of the American Dream. Well, somebody has to go out and help renovate those homes and build new homes. And one of those gentlemen is in my congressional district back in Texas, a gentleman by the name of Gil Travers of Travers and Company. He is a home builder. Prior to us passing the economic growth legislation with the tax relief, he had just a handful of workers; but once we passed the tax relief, he had to hire extra workers. He hired a lady named Jan, who was unemployed, to help him clean up some of his job sites. She got so busy that she had to hire two people who were unemployed to help her clean up the job site, a gentleman by the name of Calvin and another lady by the name of Christy, all because of tax relief.

And yet this week the Democrats want to raise taxes on Travers and Company Home Builders. They want to jeopardize the pay checks of Jan and Calvin and Christy and replace them with welfare checks, and they call that compassion.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Talking about our homes and construction and home sales. In October, home sales reached 7.1 units in October. And the thing that is so interesting is that is just off the historic high of home sales which was in June of this year when there were 7.3 units that were built or were sold. So whether it is new homes being built, whether it is existing homes, the home sales, how amazing that we are seeing home sales reaching such high numbers in both the new construction and the existing home sales category. And I yield back to the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. HENSARLING. Well, again, it illustrates just how valuable the tax relief has been to our economy. We have spoken this evening at length about over 4 million new jobs. Four million new jobs in the future that have been created. Four million new paychecks. That is what compassion is all about. Compassion is not measured by the number of welfare checks that are printed in Washington. It is measured by the number of paychecks that are printed all over the United States of America.

Our GDP growth, 2½ years straight where each and every quarter of economic growth has been over 3 percent. We have consumer spending that is advancing, advanced 4.2 percent during the third quarter. Retail sales are up. Real disposable income for our working families is up since we passed the tax relief package in our economic growth legislation. And manufacturing, which has faced many, many challenges in recent years, manufacturing production is continuing to expand. We have increases in productivity, and the list goes on and on and on. And all of this is threatened if we permit the Democrats to offer their Christmas gift to the American people, a huge tax increase; and that is why it is so vital, so vital tomorrow that we do not allow that to happen.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman from Texas, and I thank him so much for being here to talk with us tonight about why this is important legislation and why it is important that we stop a tax increase on the American people. And we have talked about so many of these issues tonight.

Mr. Speaker, this economy is booming. Inflation is low. Unemployment is near historic lows. We saw that 4.1 percent growth with the quarter that ended in September of 2005. And I think it is important to realize that this just did not happen. It did not just happen. And I know that my constituents certainly remember the recession the President confronted when he took office, and they remember the impact that September 11 had on our economy. We did not bury our heads in the sand when that happened. We rolled up our sleeves. We got to work. We passed tax reforms and tax relief, and tomorrow is our opportunity to extend that.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members of this body to join us in supporting H.R. 4297 tomorrow.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House. We would like to thank not only Democratic leader Ms. PELOSI but the entire Democratic leadership, Mr. HOYER, Mr. MENENDEZ and Mr. CLYBURN, our vice chair of the Democratic Caucus.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the 30-something Working Group comes to the floor to share not only with Members but also with the American people about what is happening good here in the Capitol and also what is happening bad here in the Capitol, and hopefully through a bipartisan effort we can move towards positive change here in the Capitol.

Mr. Speaker, it saddens me to report the fact that this Congress, need it be whatever poll you look at, the American people by 33 percent think that we are doing a good job. Thirty-three percent of the American people feel that this Congress is doing a good job. I would tell you that if it was a grade system, Mr. Speaker, I would assume that, and Members, I would assume that that would be a failing grade.

I have two children that attend school. And if their grades were based on a 33 percent performance, I do not think that they would be moving to the next grade. And I think it is important, Members of Congress, Mr. Speaker, as we start to look at our responsibilities to the American people, not just to our constituents in our districts, but to the American people, because by them sending us to Congress they federalized us to come up here and run this country in the way that it should be.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to remind the Members that this is the people's House. It is not my House. It is not Mr. RYAN's House. It is not Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ's House. Mr. Speaker, all due respect, it is not your House. It is the people's House.

In the Senate, I must add, and we must let all of the Members, we must remind them in the Senate someone can be appointed to the Senate. Of course they have elections. But in a time, let us just say, Mr. Speaker, like in New Jersey, the Governor of New Jersey, the new Governor of New Jersey has the opportunity, who was a U.S. Senator, to appoint someone to be the new U.S. Senator from the State of New Jersey.

But in the House, with a seat being vacated, let us just say someone from New Jersey is appointed to be the Senator. He cannot appoint someone here to the House of Representatives. He would have to set a special election for that seat to be filled constitutionally. So this is the people's House. And so when we start talking about the people of the United States of America, we are closer to them than any other, I think, than any other branch of government.

I would like to say that on the heels of President Bush's speech today on Iraq's economy, I could not help, and Mr. RYAN and I just returned from Iraq. We visited three cities in Iraq and we went to the infamous Green Zone and Baghdad visiting our troops. Many of them were members of the Army, soldiers. Some, Mr. Speaker, on their third deployment to Iraq.

I could not help but pay attention, and I got a copy of the President's

speech and he released a 35-page, 32 pages if you look at glossy cover and all, 35 pages of his strategy for victory there in Iraq.

But he talked about the economy today in Iraq. But I cannot help but say, Mr. Speaker, and to the Members, that it would have been good if the President could have talked about our U.S. economy. I think the reason why he did not talk about the U.S. economy is the fact that we have record deficits, some 3.5 trillion over the next 10 years' deficits. That is not the Kendrick Meek report. That is not the Tim Ryan report. That is not the Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz report. That is reality.

We are record-breaking as it relates to borrowing money, Members, from foreign countries. This President, along with this Republican majority here in the House and in the Senate, has achieved \$4.5 trillion in borrowing money from foreign nations, more than 42 Presidents before him. They were only able to, among all of those Presidents, I mean all of them, I am talking about since we became a country, \$4.1 trillion that have been achieved. And I want to correct myself. I am sorry. I have so many numbers here, Mr. Speaker. I want to correct myself. I am glad Mr. RYAN brought this over. \$1.05 trillion by this President. I said four and I will correct myself right now because in the 30-Something Working Group, Mr. Speaker, we believe in third-party validators and sharing with the American people and the Members the truth about what is happening here in the Capitol. So maybe 4.05 might have sounded a little better, but we believe in making sure that we give good information. 1.05 trillion, this president, the last 4 years, 2001 to 2005; and he is not done yet. 1.01 trillion, 42 Presidents in the history of this country, Republican, Democrat, and in their lifetime for some of them very early on were members of the Whig Party. From 1776 to 2000, 224 years, Mr. Speaker. And this is from the U.S. Department of Treasury. This is not from the National Democratic Party or anything like that. We just want to make sure, Mr. RYAN, that we have our third-party validators here.

Maybe the President, Mr. RYAN, could have talked about the fact that health care costs increased over 60 percent for small businesses over the last 5 years. Major companies are cutting jobs, and not only their pension plan that they promised, but they are following our lead here under this Republican majority, Mr. RYAN, by the fact that we are not only increasing copayments and the wait for our veterans once they leave the military, they are following our lead. Companies like GM, Delphi, Merck, Verizon and now Ford are now "reprioritizing." That means cutting jobs. That means cutting back on promises that they promised their employees from the beginning.

The average family right now in the United States as relates to natural gas

are paying three times more than they paid in 2001. The President could have talked about that, but he did not. He wanted to talk about Iraq because he needs to explain himself. Republican majority, they need to explain themselves.

Sixty percent of Americans, Mr. Speaker, if we like it or not, do not believe that our leadership as relates to leading our effort in Iraq has a sound plan in getting us out of there. So we are going to talk about some of these things tonight. We are going to also talk about, Mr. Speaker, this ongoing culture of corruption and cronyism and incompetence. This is not the Kendrick Meek report. This is just today's papers. This is just today that is outlining a culture of corruption and cronyism and incompetence. So when historians look back on the 109th Congress and the contributions that we made, they are also going to look at the void in leadership and leading this country in the way that they should lead.

We used to give speeches here on the floor, Mr. RYAN, and you know full well about putting burden on future generations.

□ 2015

Well, I can tell the Members right now, Mr. Speaker, and this is not me speaking. They can check with any of the Federal agencies that do the reports or the auditor generals that put out reports on an annual basis. We are putting this generation in the present in jeopardy.

So I am so glad that we have the opportunity tonight to come to the floor, and I am so glad that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is here, and I am glad that we have a level of consistency for the American people to come to the floor and share this information.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

And I think he is absolutely right. That is the most startling statistic that he has shown us with the money that we have borrowed from foreign interests because we come to the floor nightly, sometimes for a couple hours a night, to talk about the future of the country. And there is no more important part, no more important aspect, of the country than our fiscal stability. And right now we have a Republican Congress, House and Senate, and the President, who are borrowing money consistently from foreign interests, and to have one President do in 4 years what 42 Presidents could not do in 224 years is absolutely outrageous. And for anyone to stand up and somehow defend this fiscal policy that we have is an outrage, and it offends me, to be quite honest, because not only are we borrowing money which we have to pay interest on, we ran a \$500 billion deficit, or close to \$500 billion. We are not factoring in the war or anything else.

We are spending \$1.5 billion a week in Iraq, which is a lot of money, and we are close to over \$200 billion already there. But to have this money and spend it is one thing, but to not have the money and have to borrow it primarily from the Chinese, the Saudi Arabians, the Japanese, to borrow that money to plug our holes here in the United States puts this country at risk, and it weakens our country.

And we do not come here because we do not have anything better to do tonight. We come here because we take a constitutional oath and we swear our allegiance to the Constitution of the United States.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Article I.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Article I, section 1 of the Constitution creates this House. The first part of the United States Constitution creates this House. So we have an obligation for oversight. We have an obligation to balance the budget, and we have an obligation to protect the future of the United States of America. What more basic fundamental part of our jobs is there other than making sure this country is fiscally stable? And to go out and borrow over \$1 trillion, I mean I think it is—this is very important for us to make this point again. In 224 years, 42 Presidents borrowed over \$1 trillion from foreign holdings, from foreign interests. Over \$1 trillion in 224 years. This President and this Republican-led Congress has borrowed over \$1 trillion in 4 years from foreign interests. That weakens our country.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, can the gentleman say that again because I just want to make sure that the American people and not only the American people, but the Members who represent them on both sides of the aisle understand what is going on.

This is unprecedented. This is not something that happened 4 or 5 years ago. This is not something that happened 20 years ago. This is not something that happened 40 years ago. This is not something that happened 200 years ago. This is something that is happening now to this country, the first time in the history of the Republic. So when folks say, well, we have to do this, that we have a war going on and we gave unprecedented tax cuts to millionaires and we had 9/11, you know something? Forty-two Presidents had World War I, World War II, had Vietnam, Korea, the Great Depression. I mean, they had a number of issues thrown in the face of this country that we had to deal with. And now under this Republican majority, under the President we have in office now, we are breaking records. We are not breaking records as it relates to our economy and growth. We are breaking records as it relates to putting this country further in debt and borrowing from foreign countries.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And, Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, people say what does the 30-Something

Group have to do with all of this, what does our group have to do with all of this? Listen, this is the future of our country. There is no greater issue for the 30-somethings or the 20-somethings or those kids in school right now or those college students right now. There is no greater issue because the money, we do not just borrow it from the Chinese. We have got to pay interest on it, and our national debt right now is \$8 trillion. So who is going to pay this and who is going to pay the interest on it? And I think it is \$300 billion a year we are paying just in interest on the debt that we have. \$300 billion. So just imagine if we could get to a position where we were in the late 1990s.

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

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, I think that is a very important statistic to discuss during the course of our conversation this evening. The interest payments that the American taxpayers are required to make every single year amount to some \$300 billion on the debt that has been accumulated because of the policies of this White House, this Republican House of Representatives, and this Republican Senate.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the Republican majority tomorrow is going to extend or reinstitute tax cuts for the wealthiest people in the country.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And how are they going to pay for them?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Up to \$70 billion, they are going to go to the Chinese, to the Saudi Arabians, Mr. Speaker, to the Japanese governments.

Mr. DELAHUNT. To the Koreans.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. To the Koreans, and they are going to borrow the money. There is no one, Mr. Speaker, that could possibly hear this argument, no Member of Congress that could possibly hear this argument and not think to themselves why would we cut taxes by \$70 billion for the wealthiest people in the country and have to borrow the money from the Chinese to pay for it?

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, I think it should be rephrased. Why should we borrow more money from foreign governments and from foreigners who invest in this country to pay wealthy Americans money? This is not a tax cut. This is a welfare program financed by non-Americans, to a substantial degree, to provide more disposable income to the most affluent among us. I dare say this sacrifices our national security.

We hear many in this Chamber, particularly on the Republican side, express concern about China. We are in the position now where we need China to fuel our economy. We need many of those Middle Eastern nations who are not democratic to fuel our economy. As

Mr. RYAN and Mr. MEEK pointed out, in excess of \$1 trillion has been borrowed from foreigners to pay for tax cuts for the most wealthy of Americans.

This makes no sense, Mr. Speaker. It makes no sense from a national security perspective. If we have concerns about China and China's being a potential adversary, why do we continue to borrow money from the Chinese communist regime? Why, Mr. Speaker? It is a question I would like to have somebody answer.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I am not sure, quite frankly, if there is a good answer. I mean, what could possibly be the good answer? And the rhetoric that we get from our friends on the other side is that the tax cuts are stimulating the economy. The tax cuts are creating jobs. And this is laughable. Where? Where? In the Delphi Corporation? Ford just announced they are cutting 30,000 jobs. General Motors? Who is creating the jobs? And I heard our friend on the other side say a little bit earlier he had a company in Texas that went from two jobs to four jobs.

I mean, that is laughable. Ford cuts 30,000, and the argument coming from the other side is there is one company in Texas, Mr. Speaker, that went from two jobs to four jobs. Now, that is economic growth.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, here in the 30-Something Group, we believe in third-party validators. We believe in making sure we share with the American people and also with the Members of this House, Mr. Speaker, because sometimes there are a lot of things that are said. Some folks come to the floor and try to make sure that they provide information that somebody might have told them or they may say "they said," but we are actually giving good information, third-party validators. Some are U.S. Government agencies. Some are groups with great credibility.

I can tell Members right now and every American knows because they just pick up a newspaper or turn on the news, Mr. RYAN mentioned just a few companies, but GM, Delphi, Merck, Verizon, and now Ford just to name a few, Mr. Speaker. So when we start talking about the tax cuts, we can go down memory lane to just a month ago. There is so much happening to the American people versus for the American people that we do not have enough time to share it all. We just do not have enough time to share it all.

I mean, we would have to take 10 hours on this floor daily just to report to the Members of the House what is going on in this House. We could not look at another Congress and say, well, that happened in the 101st Congress or that happened in the 93rd Congress or that happened in the 3rd Congress. No. We are setting a new chapter in the record book as it relates to not governing in the way that we should. And I do not want to say "we," Mr. Speaker, because it is the Republican majority, and I just want to make sure Mem-

bers understand. Folks talk about what the Democrats are doing? What we are doing? Somebody said something about what the Democrats are going to raise. We cannot even bring our proposal to the floor. Do my colleagues know why? They say Democrats are lazy, that they do not want to put anything together. Guess what. We have a number of plans to put this country back in order and make sure that we clean out this deficit spending that the majority is doing, and they will not allow us in the Rules Committee to come to the floor and put our proposals on this floor and let us do it on an up-or-down vote. What they are doing is they are borrowing from this generation and future generations.

Just a few weeks ago, what was it, 14-something billion dollars they took from students, they took from parents that are trying to educate their children? We are getting our clock cleaned by China that, I must add, we are borrowing money from to give billionaires and millionaires tax cuts. We are borrowing money from them. They have more engineers. As a Member of Congress that represents a father or mother that wants to see their daughter become an engineer, forget about it. Unless they are a millionaire or a billionaire, that is the only way she is going to get to college so that she can be able to make this country strong. We are weakening this country and giving subsidies to companies that go overseas, Mr. Speaker, to have a better deal than they are going to have here on U.S. soil, to have better opportunities for our young people.

No Child Left Behind, Mr. Speaker, was a piece of legislation that we all thought at the beginning that could be a bipartisan work product that we can fund to help our future generations and present generation so we can compete against other countries. No. What we are doing now is we are making it easier for U.S. companies to go overseas, send our jobs overseas, and have GM, Delphi, Merck, Verizon, and now Ford lay off workers here. This is not the Kendrick Meek report, Mr. Speaker. This is reality. This is not Walt Disney World. This is the U.S. House of Representatives.

□ 2030

It starts here. We are the People's House. The Republican majority has allowed this to happen. Now, if someone is a Republican or an Independent, or, you know, Libertarian, Green Party, and says I am not a Democrat, I do not subscribe to that, you must subscribe to it, because it is dealing with your household. This is not just Democratic households that the Republican majority cut \$4 billion plus out of student loans and student aid. That is going to increase, increase the cost to send your child to college.

So I would say, gentlemen, for the Members that are in their offices right now, for the Members that are paying attention to us on the floor right now,

they have to put in their newsletter to their constituents that you need to look at that college fund that you are setting aside for your child, because, guess what? You need to increase it. Because we just made life harder for you.

Why do we make life harder for you? We made life harder because we had to make sure that the oil companies had their subsidies while they are making record breaking profits. We had to make sure that the millionaires and billionaires get their tax cut.

It is not just our report. Just pick up the paper. Just take a look at what is going on in this Congress right now. It is not that. It is not the fact that, oh, well, we had to cut the student loan and student opportunities, we had to cut Medicaid and we had to instruct the Veterans Affairs Committee to cut out of their budget millions for veterans to make their lives longer, to make those health care clinics for veterans, have them have fewer hours.

Gentlemen, in some areas of this great country of ours, there are clinics that are only open for 1 day a week for the veterans. One day. So now we have instructed, or the Republican majority has instructed, because we all voted against it, to then cut over \$600 million. So that means that maybe they will be open for half a day, Mr. Speaker.

And the President today wants to talk about the economy in Iraq. Wants to talking about what we have done with Iraqi contractors. Please. Why do not we talk about what we have done in U.S. cities?

Mr. DELAHUNT. If the gentleman will yield for a moment. You know, how about building some roads here in the United States? How about rehabilitating schools and constructing new schools with taxpayer dollars generated at the Federal level.

Rather than doing that for the United States here, what about our fellow citizens who were ravaged and are expressing frustration ever every single day in the national media in the aftermath of Katrina, and Rita, and other natural disasters, who are living in cars. What about doing something here, Mr. President, for Americans, rather than assuming the cost of nation building in Iraq?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think the President needs to recognize, and I am not saying this facetiously, he is not the President of Iraq. He is the President of the United States of America. And I do not say that to be flippant. I say that because this President's sole focus throughout his first term and into the second term has been Iraq.

And to give a speech today as Ford announces that they are cutting 30,000 jobs in the United States of America, as Delphi is in bankruptcy, as General Motors is having great difficulty competing, he is giving a speech on the Iraqi economy. It is like we are having a bad dream. I mean, come on. At some point, should not someone around the

President or somebody in this Congress tug him on the shirt sleeve and say, hey, Mr. President, we need you. We need your help. This country needs a domestic economic policy.

Borrowing money from the Chinese to subsidize tax cuts for the top 1 percent is not a domestic agenda.

Mr. DELAHUNT. At a minimum, the American people deserve a debate. They deserve a debate. They deserve a debate about the implications, not just in terms of our national security, but the implications for the economic future particularly of your generation, by virtue of the costs that are being borne by American taxpayers, let alone my sons and daughters and your generation with their blood in Iraq.

I mean, from what we can infer, since the American taxpayer is bearing almost the entire burden of nation building in Iraq, let us have a debate about the concept of nation building as a key critical ingredient in the foreign policy espoused by this White House and embraced by this Republican Congress.

Because that, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is a marked transformation in traditional Republican principles. We have heard, even in the course of the campaign in 2000 and from previous Presidential campaigns, a denigration of nation building in terms of our foreign policy. And yet, what we have done is we have embarked upon a nation building exercise as part of our foreign policy, as part of our international relations. It is being borne by the American taxpayer.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The problem with this whole situation, this whole scenario, is that as we are spending \$1.5 billion a week in Iraq, and we are borrowing money from the Chinese, over \$1 trillion in the last 4 years, not investing in the United States, not investing in education, not investing in research and development, not fixing our health care issue, we are weakening ourselves as a country.

Now we all as Americans want to say we want to be good to other countries. We want to be helpful to other countries. But if you are not strong at home, what good really are you to the rest of the world? We need a strong America, because if America is not strong, you are going to see a communist China rear its ugly head.

And talk about having a debate about an issue. It was in today's paper and on the news last night and today. Osama bin Laden. There is a name we have not heard for a while. Osama bin Laden is still alive leading the jihad.

Why are we not having the discussion about where is Osama bin Laden? This is the man who coordinated and organized the attack against the United States on 9/11. And we are having this huge debate about Iraq and what we should do and when we should leave and how it should go. What about Osama bin Laden?

Mr. DELAHUNT. Let me ask you this. Was al-Qaeda in Iraq prior to the invasion of Iraq?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. No.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. This working group that we have plays a very important role in making sure that the Members know that we in the minority party here in this House know exactly what they are doing and what they are not doing.

And I can tell you that it is just so powerful, and it serves, to our benefit politically if the country did not have to suffer. You know, as an American I must say, gentlemen, that politically we could just say, well, let us go home. Let us not come to the floor, Mr. Speaker, and share with the Members about what they are not doing and what we should do. Come to the floor and share our proposals from the Democratic side that will fall on deaf ears on the other side, because they do not want to hear our ideas, gentlemen, they just want to criticize what we are trying to do to save this country of ours.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) mentioned earlier that all they are doing is weakening the country. Now, the facts are, like it or not, Members, on the Republican majority side, like it or not, the bottom line is is that the 9/11 Commission put out a report card. And the Republican majority gets a big fat F because we have been, and as ranking member of oversight on the Homeland Security Committee, we have worked time after time again and put forward proposal after proposal to make sure that U.S. cities are prepared for a terrorist attack.

Interoperability. Mr. Speaker, I want to break that down for the Members. That is making sure that first responders can talk to one another, which we learned from 9/11, that firefighters could not talk to police officers, police officers could not talk to firefighters, they could not talk to the port authority, they could not talk to others as it relates to helping Americans get out of those buildings. And guess what? Lives were lost. Lives were lost.

Mr. DELAHUNT. From September 11 of 2001 to today, has anything changed in terms of our preparedness for a major terrorist attack such as we experienced in New York and here in Washington? Has anything changed according to the 9/11 report of any consequence, of anything substantial whatsoever?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, do not ask me. I mean, look at what the 9/11 bipartisan commission said. I was watching Tim Russert, one of the respected reporters here in Washington, DC, at NBC. And he had the chairman, who is a Republican, past Republican governor, and the vice chairman that was a Member of this House, respected Democrat, on both sides of the aisle they respect him.

And they both said that the administration, present administration, Mr. Speaker, and the Republican majority, gets a big fat F. They did not want to grade. Well, let me just put it this way. They did not want to grade it, but they

said that it is low. Okay. And I think it is important that we understand that interoperability that was a big issue that first responders asked for, they could have saved not only first responder lives, but American lives if they could have talked to one another, because they could not, because they did not have the ability.

Okay. You would assume that we would run out and get that done. No. We did not get it done. The Republican majority did not get it done. It was not prioritized. Yes, the money went there, but guess what? There is a bunch of politics that is going on as it relates to the money and the execution of making sure that U.S. cities have what they need.

Now, Americans again, another example, looked at what happened in Katrina. The Coast Guard could not talk to the police officers. The police officer could not talk to the military. The military could not talk to fire departments that came down to help. Fire departments could not talk to game and fish that were on boats trying to rescue people.

Why? Because the interoperability is not there. We mandate highway dollars. I used to be a State trooper in the State of Florida. I can tell you right now, sometimes we used to be told, you need to write those seatbelt tickets. Why? Because the Colonel of the Florida Highway Patrol says so? No. Because if we do not write seatbelt tickets and we write speeding tickets to folks not wearing their seatbelts, we will lose our Federal money.

You think that if this Congress did that as it relates to making sure that we have interoperability that would save lives if a terrorist attack was to happen? Now it is not a secret. Wherever Americans are living now, Mr. Speaker, first responders could not talk to one another, because the dollars have not been prioritized as it relates to making sure that it happens on behalf of U.S. cities.

I want to make one other point, a couple of points if I may, and I will be quick. Failure to secure the materials for weapons of mass destruction in the national priority. We still do not have HAZMAT uniforms for many of our first responders that are out there.

Failure to improve air cargo inspection as a priority.

□ 2045

We want to shake down people at the magnetometers when they walk through the TSA. Meanwhile, we have containers being placed on these commercial airlines that are unchecked.

Failed to implement an airline passenger prescreening program based on consolidated terrorist watch lists. Still, you have the administration, you have the majority that has failed to do that. We have proposals to do that. I am on Homeland Security. Take it from me, it is on a partisan vote and it goes down if it is heard at all, especially not on this floor.

Failed to review and make changes in the congressional intelligence oversight process. I am going to tell you right now, there are some things that we should have great oversight over but, I hate to report, there are things that we don't even have an opportunity to have a hearing on. I just want to make sure the Members of the House understand, the majority rules here. They set the agenda. They say when something is going to happen. I mean the Republican majority. They set the agenda. They make sure that we have these hearings and they denied hearings as relates to this.

For Republicans to say, well, the Democrats are stopping us from doing certain things, we cannot stop them right now, Mr. Speaker, the Republican majority. That is something that the American people have to do. I can tell you right now, it is not political rhetoric. This is reality. I want to be proven wrong. But this is the report card. The 9/11 Commission has said it and we have been on this floor time after time asking for a Hurricane Katrina independent commission. The State of the Union that is coming up, I don't represent anyone in New Orleans or in the gulf States, but I asked a person that is a victim, an evacuee of that storm, to take my gallery pass for the State of the Union. I want her to be here, to look at the President and this Republican majority and all of us when he marches in here on the floor and talks about how great things are. Meanwhile back at the ranch in New Orleans and in the gulf coast, some areas don't even have power. And they are asking Louisiana and they are asking Mississippi to carry the weight on the cost of recovery. Meanwhile, we have people walking on this floor with a straight face coming here talking about we need tax cuts to help the economy and my constituents need a tax cut, because of the millionaires and billionaires that are getting it.

I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to get these points out because it is important that we share this information.

Mr. DELAHUNT. They are excellent points. I think your idea about taking your one ticket and allowing a victim of Katrina and the natural disasters that befell our gulf States, invite them to come and sit in this gallery is an excellent concept. We as a group ought to consider asking our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to allow these seats to be filled by American citizens who have had their lives disrupted and their futures placed in doubt and listen to this President tell them that things are good in America and that their government is helping them. Maybe that might prompt some action, Mr. Speaker. Because just recently, 2 nights ago, there was on one of the networks a story about Americans living in cars waiting to go into trailers. How long do we expect our fellow citizens to endure that kind of an existence? We can feel sorry for those all over the

globe that experience poverty, that experience tragedy in their lives, but our first obligation is to our own citizens.

When we speak of nation-building, Mr. Speaker, let's start building America again. That is where we should begin. In terms of your points regarding our lack of preparedness for a terrorist attack, let's be very candid. Those levees that were breached in Louisiana, they were breached because of natural forces, forces of nature. They very well could have been breached by a terrorist attack. And what did we see? We saw a lack of preparation, Mr. Speaker, that offended every American and really, I would suggest, shook the rest of the world because they saw an America that they did not realize existed, an America that was ill-prepared to take care of its own people.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think that the key point to this whole thing with the Katrina scenario is that the President ran on he was going to make the country stronger, that he could protect us better than his opponent, which is fine. Katrina happened. It was not a surprise attack. It was not a surprise that Katrina hit the gulf coast. This hurricane was on the Weather Channel for 5 days. And we say, were we really ready? Unfortunately, as Mr. Hamilton and Governor Kean said, that there will probably be another terrorist attack in the United States. We don't want that to happen, of course, but we are not going to have 5 days to prepare for a terrorist attack in the United States. You are not going to be able to turn on the Weather Channel and they are going to say, a terrorist attack is coming for New York City and you have 5 days to prepare for it. That is the number-one responsibility that we have. Article 1, section 1 creates this body and we have an obligation to protect this country. We are not going to have forewarning. We are not going to be tipped off by the Weather Channel. And if we cannot do it with 5 days' preparation, it frightens me at what stage we are at right now and the job we are not doing because we are so focused on all these other things.

I would be happy to yield to my friend who just strutted in from wherever she was.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I can tell you I just strutted in from helping my first graders with their homework. Just so you know, I have my priorities straight.

I spent a couple of minutes listening to your exchange and cannot help but chime in here and express my deep concern which I know my good friend from Florida (Mr. MEEK) shares as well. We had our Governor and FEMA represent our delegation in advance of Wilma. You have got Katrina and we all are very familiar with the lack of preparation clearly and the aftermath of Katrina and the disaster literally of the aftermath of Katrina but then you fast-forward a couple of months to Wilma when we had 2 months that

FEMA could have learned from some of those mistakes and dealt with the preparedness issues that they were really poor on and the aftermath response issues that they received incredibly poor marks on. You would think that they would have fixed it. But in our case, our Governor and FEMA represented to us that we were the model State. I say this not to be too specific about any one State's preparation, but FEMA and the Florida government represented that our State was the most prepared.

We can tell you that if our State and their response to Wilma is the pride and joy, is the model for preparation in disaster response, then we should all be deeply concerned about the other 49 States and their preparedness and potential response for a natural or a man-made disaster like a terrorist attack.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think this goes right to the point that our friends on the other side, as much as we like some of them, are unable to govern. They just don't know how to do it. There is just total incompetence, from the economy, from the poverty levels, the macroeconomic situation, balancing the budget, lack of fiscal restraint, fiscal recklessness in borrowing \$1 trillion from foreign interests over the past 4 years. They just are unable to govern the country. They have had their chance. They have controlled the House and the Senate and the White House, one party, they have had a chance to implement their agenda, and nothing seems to be going right.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You are absolutely right. On top of that, because we are about third-party validators and it is not all about just what we say, you have Governor Kean and Mr. Hamilton who the other day gave them a list of Fs on almost every major aspect of preparedness and what we should be doing in terms of response to a potential terrorist act. It is just one more example of their lack of caring, of their lack of competence, of the cronyism, of the corruption. Find a C word and this Republican leadership and the administration absolutely fit the bill.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Can the gentleman please elaborate on the C words?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We have got the first C word which is corruption. It seems like every day we have yet another example, a tragic example, it wrenched my heart to hear that we had a colleague of ours, the former gentleman from California, who pled guilty to bribery, so we have got corruption. We have ethics charges, some which are just accusations, some which have been validated, up and down the ranks of many of our Republican colleagues. That is one C word. Then you shift from corruption to cronyism. There is rampant cronyism throughout this administration. You have only Michael Brown, Brownie, to use as an example. When the President would put in place someone whose

claim to fame in terms of his qualifications for being the lead expert on disaster preparedness and response was being the president of the Arabian Horse Association as opposed to having a deeply long resume in emergency preparedness, that just smacks of cronyism. What was his real quality in terms of being hired for that job? He was James Allbaugh's roommate. That was the real qualification when he got that job. You have Mr. Savavian, who was the procurement director in the White House who now has been fired because he was accused of wrongdoing.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. He had the opportunity to resign and then the next day he was indicted. Go ahead.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you just for the filling in of the facts. The list goes on in terms of the cronyism that is rampant through this administration. So you have corruption. You have cronyism. Then you have, as the gentleman from Ohio just described, the total lack of competence. Example after example. The proposal on Social Security. The way they handled Katrina. The way they handled Wilma. The deficit. We have an \$8 trillion deficit.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Iraq.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Iraq. You have an \$8 trillion deficit now. We have got corruption, cronyism, competence.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It is a culture.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It is a culture.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. This is not a one-time event.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I must say that never before in the history of this country has there been leadership, all of these issues of cronyism and corruption, never before at these levels in the history of this country. It is not the Kendrick Meek report, the Debbie Wasserman Schultz report, or the Tim Ryan, the Bill Delahunt report.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. This country deserves better than that. That is the point that we are trying to make. We do not have to settle for a dictator like some people do in some countries. We are allowed to have high expectations for our leaders in the country.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I want to acknowledge the presence of a good colleague and a good friend and clearly a solid Republican, STEVE KING from Iowa. Let me pose a question to him. The gentleman from Iowa is down here on a regular basis and is an ardent advocate of his point of view. I know we are running out of time.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I hope he yields to us for the time we are yielding to him because we only have about 6 minutes left.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I think we are coming back for another hour, so we will get him on the other side here.

I will just make this statement and ask for his comment. We have been at war for almost 3 years. It will be 3 years this March. We have not had a single oversight hearing on Iraq in the

committees that I serve on, including the House International Relations Committee. Not one.

□ 2100

There are so many questions that the American people have. There are so many questions that we all have, and yet, I would submit that we are not exercising our constitutional mandate to serve as a check and balance on the executive branch. I mean, we do have these allegations of an order of magnitude of corruption that is ongoing in Iraq today.

Let me just quote you from the Washington Times, not a liberal journal. I think you will grant me that.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I will.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This is a quote from October 28, a column by Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, again, people that would not agree with me or my colleagues on this side of the aisle. Here is what they said: Defense officials tell us the scandal involves massive corruption in Iraq related to the United States and international funds meant for reconstruction efforts and the failure of the administration to control these funds.

I am ranking member on a subcommittee that has requested for months an oversight hearing just simply on these allegations, and I am met with silence. Let me tell you that is wrong. It is a disservice to the American people. It is a disservice to the institution, not a single hearing in 3 years.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I thank my friend and the gentleman from Massachusetts and colleague on the Judiciary Committee.

I have been to Iraq for the express purposes of oversight of those construction projects, about \$12.5 billion administered by the Army and the balance of that \$18.5 billion by other entities, the sea bees. Yes, I actually faced a number of questions from the people in Iraq. I did not get to the bottom of that. I do not know that they are in a position to actually have oversight on this in that fashion, but your point that you have made is one that is somewhat new and fresh to me. I have done due diligence, I think, to an extent to see where that money's been spent there. I would very much like to sit down with you and have this conversation so that we could bore into this.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, but the American people have a right of transparency and watching and hearing from these people. You make that effort and I understand that you do and you ask questions, but we need to do this in the light of day. There is pervasive corruption ongoing in the rebuilding of Iraq. It is offensive, and this comes from conservative columnists as well as our own military personnel and from multiple, different sources. Yet, the leadership in this House is denying the American people the right to hear.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Just a few examples of what you are talking about, we are talking about the role of the White House in promoting misleading intelligence when it came to how we got into the war and the Iraq's weapons of mass destruction or lack thereof. We are talking about the responsibility of senior administration officials for the abuses at Abu Ghraib. We are talking about the role of the Vice President's office and the award of Halliburton contracts, no information on that, no accountability. The role of the White House in withholding the Medicare cost estimates from Congress. The identity of the energy industry campaign contributors that met with the Vice President's energy task force.

We could keep going about the corruption, the lack of information, the lack of competence, and in fact, when we come back at our next opportunity in our next hour, we will continue to go on about that.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. How about the gentleman, I cannot remember his name, a couple of weeks ago came up who had \$87 million worth of contracts in Iraq he was in charge of and he was stealing money, hundred of thousands of dollars. In the 1990s he was convicted of fraud, but yet, this administration hired him again. That is incompetence. That is cronyism. That is an inability to execute the proper role of government.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we just got back from Iraq. We are not even a week out of Iraq. We visited three Iraqi cities, and it was my second trip. I can tell you this, that when you hear uniformed personnel say, well, you know, some of the money, I mean it is like you know people take some of the money for themselves; it is something that happens here in Iraq. This is an accepted kind of thing. This is the U.S. taxpayers' money, and we are just saying, oh, well, you know, that is the way things happen over here.

Let me tell you, when the auditor general really starts to report what is happening with the money we are giving, that is being taken away from U.S. cities and the U.S. taxpayer, meanwhile the majority says, oh, let us govern, we will make sure that we are fiscal and we are responsible, well, when we come back in the next hour I want to talk about being responsible. I think it is important we do that. We will be back in an hour.

I just want you to give the Web site out before we close.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio.
30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Mr. DELAHUNT, Mr. RYAN, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ and to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us to have the hour. We would also like to say it is pleasure and honor to address the House of Representatives.

IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCCAUL). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address this Chamber and appreciate the opportunity for some dialogue with my colleagues from the other side of the aisle and particularly Uncle Bill from Massachusetts whom I did yield to the last time when he asked me, and so we have a little engagement going.

I think it is constructive dialogue that we have. I know we disagree often. We are looking for the best thing for this country all together, Mr. Speaker, and disagree with the method of how we get there, and sometimes we disagree with our definition and analysis of how we approach these things.

So to begin my hour, Mr. Speaker, I would like to address some of the concerns that were raised in this previous hour, many of which I did not hear in great detail, some of which the philosophy I heard ad infinitum here one or 2 hours a night after our session every week for the last months.

One of the issues that came up, Mr. Speaker, was the issue of weapons of mass destruction, and yes, I have been to Iraq. I have been there three times. The last time there was I came back the latter part of August, and I make it a point to go to the places where some of the other Members of Congress have not gone. I make it a point to find soldiers there, generally I ask for Iowans, anybody here from Iowa. We sit down and talk, and I meet with people all the way up the line to the top brass and also to the U.S. ambassador, representatives of the Iraqi government. I have tracked this through the history of the liberation of Iraq and on through to this point that we are today.

It saddens me a great deal, Mr. Speaker, to hear some of the leaders of the party on the other side and a very small number of people on my side of the aisle who have lost their faith, lost their faith in their own judgment, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we had this debate here in this Congress in the fall of 2002, and this Congress voted by a solid majority to endorse the President's authority to use force to enforce the resolution of the United Nations in Iraq. Those resolutions had to be enforced, Mr. Speaker, and without that, there would have been no teeth whatsoever to the United Nations.

Our President did that. We knew that was going to be the case. We knew when the debate took place in this Chamber that there was going to be a majority decision. I would like to think when we meet here to have these debates, Mr. Speaker, that we stick with the decision of the majority. That is the will of this body. When the will of this body is reflected and the will of the Senate is reflected and that resolution makes its way to the White House, where statutory legislation the Presi-

dent signs it, if it is a resolution the President takes account of the judgment of the House of Representatives and the judgment of the Senate. The judgment of the House and the judgment of the Senate was to endorse the President, the commander-in-chief, and grant him the endorsement of Congress to use authority to enforce the United Nations resolutions, particularly 1441. The President did that.

There is a long argument as to why he did not have an alternative, and our troops went into Afghanistan. Our troops went into Iraq and liberated 50 million people, and they are grateful today, extraordinarily grateful today, to have that opportunity to be free.

If anyone doubts that, look back in your mind's eye to last January when the Iraqis went to the polls to elect their interim parliament. Eight to 8.5 million of the Iraqis went to the polls to vote, and they voted and they dipped their finger in the purple ink. They proudly and they, in fact, defiantly marched out of there with their purple fingers in the air. When they were threatened with their very lives for going to the polls to vote in that January, there were 108 attacks on the polling booths in Iraq by some suicide bombers, all terrorists, trying to intimidate the entire country from voicing their voice of freedom, their voice of directing their national destiny through their elected leaders. Yet, they went to the polls and defied all of those threats and, in fact, upset the predictions from the other side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker.

So the people that did not have faith that there could be legitimate elections in Iraq saw them happen, and those people that were so invested in failure, that they could not abide admitting that there was a success, began to explain it away.

Well, we had kind of an election, kind of a legitimacy came out of the mouth of JOHN KERRY. So how much more legitimate can you get when people defy a threat of death to go for their first time and vote for the first time in their lives, and legitimately, their argument can be made the first time in all history on that piece of real estate. They had that courage to take advantage of that opportunity, and they voted in greater numbers in percentage-wise than Americans did in the presidential election.

Yet, we had people over here that said, well, it is a kind of legitimacy; it really is not a real election; we really do not know how many people that did not participate that would have if somehow or another they believed in the process, had more courage or been less threats on their lives. Yet, they voted in greater numbers than Americans did, and they call it kind of a legitimacy. That was January.

October 15, by then this new parliament has written a new Constitution, another milestone, a milestone that set on the calendar a sequence of events that need to take place in order