the privatization of Social Security, which would borrow trillions of dollars from the Social Security trust fund and drive it deeper into debt and imperil its opportunities to achieve solvency, but now he was offering something called progressive indexing, which would be a substantial cut in benefits under Social Security to middle-class recipients.

They were quite stunned to learn that those individuals who pay into Social Security every week from their paychecks, every month from their paychecks and all year long from their paychecks, that the President was now suggesting that they should take a cut in their benefits as a way of restoring solvency. They were not just stunned that the President was suggesting this one-two assault on Social Security, but they were also quite alarmed to learn that the President apparently has no intention of paying back the some $700 billion that his administration has borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, that the trust fund is, in fact, not being honored, the people that pay into that trust fund every year to the tune of some $160 billion, that that money is now being taken out to use for other functions of the government, whether it is the war in Iraq or whether it is the general spending of the government.

It is very clear that they want that trust fund restored. It is a trust fund. They are paying into it because they believe that that money is going to be put there, loaned to the government, replaced by Treasury bills, but it will be there for their use, for their annuities that they are buying every week when they pay into the Social Security fund.

But that is not what the President is suggesting. The President is suggesting, as he does in the budget that this House passed last week, that he will continue to borrow $160 billion out of the trust fund and, as he said when he went to West Virginia, it is really not a trust fund, there is no trust there, so apparently he is the first President since we started Social Security who has suggested that he may not pay the trust fund back.

That is just unacceptable to my constituents at the town hall in Martinez. I think it is unacceptable to the overwhelming number of the American public who believe that the reason they are paying into Social Security is so that they can have some level of financial security upon their retirement.

Social Security, for the current retirees, supplies over half of their retirement income. Sure, we all want to make it easier and better and more likely that Americans will save for their retirement. But that has not happened. Hopefully it will happen in the future. But Social Security is a very important part of people's retirements. When they look at the efforts by corporations to get rid of their retirement plans, when they look at the difficulty they are having as middle-class families to save not only for their child's education but for their retirement, they recognize how important it is that the Social Security trust fund be maintained.

But now this President comes along and suggests that that is not the case, that he is going to put an assault on that trust fund with the privatization of Social Security and then he is going to come along and cut the benefits to middle-class Social Security recipients who have paid into that trust fund throughout their entire working life. I think it is very clear that not only is this plan unacceptable to the vast numbers of Americans who have had a chance to take a look at it, but hopefully it will become unacceptable to this Congress as stewards of that trust fund.

But first and foremost, what the American people want us to do is to stop taking the money out of the trust fund to fund the rest of the government. We have got to honor what we set out to do in 1983 under the bipartisan agreement of Speaker Tip O'Neill, an icon of the Democratic Party, President Ronald Reagan, an icon of the Republican Party, when they sat down and hammered out a bipartisan agreement.

Part of that agreement was to create a trust fund, not some honey pot that any Member of Congress could go into and take out for whatever purpose they want but a trust fund for the retirement of millions and millions of Americans and their families.

It is important that we honor that, Mr. Speaker.

LOWELL STOUT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute Lowell Stout, a good friend who recently passed away in Hobbs, New Mexico.

Lowell was an attorney there. He moved to the area from Oklahoma after the Dust Bowl days in the 1930s. He always called himself a proud son of a sharecropper from Blaine Bottom, Oklahoma.

Lowell worked his way through school as a roughneck on drilling rigs. He also worked as an oil field roustabout. During the Korean War, he served in the Army. After his time in the service, he returned to Hobbs to practice law defending a variety of civil litigation matters. Later he began to specialize, representing the small guy in personal injury, plaintiff-related matters.

Lowell became a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers in 1981. He was selected to be included among the ''Best Lawyers in America.'' He was an early inductee into the Joe Roehl Circle of Honor which honors the finest trial lawyers in New Mexico.

I never asked Lowell if he was a Democrat or Republican. I suspect he was a Democrat. We never talked much about politics because we shared a common belief that the family was paramount. Lowell was the parent of Mark and Georgiann. Georgiann and I went to school together and graduated. She went on to San Francisco and lives there today. Son Mark stays in Hobbs. He and his wife Cindy have raised their family there.

The abiding memory of Mr. Stout is that he was always with his wife Liliane. They raised their family in Hobbs. He was a dedicated family man. In these days of partisan politics, I know that many times Mr. Stout disagreed with my opinions, but he frankly encouraged me to do the best that I could. He did the best that he could. I think that we ought to learn by his example: dedication and commitment to family, dedication and commitment to a wife.

Again, I salute Lowell Stout, a great lawyer, a fine human being, a friend and the father of friends of mine and the husband of a friend of mine.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 2 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 56 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until 2 p.m.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN) at 2 p.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Eternal Father, You are ever present to Your people, especially the young and the most vulnerable of society. As we pray for the Members of the United States House of Representatives today, we strain with eyes of faith to peer into the future. We know, Lord, that even now, You are preparing us for an uncertain age to come. By blessing this country with energetic and intelligent young people who have a clear vision of just what is right and a vibrant awareness of those suffering in the world, You are already providing our Nation with young leaders for tomorrow.

By Your grace, strengthen family life, that our young people mature in love and in freedom. Steeped in religious values, may they embrace the self-discipline and study necessary to achieve personal goals and realize their full potential.

May many young people be open to Your call to serve fellow Americans in public service, raise ethical standards in business, bring greater integrity and

civility to politics, and become ambassadors of peace, reconciliation and liberty in a world community.

We praise You and thank You, for Your hopeful dreams You are now planting in the hearts of America's youth, both now and always. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. KILDEE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

COMBAT MEDIC BADGE

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, the combat medic badge was first awarded in 1945 to medics who served in combat while in or attached to a combat unit. As times changed, the role of the medic changed with them. In Vietnam, medics served in units, but some also flew in helicopter medical evacuation ambulance units, called medivacs.

DUSTOFF was the call sign that we gave this mission, and they saved nearly a million people during the Vietnam war by flying unarmed onto the battlefield to treat and save our wounded soldiers, most often under fire.

The average DUSTOFF medic treated nearly 2,000 troops in a 1-year tour. Currently, there is no unique way to honor these brave men and women. Although they flew in and out of combat every day, they are not eligible for the combat medic badge, because they were not attached to a combat unit; often the medivac unit was another unit.

And my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. HOLDEN), has legislation to correct this by directing the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines to develop the combat medivac badge. The badge will be awarded to anyone who has served in combat as a pilot or crew member of a helicopter medical evacuation ambulance since 1950.

I urge the body to pass this, give the DUSTOFF veterans the honor they deserve.

UNINSURED AMERICANS

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, almost a quarter of Texans do not have health insurance, and this is the highest rate of uninsured in the United States.

In Dallas alone, the uninsured rate is 25 percent. We all know someone who is living without health insurance. There is a perception that if someone does not have health insurance, it is because they do not work or they are on public assistance.

Over 80 percent of the uninsured workers are workers, and 50 percent of them are full-time workers. Americans who work hard for a living should not have to live without health insurance. These uninsured often face the difficult decision of either ignoring their medical problems or being able to afford food and rent.

Mr. Speaker, the sad truth is that no American family is more than one job change, one corporate cost cut, or one serious illness or an accident away from being uninsured. It is time for this Congress to address this problem with innovative ideas and actions.

GIVING CYNICAL PLOYS A BAD NAME

(Mr. DELAY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. DELAY. Mr. Speaker, as much as we may hate to admit it, there is no denying that the bald-face, cynical ploy can be as much a part of American politics as shaking hands and kissing babies.

Though cynical ploys are occasionally effective, they are almost never pretty. But, Mr. Speaker, the refusal of the national Democratic leaders to offer constructive proposals to strengthen and preserve the Social Security system is starting to give even cynical ploys a bad name.

After all, the stakes of this debate are not a mere election or two, but are instead a looming fiscal crisis and the retirement security of a generation of American seniors.

President Bush and some Republican congressional candidates ran in 2004 on the issue of retirement security. And the President made Social Security the focus of his first State of the Union after his reelection.

From that day on, Democrat leaders have rejected any effort to begin bipartisan dialogue on reform and have threatened any of their rank-and-file Members from so much as discussing the issue with members of the AARP, let alone Republican Members.

From the outset of this debate, Republicans, led by President Bush, have held a seat at the table open for congressional Democrats. And despite this sincere desire among many Democrats to help, their leaders have demanded unquestioned obedience to their obstructionism.

Just last week, President Bush ended a 60-day tour of our Nation explaining to the American people the problems facing Social Security and his ideas to help solve those problems. Indeed, he has left open for debate, as we have, any productive reform idea to address the system's funding and benefit structure, personal retirement accounts, and other options.

President Bush and his party are trying to preserve and strengthen Social Security for generations to come, to keep the promise the program originally made to the American people 7 decades ago. And since January, we Republicans have identified the problems and begun this crucial debate by proposing several solution alternatives.

Meanwhile, the Democrats have ignored problems, offered no solutions, and attacked anyone with courage to help. As I said, Mr. Speaker, some cynical ploys work and some do not. But as the retirement security of a generation of future retirees depends on the honest, sincere work we do this year, I think we owe it to them to be a little bit better than that.

So even as Republicans continue our work this month to develop the long-term solutions to Social Security troubles, I once again remind Democrats willing to work with us that their seat at the table will be kept open.

SOCIAL SECURITY

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. With all due respect to my good friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), Mr. Speaker, the Democrats have been doing right for the American people on social security. We have been holding town hall meetings all over this country. We know and the American people ought to know that Social Security is not going bankrupt, that the President misspoke when he said that there is no Social Security trust fund.

As a matter of fact, the Social Security trustees released a report recently that says that right now the Social Security trust fund has $1.68 trillion in it; that trust fund will grow to $6 trillion by the year 2028 without any changes whatsoever; that Social Security is rock solid through the year 2041, according to the Social Security Administration's own actuaries; that Social Security is rock solid through the year 2052, according to the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office.

Yes, both parties ought to come together; but we ought to come together in truth, and we ought to have the President let go about this masquerade about social Security going bankrupt.

What is going bankrupt is a legislative process that fails to stand up for the retirement security of the American people. Forty-seven million Americans rely on Social Security. They have a right to expect that the money is going to be there, and we Democrats will make sure that money will be there for them for generations to come.