

The President falls far short of his promise under the No Child Left Behind bill, even though this means that taxpayers will have to foot the bill at the local level to pay for education.

Finally, the President does not seem to mind taxing veterans' health care at \$250 per year, and doubling copayments for veterans' prescription drugs, at a time when we should be saluting our veterans.

Our values as a society are not reflected in this budget. We must ban together in Congress to force an honest accounting, and insist upon the restoration of long-term fiscal responsibility to our Nation. It's not enough to talk about compassion—it is high time that we refocus our priorities and show some compassion.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order today.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from South Carolina?

There was no objection.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THE COST OF THE MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mrs. JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, the landmark Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act that this body passed in 2003 was the subject of heated rhetoric and partisan attacks at that time. Most recently, we have heard the claim that the costs of this wonderful Medicare prescription drug benefit have skyrocketed far above the estimates relied upon when we passed the bill in 2003. Allow me to set the record straight.

The cost of the Medicare prescription drug benefit that will guarantee every senior in America affordable prescription drug coverage has not changed. In November of 2003, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that the costs of the drug benefit from 2004 to 2013 would be \$408 billion. Today, they estimated it at \$410 billion.

In December of 2003, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, using different assumptions, estimated that the cost of the bill over the same 10-year period would be \$511 billion. Today, they are saying it will cost \$518 billion. So, whatever estimates we use, whichever set of assumptions we wish to rely on, CBO's or CMS', the answer is the cost estimates have not changed. They varied about plus or minus 1 percent.

So what is the issue? What is the big uproar over? The answer is simple. New estimates just released by the adminis-

tration are for a 10-year period that begin in 2006, not 2004. These estimates cite a cost of \$724 billion. That is because they drop 2 years when there was no drug program and add 2 years when millions more Medicare beneficiaries are going to enjoy the benefits of our Medicare Modernization and Prescription Drug Act. It is just that simple. The 10-year estimating period changed. So, of course, the estimates went up.

But it is easy for the estimators to count the new number of people who benefit from the program in the 2 additional years and drop the 2 years when there was no program. It is more difficult for them, and so they do not do it, estimate the saving that the Medicare modernization and prescription drug bill will enable Medicare to enjoy while at the same time improving the quality of care we will be able to deliver to our seniors.

The Medicare Modernization Act fundamentally changed the way Medicare delivers care to our seniors. By offering welcome to Medicare physicals and disease management programs, we have transformed Medicare from simply an illness treatment program to a wellness and preventative health program.

Medicare has always been good at treating our seniors once they got sick, but did nothing to prevent them from getting sick. Worse, Medicare did nothing to help seniors with chronic illnesses to prevent that chronic illness from worsening.

America's seniors deserve the changes we made in the Medicare Modernization Act. That act modernized the delivery system of care to enable Medicare to deliver the most recent medical advances to our seniors, particularly to those with chronic diseases.

□ 1745

By moving from an illness model to a preventive care model, we can keep seniors out of high-cost care settings, like hospitals and emergency rooms. If you are looking for a sensible way to control costs, this is the way to do it. Disease management programs, like the ones the Medicare Modernization Act have introduced into Medicare, have proven they save health care dollars and they improve health care quality.

PacificCare has already saved \$244 million through existing disease management programs to their 720,000 Medicare beneficiaries. They have saved \$75 million through medication management for patients with congestive heart failure and reduced hospitalizations by 50 percent. They have saved \$185 million by improving blood sugar and cholesterol levels in diabetics. They have saved \$72 annually through their congestive heart failure program, which has served 15,000 patients.

McKesson, which will bring Medicare seniors into the Medicare Modernization Chronic Care Improvement Pro-

gram this year, currently saves \$3,089 per patient each year in their disease management programs. They have reduced emergency department visits by 61 percent. They have reduced hospitalizations by 66 percent.

XLHealth, which operates a Medicare Chronic Care Improvement Program, has reduced medical costs in 2,500 Medicare patients since 2000. Their disease management program has reduced hospitalizations by 25 percent, amputations by more than 50 percent, and heart bypass surgery by 65 percent.

The bottom line: disease management programs save money and improve health care quality. And thanks to the Medicare Modernization Act, these programs will create a better quality of life for seniors with congestive heart failure, diabetes, chronic obstructive disease, and other chronic illnesses and bend the curve of Medicare's cost growth.

These recent estimates we have been hearing so much about simply do not include any consideration of the power of disease management programs to reduce the cost of chronic disease and to improve the quality of care in Medicare. Twenty percent of our seniors have five or more chronic conditions and account for two-thirds of Medicare spending. Twenty percent. Of course disease management will reduce the cost of Medicare.

MMA also initiated another new, though related, development in Medicare that will create significant savings while improving quality, but isn't reflected in cost estimates drawing attention today. For the first time, electronic prescribing will become routine in the Medicare program, with electronic medical trends coming along thereafter.

Electronic prescribing technology will save lives and money by eliminating adverse drug interactions, eliminating handwriting errors, and by notifying physicians when a lower cost generic alternative is available. As we all know, generic drugs often far cheaper than brand name drugs. Electronic prescribing will save money, and while this technology called for in the MMA, the cost savings are not reflected in the cost estimates.

Repealing the MMA would be the wrong medicine for America's seniors. Doing so would deprive them of prescription drugs and the high level of coordinated and preventive care that will keep our seniors healthier and control Medicare spending by improving the quality of our health delivery system.

CODEL TO PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity this evening to address you on a subject that is both a meaningful memory for me, as the elected representative of the people of eastern Indiana's Sixth Congressional District, but also, as I believe we will hear not only from my recollection but

from colleagues who will join us, and a very rare opportunity to have a contemporary conversation about the critical importance and the extraordinary success of the United States of America in Afghanistan.

I had the privilege, as a Member of the House Committee on International Relations, to lead a congressional delegation both to Pakistan and Afghanistan this past December. Between the dates of 7 December and 14 December, I had the opportunity of traveling through Pakistan. We landed in Islamabad. We drove by ground transportation to the border of the tribal areas, the city of Peshawar, but also the areas both north and south, Waziristan, where many may recognize the areas most often associated with theories about the hiding place of one Osama bin Laden.

While I and the Members of our delegation were in the city of Peshawar, we actually sat down for a meal with tribal leaders from that central area of south Waziristan, which is in effect in the western area of Pakistan, and it probably is analogous to the Wild West in American history and folklore. As we met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Governor of the Peshawar Province, they referred to this area of Pakistan as the ungoverned areas of their country.

So they really are dominated, Mr. Speaker, by tribal leaders who are, in effect, military and familial leaders of communities ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 persons that dot the mountainous landscape of western Pakistan.

Now, while we stopped in Pakistan and evaluated the progress of the war on terror in that country, the primary purpose for our trip was to visit Afghanistan, where Operation Enduring Freedom has been an extraordinary success since the months immediately following the devastating attack on our country on September 11, 2001. It was my happy privilege to lead what came to be known as CODEL Pence, but the happier part of that was to be joined by colleagues and senior staff personnel of the House Committee on International Relations, who made this trip that much more meaningful and informative for the four policymakers that were alongside for the journey.

My colleagues, some of whom will join me here tonight to share their reflections on Afghanistan and the experience that they had, both in Kabul as well as at provisional reconstruction sites around the country, but my colleagues who joined me included the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), and my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA).

There were also noteworthy senior staff personnel from the House Committee on International Relations who joined us, as well as members of the media, all of whom, I might add, demonstrated an extraordinary degree of compassion toward the soldiers that we

met and an extraordinary degree of compassion toward the regular Afghani adults and children that we encountered.

And I might also add that while at no time was our delegation in any physical peril, I do want to commend all those who traveled with us for the willingness to go into a combat environment and to carry the encouragement of the people that we serve to these soldiers in what was the holiday season, when they found themselves so far away from home.

From that dinner in Peshawar with the tribal leaders, we embarked by a C-130 and traveled for our first day into Afghanistan. We arrived in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the belly of a C-130 cargo plane, and we made our way through Kabul. By way of my first recollection, it was an extraordinarily war-torn city.

Our victory in Operation Enduring Freedom was so overwhelming and so quick against the Taliban and the al Qaeda that they harbored that I do not know that I did not really expect to see a metropolitan capital relatively unmolested by war. But that is only because I was not thinking. I was not thinking that it was not the military engagement of the United States of America in Kabul that has wreaked havoc on that, the largest city in Afghanistan. Rather it was years and decades of warfare in that country.

More on that later. More on how that has affected the attitudes of the Afghans both toward the American military commitment and presence in the region and how it bears on our relationship going forward.

But this city had been torn asunder by the military barbarism of the Taliban and, of course, by a decades-long struggle with the former Soviet Union that used barbaric military force again and again and again to attempt to defeat and subjugate the Afghan people and the Afghan military, ultimately to their defeat and ultimately to their national demise.

During our trip, we had a number of great privileges. We met while we were in Kabul with President Karzai. We had the privilege, Mr. Speaker, of being the very first congressional delegation to meet with President Hamid Karzai after his inauguration as the first elected President of Afghanistan. It was an extraordinary privilege for us to be there on December 13, 2004, sitting in the presidential palace and sitting in the office with President Karzai.

By way of reporting to this Chamber a few personal reflections on Hamid Karzai, he is a man who I truly believe is the George Washington of this generation of the Afghan people. He is, as General Washington, whose portrait hangs in this very Chamber, he is in every sense the indispensable man of the transition from the brutalities of Soviet Communism to the brutalities of Taliban extremism to the free era of an Islamic democratic republic in Afghanistan.

I started to get a sense, as we sat in his office in the palace, about why this man has been so successful. He is, first and foremost, a man whose personal biography is deeply compelling. Hamid Karzai comes from the region of Afghanistan down along the border. We were headed to his hometown, which if memory serves, is Kandahar.

His father had been, in effect, a tribal leader in Kandahar during the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; and as history records, Hamid Karzai's father had been initially very supportive of the Taliban, but very soon saw their twist into totalitarianism and brutality, and Hamid Karzai's father spoke out against the Taliban. And as often happens in brutal dictatorships, Hamid Karzai's father was assassinated, at which point he was spirited across the border into Pakistan. And during much of the reign of the Taliban, he essentially hid out in parts of Pakistan, which of course is very familiar to Hamid Karzai because he had been educated in the country of Pakistan. And to this day he bears both the Pakistani's facile ability with the English language as well as a deep understanding of history and academic thought.

It is that Hamid Karzai who, first with his biography was from a family that had suffered under the Taliban, that then he is able to come back and be the first elected president.

□ 1800

But I think also, and maybe my colleague from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) can reflect on our meeting with Hamid Karzai as well, I found him to be an extraordinarily compelling personality as well. The one message, and I will yield to my colleague for reflections on that meeting and maybe invite my colleague, Mr. Speaker, to a bit of a give-and-take as we tell the story of our journey through Afghanistan. I found him to be an individual who was deeply humble, who had a profound understanding of history, particularly the history of democracy, and who said to us again and again, I will not steal the gentleman from Indiana's thunder because he really asked a profound question of Hamid Karzai that I hope he recites and refers to, but I had a sense again and again that President Karzai understood that we were probably hearing back home that his people may not want the United States to stay around in Afghanistan. He looked at us again and again, Mr. Speaker, and said, When you go home, tell the people that you serve that we will never in Afghanistan fail to be grateful for what you have done and that we love the American soldier, we are grateful for their sacrifices and we love the American people.

To hear that from the elected President of a country that within a matter of years ago was not only one of the great enemies of our country in the world but harbored the al Qaeda, it was

just an extraordinary miracle of history and a great testament to this President's leadership.

With that, Mr. Speaker, and I hope he will stick around for much of our conversation as we tell the story of journeying through this area, is the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) who is beginning his second term in Congress, a member of the Committee on Ways and Means. We are proud of his leadership in Indiana. I was especially grateful that his family was willing to spare him to travel through a pretty difficult part of the world to gain a greater understanding as a policy leader. I yield to the gentleman for any reflections on our trip, but most especially would press him for an anecdote about our meeting with President Karzai.

Mr. CHOCOLA. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I want to thank my colleague from Indiana for his leadership in putting this trip together. It was an extraordinary trip full of extraordinary lessons. I only wish that all of the American people could have joined us on that trip and learned what we learned and saw what we saw, to see really the birth of democracy in a country, being the first delegation to meet with President Karzai after his inauguration in free elections, that went off very successfully. The terrorists were unable to stand in the way of people pursuing freedom. It is a wonderful thing to see.

I do recall our meeting with President Karzai and I think he is an extraordinary individual, the right man at the right time, and a great partner for the United States. I do not know if I asked him any profound questions; but one of the questions I asked him was, What would you say to the American people or what would you say if you could go to a town hall meeting in the Second District of Indiana? I invited him to come, as you may recall. He was a little busy and could not join us. But what he said, I do think, was interesting. You would expect him to say thank you. You would expect him to thank the American people for our support for democracy in Afghanistan and giving really the people of Afghanistan the opportunity to rebuild their country and their lives. But, instead, he said congratulations to the American people. He said, I could say thank you, but I would rather say congratulations, because what we have achieved together is an extraordinary thing.

It is extraordinary to think that just a couple of years ago that Afghanistan was under Taliban rule, was harboring the terrorists that attacked us on September 11, and today we could sit in his office and after having driven through the streets of Kabul and seen economic freedom flourishing, entrepreneurship in the streets, in partnership with Afghans and Americans working side by side, he said, it is an extraordinary thing that we have accomplished and an extraordinary thing that we will continue to accomplish together. So

congratulations to the American people in having such a wonderful partnership with the Afghans.

I also remember what he said: I would also point out that the strength of Afghanistan is not our buildings, it is not our economy, it is not the Afghan national army, it is the people of Afghanistan. That is the greatest strength that will continue to build hope and opportunity in this country.

I think he sounded a little bit like our Founding Fathers and, in fact, he sounded a little bit like Ronald Reagan whom I consider one of the best Presidents in our Nation's history when he said, I think his exact words were, "The government that governs the least governs the best." I think we have heard that before somewhere.

But he understands that it is the government that creates an environment for success, that the Afghan government is not going to create success for the Afghan people, but they are fully capable of doing that on their own; and if the Afghan government can help create an environment where people can achieve their own success, really enjoy the fruits of their own success and encourage them to share that with others and grow their economy and help their neighbor, that Afghanistan is well on its way to a free and democratic and successful country.

I would love to stay here with my colleague and discuss other great opportunities and lessons we had. Again, thank you for your leadership and thank you for your creativity in helping to share that story with some people here in the United States by having some media with us that did tell the story. I just wish we could have the whole country hear the story loud and clear, because it is a true success story.

Mr. PENCE. I am grateful for the gentleman's remarks, Mr. Speaker.

This is an area, and I hope anyone that might be looking in to this august Chamber tonight might hear what my colleague from Indiana just said about the gratitude that came out of President Hamid Karzai. I had literally forgotten until you recited the story that that is precisely how he answered the gentleman's question, was to say our success is the success of the American people.

It has been an incredible success. Afghanistan, as the station chief where we overnighted at the American embassy in Kabul told us, and I will never forget it as we met for a briefing there on the embassy compound. He said, Afghanistan is a place where American power and American generosity are working. Let me say it again for the benefit of any here: Afghanistan is a place where American power and American generosity are working.

We have our challenges in Iraq and with this strong Commander in Chief that we have, we will see our way through this and we will see those good people with their ink-stained fingers through to the freedom they so richly deserve. But Afghanistan is a place we

do not read about as much in the news. I think that animated my colleague from Indiana and my desire to go there and tell the story of the success that we had seen.

One of the things that we saw there was to travel in Kabul to the northern outskirts of the city to what has come to be known as Camp Phoenix, a large military installation and principally where, as near as this non-veteran could appreciate, where a great deal of the supplies are managed on a regular basis for Operation Enduring Freedom. And also, I might add, it is also a place where, if we can brag for just a moment and go to a different poster, 15 percent of the Army National Guard in Afghanistan are stationed and every single one of them is a Hoosier. For anyone looking in who does not know the vernacular, that means from Indiana.

This, of course, is a photograph that my colleague actually should be in this picture because the gentleman from Indiana actually brought this Indiana flag, but all of these soldiers, this photograph taken at the provisional reconstruction team site in Jalalabad are of some 1,500 members of the Indiana Army National Guard, away from their families, away from their husbands and their spouses and their wives and their children and their grandchildren, and doing the kind of work day in and day out that is the building of schools, the establishing of fresh water, the establishing of basic services through these provisional reconstruction teams.

We took a memorable helicopter ride on, I think it was a CH-53, a Hercules helicopter, very much like Luke Skywalker through the mountains of Jalalabad, hugging the mountainsides, and landed softly at this provisional reconstruction site. And these folks who, when they are not in uniform, are insurance salesmen and small business owners and pastors and business people and blue-collar workers, but here they are American soldiers and they are impacting the lives every day of regular, ordinary Afghans. They are a source of enormous pride to this Hoosier for the sacrifices that they are making.

As we think about the role, particularly of General Moorhead who commands the Hoosiers at Camp Phoenix, who are literally fanned out all across Afghanistan, I am reminded as I prepare to yield to my colleague for any memories of that part of our trip and the Hoosiers that we met, the night before we left, many of us, my colleague included, and our spouses were able to be with the President and the First Lady at the White House for a holiday celebration. In the few minutes I had with the President, I told him I was leaving for Afghanistan the next day and he thanked me for that, as the Commander in Chief would, and asked me to thank my delegation for going. And then I said to the President, you know, 15 percent of your Army National Guard over there are Hoosiers. And without missing a beat, the President of the United States said, "That's

why it's going so well, Mike." I told that to every single one of the Hoosiers that we met. I thought the President was just being nice, but when we went over there and saw the professionalism and the commitment and the compassion with which these Hoosiers are bringing, in many ways, civilization, stability and democracy to the people of Afghanistan, I became convinced that the President's generous comment was actually pretty close to right. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. CHOCOLA. I thank the gentleman for yielding. That is a great picture. If you will recall, just behind the group, I guess on their right, behind them is a school. We toured the school. The students there and the headmaster were so thankful to the soldiers that had helped rebuild the school and helped provide school supplies that the children previously really did not have. On the other side, you can see a little bit of it, there is an orchard.

I think the one thing that we have to recognize is that our soldiers are really soldiers of mercy, that we can kill bad guys all day long and we need to kill the enemy, but for the most part what our soldiers are doing there is helping to build a future for the children and the families of Afghanistan. Right there in Jalalabad, helping to build a school, helping to cultivate an orchard and teaching the lessons of how to grow an economy. I think one of the most important lessons that I learned on our trip was that the two most effective tools in weapons in the war on terror is education and economic growth.

One of the most stunning statistics that I learned during our trip was that 40 percent of the Afghan population is under 14 years of age, many of them in the picture you have there. If we do not help the Afghan children, the leaders of tomorrow, have a good education and have an opportunity for a good job in a growing economy, then they will choose a path that is destructive. They will choose a path of terrorism and crime. If they have an education and they have an opportunity for economic growth and a good job, they will be our partners in peace and democracy.

Mr. PENCE. If I may interrupt the gentleman on that point, before the gentleman arrived, I was reflecting on our experience in Pakistan and in Islamabad; and I might, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, encourage the gentleman to speak about precisely that point, which is a profound point which he made both on national television appearances related to this trip, that economic development and education, I think his phrase was, are the principal means to combat terrorism long term.

I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman might reflect on what we saw in the advances at what are known as madrassas or traditionally religious education facilities. We were one of the few American delegations to be per-

mitted to visit a traditional Islamic madrassa in Islamabad, Pakistan. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the gentleman to reflect on that and how that bears on his keen insight about the need to encourage greater, more expansive education in this difficult part of the world.

Mr. CHOCOLA. I thank the gentleman. Certainly a very important part of our trip was our stop in Pakistan. Again, I appreciate the gentleman's leadership in helping to arrange a visit to a madrassa.

When I heard we were going to a madrassa, I was a little concerned, a little skeptical, that here we were going to visit a facility that basically educated religious fanatics, that hated America, hated western values and basically everything we stood for. I was pleased to find out that it was a moderate facility. The thing I was probably most encouraged to learn from the Pakistan government about education in madrassas is that the Pakistan government's strategy is to build secular schools right next to the extreme madrassas in their country.

□ 1815

Because when parents are given the opportunity to send their child to a school that provides education, boarding, and food when the average income is a few hundred dollars a year, certainly they will do that.

But when the school only provides a religious education that provides no marketable skills in the economy, their child does not necessarily have a bright future, and their options are limited when they graduate, and they are susceptible to some of the radical teachings.

But if their child is given the opportunity to go to a school next door that provides a secular education, that teaches them reading, math, and life skills to be able to be constructive, contributing members to a country and an economy, the parents are going to make the same choice every single time. They are going to make sure their child has a bright future, has every opportunity possible to them that they can gain through that education.

So the Pakistan government is doing some very good things in support of combating terrorism, by going right to the root by addressing the hope and the opportunity of the youth of that part of the world so that they choose a positive path in life rather than terrorism and crime and a very destructive path in life.

I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman for that memory and, more importantly, the observation about the critical importance of education.

This photograph is just so meaningful to me, and I think I could live to be a lot older and have just a little bit more gray hair and not cherish any

photograph more. And I hope anyone peeking in would examine this or even go to my Web site and take a careful look at it.

As the gentleman will remember, we were walking down this road outside of the provisional reconstruction team's compound in Jalalabad. We were surrounded by soldiers carrying very large weapons and wearing body armor; and we were walking along what we can see is a small village, which, like most villages in that area, was walled with a rustic door. But what struck me and what strikes me about this photograph, it speaks to the gentleman's point about education and it speaks to the gentleman's point about whether it be in Afghanistan or Pakistan or other parts of the world that if we can win the hearts of the children for freedom and to understand the heart and the intent of the good people of the United States of America, we will have gone a long way toward defeating terrorism in the 21st century.

What I love about this photograph is that, and the gentleman will recall, as we came down this street again in an intimidating environment, we were surrounded by big men carrying big guns and wearing body armor, but these children came streaming out of this door running up to the soldiers as long-lost friends. Every one of the soldiers, after checking the perimeter carefully, took a knee. Many of them began to speak in the native tongue with the children. The gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA), the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), all of us kind of fanned out and started learning names and chatting with children and posing for pictures; and the most striking thing to me about this photograph, and these are all children, and I am sure we were told but I cannot imagine what their families live on per year but it has to be pennies a day in our currency, and yet every child in this photograph is smiling. Every child in this photograph looks healthy and well fed.

And I know the only reason that is true is because of the United States of America and because of the American soldier; that Jalalabad was an area that was destitute, impoverished, lacking in fundamental basic services, lacking in schools because, as we met with regular Afghans, they told us, We have never had little girls be able to come to school. The Taliban would never allow it, and we never had buildings to come to school in until the United States of America.

So what this picture represents to me with almost an Old Testament-looking wall and door behind it, which if one goes through Afghanistan, it is pretty Old Testament. I mean, it literally looks like a scene out of an Easter pageant. The whole country does, with mud walls and mud streets and ox-drawn carts, and yet to see these children and to see the looks on their faces that is evident in this photograph just

moved me and blessed my heart at a level that said what these soldiers have done, what their families who have sacrificed their time and in some cases they have said good-bye forever to their sons who have fallen in Operation Enduring Freedom, is in some way recompensed by these smiles and by the affection.

I do not know if the gentleman remembers that or the times that we went into classrooms in Jalalabad. The reaction that we got from children was just extraordinary to me to see the way these children were responding to American soldiers and to American personnel and to know they knew we were from America and that America was doing all of these things in Jalalabad and in Kabul and all over Afghanistan for their people. It just was deeply moving to me.

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

Mr. PENCE. I yield to the gentleman from Indiana.

Mr. CHOCOLA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

I share his recollection and impact from those moments. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, and that one is worth several million, I think.

I have always argued that the United States has been the greatest force for good in the history of the world. And we talk about the Greatest Generation, and we generally refer to those who served in World War II as that generation; and I think that is a very fitting description. But I think we are very fortunate that the reality is that every generation of Americans has been truly great, and most of those generations have been defined by those who volunteered to serve in this Nation's uniform.

And as the President said before, we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers. And we were with some strangers who have just witnessed the first democratic election in their nation's history, and it is something that they will remember the rest of their lives, and they will grow up to be our friends and our allies and our partners in a better and safer world.

We saw in this Chamber, during the President's State of the Union speech, one of the most moving moments I have ever witnessed when the mother of a fallen Marine embraced a young woman who had recently voted and been the advocate for human rights. In fact, that advocacy cost her father his life when he was assassinated by Saddam Hussein. So this is just a small representation that every American, I think, should be very proud of. The fact that children come streaming out behind a wall of a village with American soldiers in full uniform and full gear with smiles on their faces, and they run towards them, not away from them, and that we have the opportunity to sit there and talk to them and get to know them a little bit, and we only get to do that because of the

greatness of this Nation and the greatness of those serving in uniform.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, that is especially well said, and it is fitting because in some of the time that we have remaining, I wanted to reflect on the American soldier and the opportunity that we had both at Camp Phoenix in Kabul, in Jalalabad, and then Bagram Air Force Base and probably for me as well being able to visit injured soldiers at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center on the way back.

But one of the things that was a great privilege for me was, Mr. Speaker, along with the gentleman from Indiana, thinking of the 1,500 Hoosier National Guard who were in Afghanistan and thinking, Mr. Speaker, of the holiday season that was upon us, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) and I developed what we came to call Operation Holiday Greeting. And it resulted in our inviting our constituents, three quarters of a million people in north central Indiana and three quarters of a million people in eastern Indiana, to send in holiday greeting cards to soldiers. We announced the initiative on November 11; and within 10 days we received, Mr. Speaker, more than 25,000 lovingly handmade holiday greeting cards that we were able to take with us to Operation Enduring Freedom.

This photograph captures just one of literally dozens and dozens of scenes where the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA), the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS) and I were handing out greeting cards to the delight of soldiers who read them. One soldier in the foreground of this photograph has completely forgotten about us and is into what we can clearly see from the American flag was a hand-crafted card very likely by some grade schooler in South Bend or a grade schooler in Muncie, Indiana.

And this was such an extraordinary blessing to be able to be a part of it because it does strike me, and then I will yield to the gentleman for his memories of this particular part of our trip, that having some politician walk up to someone on a far-flung theater of operation and deployment and say, Hey, the folks back home are praying for you, appreciate what you are doing, and have got you in their hearts, it is a whole other thing for that politician, who by and large we do not trust anyway, to hand to the soldier a fist full of lovingly crafted holiday greeting cards that say we are praying for them, we are thinking of them, we would love a note from them to say how things are going.

I saw some of the biggest, toughest most grizzled soldiers at Bagram Air Force Base in that cafeteria where we wandered, when we walked up to them and they kind of had that lockjawed look and they do not know who we are and they do not know if they like us; and when we tell them we are Congressmen from Indiana, they think, well, that is okay, thanks for coming over and we appreciate it.

But then when I would hand them the cards, these big guys would melt. Just one after another I saw more than one guy start to wipe tears from his eyes. And as the song goes, "It Ain't Funny When a Soldier Cries," but I saw more than a few well up with tears, not because of anything I did or I would say anything that the gentleman from South Bend did, but these cards and the fact that in 10 short days Hoosiers of all ages, senior citizens, grade school kids, people at churches and synagogues, took time to sit down and express their prayers and their good wishes and their greetings to these soldiers.

And the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) and I, I must say, Mr. Speaker, we lugged a lot of boxes, and I want to commend the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) for his tireless effort in passing these cards out.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Indiana for any memories of Operation Holiday Greeting.

Mr. CHOCOLA. Mr. Speaker, the memories are obviously wonderful and rewarding. And as the gentleman recalls, we got to Camp Phoenix about midday and went to the mess hall where there were several soldiers in there enjoying lunch. It was a delicious lunch, as I recall. And having the opportunity during the holiday season to walk in there and hand a little piece of home to a Hoosier soldier unexpectedly is something that certainly I think we got more out of it than anyone else. And I have to thank our constituents for responding in such a generous way. It is an amazing response in a very short period of time for people to go to the effort to thank our men and women in uniform for their service, for being away from home at a very difficult time of year to be away from home.

And the gentleman is right. We would hand them a pile of cards, and they would kind of forget we were there. They would start looking through those cards and reading the messages. There were a lot of unique approaches in the messages, and so it was a great thrill that certainly I will always remember. And I remember one soldier in particular whose name was Oliver Jackson, and I walked up to him, and he said, Hey, I know you. He said, I am from South Bend, Indiana.

And I said, I know where that is and thank you for your service. So we sat down and talked for a while, and he said he was going to be home on leave in a couple weeks. And I said, When you come home, call me. And I gave him my contact information. And he did. He came home a few weeks later, and he did not stop by just to say hi. He stopped by. As the gentleman will recall, we gave a couple of flags to the soldiers at Camp Phoenix. We gave them an American flag and an Indiana flag. Then a constituent of mine has designed a battle flag that really commemorates and honors all the major battles that our Armed Forces have been in since the founding of our country.

□ 1830

I left two of those flags there. In the spirit of our soldiers giving more than we could ever give them, and I will have to give you a copy of this, all of the Hoosier members of that unit signed that flag and sent it back. Oliver Jackson brought that flag back. It will be hanging in my office very proudly as one of the most memorable things that I will ever receive; which is we tried to do a nice thing for them, our constituents did, and I think they one-upped us, not only by serving our Nation so valiantly and bravely and effectively, but thinking about us at a time when they are away from home and saying "thank you" in an extraordinary way.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I am jealous to learn about the signed battle flag, but it is to the gentleman's credit, because it was the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) who remembered to bring those flags from home, and I want to commend him again for his thoughtfulness in remembering to bring that for our soldiers, but also to have them return, to have them show their appreciation.

I guess I just appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the gentleman's reflection on the character of the soldiers that we saw in Operation Enduring Freedom. There is a toughness there. I think, candidly, we were there at a very tough time of the year.

I have had the privilege in my 45 years of never not being home for a little bit of Christmas. I have always been able to be home for part of Christmas. It is a grievous thing to not be home, and yet beyond what on the surface you could tell was not an easy time for many of them, was a seriousness and a professionalism and an understanding of the importance of what we are doing in Afghanistan, which is still a dangerous place.

I guess that is where I would like to close our reflections tonight as we have talked about President Karzai and our meetings in Kabul, as we have talked about the children that we saw, the provisional reconstruction team, but is to say it is my hope that anyone looking in, Mr. Speaker, would understand that Afghanistan is not succeeding because there are no bad guys there. Afghanistan is not succeeding because it is an easier place to build a democracy than Iraq. Afghanistan is succeeding because American generosity and American power, in partnership with the good people of Afghanistan, is causing that success, day in and day out.

As we approach, I believe, the parliamentary elections this coming April, where the legislative body of that government will be elected, that is all being made possible because the people of Afghanistan, who, as I suggested earlier in this conversation, it strikes me that from our conversations with regular Afghans as well as President Karzai, is the one thing you hear

from folks, is this: They are bone weary of war in Afghanistan, the war that was pressed down on them by the Soviet communists, the war that was pressed down on them through tribal in-fighting, the war that was pressed down on them by the Taliban and al Qaeda under its patronage. And when the American military came in and the generosity of the American people was unleashed, the people of Afghanistan have opened their arms and said, "Yes, come, stay, help us build stability, help us create a country that is no longer dependent on the narcotics trade. Help us transition to an agricultural economy."

But it is all working. I guess my real burden in trying to take up an hour of the people's time tonight, Mr. Speaker, and I will yield to the gentleman for any closing thoughts, is just to make sure that as we go into a debate over additional funding for Afghanistan, as we go into a debate for additional counternarcotics funding, and there will be those of us that would argue that those things should happen in the regular budget as opposed to the supplemental, but beyond all of those arguments, it is my hope that the American people would understand that we are succeeding in Afghanistan because of American generosity and American power and the Afghan people are making it happen.

It is not happening automatically. It is not the absence of conflict or the absence of danger that is resulting in this success. It is in spite of those things that we are succeeding. And even though no news rarely makes it in the newspaper, the truth is if things are not blowing up on a daily basis, things slip out of the news, and Afghanistan has slipped out of the news and the American people tend to, and I think I am as guilty as the next person; before we went, I tended to think it is not that tough over there. It is tough. It is hard. It is commitment and focus every single day.

But it is working, and it is my hope that we really celebrate that. As we have a debate over additional funding for Afghanistan, at every level, that we will understand that the good people of Afghanistan have embraced the American people with gratitude, they have embraced the American soldier, as the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) just recited, as the Iraqi woman embraced the mother of the fallen soldier just yards away from where we are standing now, and to understand that we must keep that commitment to bring these good people of Afghanistan the freedom they so richly deserve.

I yield for closing remarks to the gentleman.

Mr. CHOCOLA. Mr. Speaker, just once again I want to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE), for leading the trip and leading tonight's discussion.

I think it is important for the American people to understand how much success they have helped provide in Af-

ghanistan. It never ceases to amaze me, the deafening silence that we fail to see in the national media about the successes that are being achieved in Afghanistan on a daily basis. And although the silence is deafening, the success is undeniable.

I will never forget the opportunity to meet with General Petraeus when I was in Iraq, in Mosul, in the summer of 2003. General Petraeus pointed out that we have to make sure we understand that the money that we invest in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, it is important that we buy guns and bullets, but you cannot distinguish between military aid and humanitarian aid. It gets back to the most effective weapons on the war on terror, I think, are education and economic growth.

If we can maintain our resolve, if we can prioritize those investments, I think we will look back at this period of history and say it was extraordinary in the growth of democracy around the world.

I think it is unfortunate that the elections in Afghanistan were not celebrated here in the United States like I think they should have been. It was the defeat of the Taliban. The Taliban had said that they were going to disrupt the registration process. Over 10 million Afghans registered to vote. They said they would disrupt the elections. I think it was close to an 80 percent turnout, much higher than we have here in the United States. So the Taliban has been rendered relatively ineffective because of the investment we have made with the Afghan people, both in military action and force, as well as humanitarian aid.

I was surprised that we met members from the United States Department of Agriculture, we met USAID members, we met State Department members, that are all over there in a relatively dangerous environment, that are risking their life to do the right thing because they understand that this is the right thing for a more safe and secure world, because the more jobs and the more education there is in Afghanistan, the safer we are here in the United States.

So I think that the American people should be very proud of their investment, they should be very proud of their effort, they should certainly be very proud of the men and women in uniform that have done the heavy lifting. If we can maintain that focus and that resolve and commitment, I know this will be a safer world.

Afghanistan and the 14-year-olds that are 40 percent of the country and younger will have hope and opportunity rather than oppression and a dead-end street for their future days. They will continue to be our partners, they will continue to run out of the front doors of their home and embrace us, and not run away from us and try to do to us harm.

I hope we have been able to share just a little bit tonight with the American people about the hope and opportunity that is really taking place every

single day. And I would encourage the American people, when they turn on the 6 o'clock news or any 24-hour news channel and they do not hear about what is going on in Afghanistan, that means it is one more day of success.

So I yield back, and again thank the gentleman for all of his efforts.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I do want to express my profound gratitude to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) for being willing to leave family and his constituents behind and travel, as we described tonight, through Islamabad, Pakistan; through Parachinar, where we met with tribal leaders; into Kabul, where we went to Camp Phoenix; through the mountains of Jalalabad to Bagram Air Base, and then out of the country.

It was a great, great privilege to travel with the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA), the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), and the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), all of whom I think exemplified the very best of a servant's attitude about public service.

I told many soldiers as we traveled that there was not hardly a person that I served in all of eastern Indiana who would not rather be standing right there in front of them thanking them for their service, assuring them of their prayers, and expressing the gratitude that the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) just described, that the American people feel for the success that the American soldier has wrought and is continuing to provide to the good people of Afghanistan.

I close by just reminding, Mr. Speaker, anyone that might be looking in, what the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) heard from President Karzai. As I have said again and again tonight, Afghanistan is a place where American power and American generosity of work are working. But when the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. CHOCOLA) asked President Karzai at the presidential palace, "What would you have us tell our constituents if you were there," and he said, "Tell the American people our success is their success, and that the President of Afghanistan said congratulations, America, on being a part of freedom and stability and opportunity coming to the good people of this historic land."

So, Mr. Speaker, with a grateful heart for the opportunity to have led CODEL Pence through Pakistan and Afghanistan, I yield back the balance of my time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. WYNN (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of personal business.

Mr. REICHERT (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today and the balance of the week on account of attending a funeral.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. WOOLSEY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Ms. LEE, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. BROWN of Ohio, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. EMANUEL, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. CARDOZA, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. COOPER, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. CASE, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. COSTA, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.
 Ms. BEAN, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. SANDERS, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. BLUMENAUER, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. KAPTUR, for 5 minutes, today.
 (The following Members (at the request of Mr. POE) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. COX, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. POE, for 5 minutes, February 17.
 Mr. FLAKE, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mrs. JOHNSON of Connecticut, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. LEWIS of California, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. MANZULLO, for 5 minutes, today.
 Mr. GOODLATTE, for 5 minutes, February 17.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 6 o'clock and 43 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, February 17, 2005, at 10 a.m.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

U.S. CONGRESS,
 OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE,

Washington, DC, February 15, 2005.

Hon. J. DENNIS HASTERT,
 Speaker, House of Representatives, The Capitol,
 Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Section 304(b)(1) of the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (CAA), 2 U.S.C. 1384(b)(1), requires that, with regard to the initial proposal of substantive regulations under the CAA, the Board "shall publish a general notice of proposed rulemaking" and "shall transmit such notice to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate for publication in the Congressional Record on the first day on which both Houses are in session following such transmittal."

The Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance is transmitting herewith the enclosed Notice of Proposed Rulemaking which

accompanies this transmittal letter. The Board requests that the accompanying Notice be published in both the House and Senate versions of the Congressional Record on the first day on which both Houses are in session following receipt of this transmittal.

Any inquiries regarding the accompanying Notice should be addressed to William W. Thompson II, Executive Director of the Office of Compliance, 110 2nd Street, SE., Room LA-200, Washington, DC 20540; 202-724-9250, TDD 202-426-1912.

Sincerely,

SUSAN S. ROBFOGEL,
 Chair of the Board of Directors.

FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE

Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Request for Comments From Interested Parties

NEW PROPOSED REGULATIONS IMPLEMENTING CERTAIN SUBSTANTIVE EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS FOR VETERANS, AS REQUIRED BY 2 U.S.C. 1316a, THE CONGRESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 1995, AS AMENDED (CAA).

Background

The purpose of this Notice is to issue proposed substantive regulations which will implement the 1998 amendment to the CAA which applies certain veterans' employment rights and protections to employing offices and employees covered by the CAA.

What is the authority under the CAA for these proposed substantive regulations? In 1998, the CAA was amended through addition of 2 U.S.C. 1316a, a provision of the Veterans' Employment Opportunities Act of 1998 (VEOA), which states in relevant part: "The rights and protections established under section 2108, sections 3309 through 3312, and subchapter I of chapter 35 of Title 5, shall apply to covered employees." As will be described in greater detail below, these sections of Title 5 accord certain hiring and retention rights to veterans of the uniformed services. Section 1316a(4)(B) states that "The regulations issued . . . shall be the same as the most relevant substantive regulations (applicable with respect to the Executive Branch) promulgated to implement the statutory provisions . . . except insofar as the Board may determine for good cause shown and stated together with the regulation, that a modification of such regulations would be more effective for the implementation of the rights and protections under this section."

Will these regulations, if approved, apply to all employees otherwise covered by the CAA? No. Subsection (5) of 2 U.S.C. 1316a, states that, for the purpose of application of these veterans' employment rights, the term "covered employee" shall not apply to any employee of an employing office: (A) whose appointment is made by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate; (B) whose appointment is made by a Member of Congress or by a committee or subcommittee of either House of Congress; or (C) who is appointed to a position, the duties of which are equivalent to those of a Senior Executive Service position. . . . These regulations would apply to all other covered employees.

Do other veterans' employment rights apply via the CAA to Legislative Branch employing offices and covered employees? Yes. Another statutory scheme regarding veterans' and armed forces members' employment rights is incorporated in part through section 206 of the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (CAA). Section 206 of the CAA, 2 U.S.C. 1316, applies certain provisions of Title 38 of the U.S. Code regarding "Employment and Re-employment Rights of Members of the Uniformed Services." Section 206 of the CAA also requires the Board of Directors to issue substantive regulations patterned upon the regulations promulgated by the Secretary of Labor to implement the Title 38 rights of