

social, environmental, and cultural inequities, have on health and health care. These inequities provide a medium in which poverty not only continues to exist but thrives.

Poverty is perhaps the most closely aligned determinate of ill health. It then should follow that the elimination of poverty would go a long way to eliminating the long-standing health care inequities that result in health care disparities for African Americans and other people of color that are the shame of this wealthy Nation.

It is my hope that this country, my country, will never forget Katrina and recognize that what was laid bare is only a fraction of what exists, particularly in the South but throughout this country.

As leaders, I hope my colleagues will join us to ensure that the infrastructure is put in place so that nowhere across the United States will such a preventable travesty ever happen again.

Part of that would be to pass our legislation to create health empowerment zones in communities such as those in which poverty and the concurrent ill health trapped their victims. This legislation would assist and empower them to address health care challenges and improve the public health infrastructure as well as mitigate the social, environmental, and economic determinants of health.

It is part of a larger legislative initiative for which we also ask your support, the Heal America Act of 2005, a comprehensive bill, a sort of Marshall Plan for health that would reverse the dynamics that lead to the disproportionate death, disease, and disability which people of color suffer.

Lastly, not allowing this to ever happen again includes not cutting Medicaid. Not only is it needed in this crisis, which has been described as in biblical proportions, but it is needed in the everyday crises that result in over 100,000 preventable premature deaths in people of color every year. My colleagues, this, too, is the annual unacknowledged catastrophe that we can and must prevent.

Mr. Speaker, let us honor the memory of the victims of Katrina and the suffering of the survivors by eradicating poverty, by creating a fair, equitable and just health care system and by building a better America where there is the guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

DOWNING STREET MEMOS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HINCHEY. Mr. Speaker, today, the occupation of Iraq continues and we learn that another bomb blast, in fact a series of bomb blasts in Iraq have resulted in the loss of more than 100 lives. So far, the loss of American servicemen and women's lives is almost 2,000. We have lost almost 2,000 American servicemen and women in Iraq.

The American people are asking now with greater frequency a very significant question: Why did we invade Iraq and why are we continuing to occupy that country?

Today, the House Committee on International Relations defeated a Resolution of Inquiry, which I introduced, and that defeat came essentially along party lines. Every Democratic member of the House Committee on International Relations voted for the resolution; one Republican voted for it; one Republican did not oppose it. But the resolution lost by one vote because all of the other Republicans on the committee opposed it.

What this resolution asked was simply this. It asked the administration, the White House, and the Defense Department to provide to the Congress information with regard to that information which is contained in the so-called Downing Street memos.

The Downing Street memos are very interesting. They were first revealed by the Sunday Times of London on May 1, 2005. What these Downing Street memos are, are high-level communications between some of the most significant members of the British Government, including Prime Minister Tony Blair; Richard Dearlove, who was the head of British intelligence; Jack Straw, the foreign secretary; and others.

These Downing Street memos were communications between these high-ranking officials of the British Government. They reveal the essence of conversations which took place between members of the British Government and members of the Bush administration here in Washington, including Condoleezza Rice, Vice President CHENEY, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and others.

What the Downing Street memos reveal is that, from the very beginning, the Bush administration was obsessed with Saddam Hussein and that they used the attack of September 11 not to go after the perpetrators of that attack, Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda network, but to twist and distort the facts in order to justify an attack against Iraq, given the obsession that they had with Saddam Hussein.

So the resolution that I introduced today, and which was defeated by the House Committee on International Relations, called upon the executive branch of government, the White House and the Defense Department, to provide to the Congress information with regard to those conversations from the

American perspective. All we have now is the British perspective. And the British perspective is quite damning indeed, damning of the intentions of the Bush administration and the way in which this ensuing occupation has been carried out.

The Downing Street memos make it clear that high-ranking members of the Bush administration were determined to twist and distort the intelligence and the facts to fit the policy which they had already decided to put into action; and that policy, of course, was to attack Iraq and to remove Saddam Hussein as the head of that government.

Many people across our country, including an increasing number of the House of Representatives, and I believe the Senate as well, are asking the question: How could that attack be justified when we now know that the ostensible justification, the justification which was set forth by the administration, was completely false?

First, that justification was that Iraq had something to do with the attack of September 11. Then the administration had to back off from that assertion when it became clear to almost everyone that there was no validity in that assertion whatsoever. Rapidly, the administration moved to an assertion that it was important for us to attack Iraq because Iraq possessed so-called weapons of mass destruction, biological and chemical weapons. And the suggestion was even made over and over and over again, by the highest ranking officials of the Bush administration, that the Iraqi government was acquiring nuclear weapons, that they had imported enriched uranium from Niger into Iraq in order to manufacture atomic bombs, and that we were in danger of having those nuclear weapons used against us. So, therefore, they sought in that way to justify an attack against Iraq.

It is now clear to almost everyone, even the most myopic of persons, that Iraq possessed no weapons of mass destruction program and was nowhere near the development of any nuclear weapons.

And as is made clear by the information that is possessed in these Downing Street memos, other countries were much more dangerous, including Libya, Iran, and North Korea, because they were much closer to developing nuclear weapons than was Iraq, which had essentially abandoned all of its large-scale weapons programs in 1991. That information had been made clear as a result of investigations which were carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency and by weapons inspections teams, two of them in fact from the United States. They found no evidence of any weapons of mass destruction.

So information from the administration about these Downing Street memos is essential. Why the Committee on International Relations defeated that resolution today remains to be seen, but we will be back. We will be

back until we get the truth about what started this war in Iraq, why it was instigated in the first place, and why it is continuing to be carried out in such a failing manner.

POVERTY IN AMERICA

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

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, there is not a lot that I can add to what my colleagues have said about the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, about the hundreds of lives that have been lost and the billions of dollars in property damage that has been experienced. But perhaps in the midst of this horror, there might be a silver lining. And if there is a silver lining, it might be that we begin to take a hard look at some of the realities of America, realities that are very rarely talked about here on the floor of the House or in the media.

Clearly, one of the realities that we did observe in New Orleans is that there were thousands and thousands of people there who could not flee the flood because they did not have money, they did not have a car, and they had no place to go. And some of them died because they are poor.

But poverty exists well beyond New Orleans. The fact of the matter is that millions of Americans today live in abject, humiliating poverty. And, tragically, in the last 5 years alone, since President Bush has been in office, the number of poor people in America has grown by 5 million.

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So not only are we not addressing the problem of poverty; it is becoming significantly worse. And at a time when a lot of my colleagues talk repeatedly about family values, some 17 percent of the children in America live in poverty, which is by far the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world. Some of the other industrialized countries have poverty rates of 3, 4 percent. We are over 17 percent.

So if there is a silver lining in Hurricane Katrina, it may be, it may be, it might be that we refocus on the needs of ordinary Americans, and we make fundamental changes in the priorities that have been established in this country in the last 5 years.

Mr. Speaker, it is not just that poverty in America is increasing; it is that the middle class in this country is shrinking. We all know about the explosion in technology. We all know that worker productivity in America is rapidly rising; but in the midst of that, what we are seeing is that real wages, inflation accounted for wages, for millions and millions of workers is going down. People are working two jobs, they are working three jobs, and yet they are further behind economically than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, in America when we talk about priorities, when we talk

about our kids, we have got to ask ourselves about our educational system and why it is that throughout this country, in Vermont and virtually every other State in America, our child care situation in America is an absolute disaster. Every psychologist will tell you that the most important years of a person's life are the first few years, and yet in America today we have kids being warehoused in America in facilities where there are inexperienced, underpaid teachers and people who are minding the children. We have millions of other Americans today who would like to go to college, but cannot afford the \$35,000 or \$40,000 a year that it costs.

To my mind we are wasting huge amounts of intellectual capital by not making college available for all Americans. It is a national disgrace that for the first time in recent years, fewer low-income kids are going to college than used to be the case.

Mr. Speaker, while the middle class is shrinking, poverty is increasing. While some 46 million Americans have no health insurance, while the average American today is paying the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, there is another reality taking place in America, and that is that the wealthiest people in our country have never had it so good.

What we are seeing today in America is the widest gap between the rich and the poor of any industrialized nation on Earth, and it is wider in America today than at any time since the 1930s.

Mr. Speaker, to my mind a great nation is measured not by the number of billionaires it has, not by the number of nuclear weapons that it has, but in fact how we treat the least amongst us, the elderly, the sick and the poor. By that definition, we are not doing very well at all.

Mr. Speaker, while average Americans were struggling last year just to keep their heads above water economically, maybe to make a few bucks more than inflation was taking away from them, the CEOs of the Forbes largest 500 corporations in America saw a 54 percent increase in their compensation; 54 percent for the CEOs of the largest corporations, while millions of Americans are seeing a decline in their standard of living.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, in the midst of a period when we are going to be spending tens of millions of dollars rebuilding the gulf coast, at a time when we are spending \$300 billion in Iraq, our Republican friends and the President of the United States want to repeal the estate tax and provide hundreds of billions of dollars more in tax breaks for the wealthiest 2 percent who are the only people who will benefit from the repeal of the estate tax and half of those benefits are going to the richest one-tenth of 1 percent.

Yes, we can cut Medicaid by \$50 billion. Yes, we can underfund the Veterans Administration so the veterans

go on waiting lists all over America. Yes, we can have children sleeping out on the street. There is no money to take care of those needs, but apparently we have hundreds of millions to give to the wealthiest 2 percent, which will drive up our deficit, drive up our national debt and leave all of that to our children.

I would hope that common sense will prevail and that the President and Republican leadership, at a time of a record-breaking national debt, record-breaking deficits, will not give huge tax breaks for people who do not need them. Instead, let us move forward to lowering our deficit. Instead, let us pay attention to the middle class and low-income Americans who need help.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, if there is any silver lining in the disaster and the horror of Hurricane Katrina, it might be that today we begin reevaluating our priorities.

TWO AMERICAS LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, first, let me just remind those who are listening tonight that there have always been two Americas here in the United States. I was quite taken aback right after the very recent catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina that reporters and many individuals kept commenting that this is not America, we do not know this place, this cannot be America. But my response consistently has been, this is the America that I know and this is the America that brought many of us here to Congress.

By race or class, there are two distinct and separate societies surviving on sheer will and determination here in our own country. It just does not make sense that the richest, most powerful Nation in the world has some of the poorest, unhealthiest, and most vulnerable people in the world. In many ways, Hurricane Katrina has brought to light the shame that the United States really, quite frankly, has tried to sweep under the rug for decades.

Now, the Congressional Black Caucus has represented this hidden America for nearly 40 years in this Congress. The Congressional Black Caucus has consistently worked to eradicate poverty throughout our country. Just look at the disparities agenda put forth by the Congressional Black Caucus under the leadership of our great chairman, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT). Whether it is unemployment rates, whether it is health statistics, whether it is statistics as it relates to decent and affordable housing, the gaps are glaring. The disparities are glaring.

The disparities of poverty severely and disproportionately affect African