

Indian bottomlands. Payment for these takings was typically haphazard and piecemeal. Time and again, the government failed to fairly compensate both tribal and individual land owners for the loss of their property.

One such landowner is Freddy LeBeau. Freddy was born and raised on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation. While serving 4 years in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific during World War II, he arranged to purchase 200 acres of land along the Missouri River.

In Freddy's own words he explains, "We live in a poor county, and if I can pay taxes on that land and help the county in that small manner, I would be glad to do that. I thought I was an asset there fighting for my country, and I would remain an asset when I came home in a small way and pay taxes on my land."

Following his service, Freddy returned home and for a time he was able to work his land, raise horses and cattle and start a family. The Pick-Sloan Act changed all that.

The Ohio dam and reservoir flooded over 100,000 acres of Cheyenne River Sioux lands, including Freddy's home. He and many other tribal members were forced to move their families to higher ground and begin again. Like many others, he did not receive a fair price for his loss. And at 83 years old, this World War II veteran says, "I am still looking for a place as good as the place that I lost."

Congress has already acknowledged this injustice and only a few years ago passed legislation to provide just compensation by creating the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Recovery Trust Fund. While this action was commendable, it left one important group behind, tribal members who lost privately owned land, elders now, who owned deeded land at the time it was taken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Current law actually prohibits the tribe from using existing funds to compensate these individuals.

The tribe has recognized this shortcoming and has worked to craft a solution that requires no new expenditures, no new expenditures, and guarantees that the affected tribal elders and their families can be justly compensated for lands taken over a generation ago.

The leadership of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, a united South Dakota congressional delegation, and the moving testimony of private landowners like Freddy LeBeau have all contributed to the introduction of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Equitable Compensation Act. This bill would correct a historic wrong and compensate tribal members who have been left behind and treated unjustly for many years.

At 83 years old, Freddy and 33 other tribal elders are still waiting for just compensation. I urge this swift consideration and passage of this bill.

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

tleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MARKEY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS

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

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I stand to oppose the misguided budget amendments that are being presented to us. These amendments will not help a post-Katrina plan, but would only add to the deficit. It would require spending cuts and new tax cuts that would mount up to \$70 billion, cuts that mostly benefit the wealthiest Americans at the expense of the poorest Americans.

If these spending cuts were approved, they would probably do what I would consider to be Draconian cutting. They would cut Medicaid, food stamps, child care support, the earned income tax credit, and supplemental security income.

I have a problem in my City of Los Angeles, and it is a homeless problem. There are over 80,000 homeless individuals that are on our streets, mostly in the evenings. They have problems with alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and mental illness. Over 33 percent of the homeless are mentally ill. And they are homeless. And why?

Because we have cut out the programs that address this population; and not only did we do that, but under the Reagan administration we closed mental health hospitals. Money was to follow the patients into the community, and it never did.

So if we are trying to be fiscally responsible, that means we are being irresponsible to the poorest of Americans. As Americans we cannot allow this to happen. If we are spreading democracy around the world, then we must live up to the principles and the tenets of its provisions. And its provisions say that every American has a right to be a recipient of the social services programs.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot accept the amendments to the budget that are being proposed. They will weaken our homeland, its people, and our security.

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

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

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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, once again it is an honor to address the House. I can tell you that this week has been quite eventful. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we come every day to the floor to share not only with the Members but the American people what is actually going on in this House, and what is not going on in this House and what should be going on in this House, and it is the House of Representatives.

And there has been a lot going on this week as it relates to the budget. As you know, many Members came to the floor to speak pro and con of this. I will not use the Washington language, but I will use it in a way that everyone can understand: our relooking at the budget and making more cuts from the budget that have already been made.

And when I have been coming to the floor recently, Mr. Speaker, I have been bringing the local publication, the Washington Post to the floor, just to serve as a third-party validator to the arguments that have been made here on the floor. I am proud that our leadership on this side of the aisle, the Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), has stood against the winds of power in saying that there are certain things that we will not do. We who are Democrats on this side, we will not turn our backs on the American people.

We will not turn our backs on the survivors of hurricanes Katrina or Rita. We will not stand idly by and watch this country continue legislatively to go down the tubes because certain people and certain individuals in power would like to see their priorities and their projects and their special interest breaks or opportunities prevail on the backs of the American people.

□ 1315

I am proud that we have the leadership on this side of the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and also the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN) to say no. I am proud of the fact that we have men and women in this Congress that are willing to stand up and say no to the majority, I must add, on the majority side who want to see their goals and objectives carried out on behalf of individuals that have suffered.

Now, I have to commend some of my colleagues here and some of my colleagues even on the other side of the aisle for standing up to the leadership

and saying no, we will not cut Medicaid. We will not cut free and reduced lunch. That did not just come about because folks thought, well, it is okay to stand up. That did not come about within the Republican Conference. But I will tell you how it came about, Mr. Speaker. It came about because Members came to this floor mainly on the Democratic side and said, if you are going to do it we are going to turn the lights up. We are going to raise our voices, and we are going to let our constituents and your constituents especially know that you are allowing this to happen.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a victory lap in any way. I do not want anyone to feel that the tide has changed because as far as I am concerned individuals that are fighting on behalf of billionaires in this Congress to make sure that their tax cut is not touched and that we take away from those that cannot fight for themselves, they are sleeping in shifts. They are sleeping in shifts because they know that that is what they have to do to prevail.

I will tell you on this side, even though we are in the minority, even though we are not in the majority, even though we cannot bring a bill to a committee and expect for it to pass with the majority vote because everything is on partisan lines here as of recently, unfortunately, but I can tell you that even though we cannot agenda some of the things that we would like to agenda that will help this country move to the next level and will put us in the right direction, we are willing to fight with what we have. And what we have is the opportunity to come to this floor to share not only with the Members, let the Members know exactly what they are doing so we are not around here hugging and smiling and cheesing and grinning and scratching where we do not itch, saying "that was a leadership call."

Well, I can tell you right now, Mr. Speaker, as we look at third party validators, I just want to make sure that folks do not believe that this is the Kendrick Meek Report and that I just sit in the office and come up with whatever we want to say. I want folks, I want the Members to go to the WashingtonPost.com editorial page just today. Like I said once before, I do not have to go back and pull publications or pull Time from 2 weeks ago or pull Newsweek from a month ago about something they wrote about and say that was a great story from the Sioux City, Iowa Journal about a month ago and I want to bring it to the attention of the Members. You pick up the paper any day and it is filled with what this Congress is doing to a certain group of Americans.

Now, like I said, there has been a lot of discussion about the budget. It is truly, truly beyond me of all the power and influence of Members of Congress, you have all kinds of leadership on the other side of the aisle that has the opportunity to shine in the aftermath of

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and some of the biggest natural disasters that have hit this country in recent days. Do they take the opportunity to lean on behalf of those that are suffering right now and displaced? No.

Do they take the opportunity to go in and deal with these Federal agencies who do not even want us to talk to them directly because they feel that they are protected by the White House and why do they have to listen to Congress? We take this opportunity to say that you had the opportunity to perform and you did not. And because you did not perform, we are here as the elected people representing the people of the United States, be it from the affected area or from an area outside of the affected area, your constituents have federalized you to lead.

No. We are not doing that. The majority side is not doing that. No. They are seizing the opportunity to carry out the motives of the special interests. So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about this issue of a culture of corruption and cronyism, this is a perfect example here in the Washington Post editorial number two, entitled "Katrina's Costs to the Poor."

What it is saying here basically is that the Congress voted earlier this year here on this floor, I must add that I did not vote for it but the majority did on party line, vote a \$35 billion cut in spending for the next 5 years as it relates to the issue of entitlement programs, Medicaid, Title I. All of these programs that help financially challenged Americans that are federally mandated were cut.

Now, we have forces on the other side saying that we will not even get it up to \$50 billion to help the Katrina victims. Well, I can tell you right now that has nothing to do about health. It has everything to do about the priorities that the majority side leadership has picked that they are going to represent. \$70 billion in tax cuts mainly, in this editorial, this is not what I am saying, I am reading verbatim from this editorial, mainly for the most wealthy, the most wealthy Americans in this country. They are fighting on their behalf. They are saying it is okay.

I do not blame the top half. I do not blame the billionaires in America for what the majority is doing on their behalf on the backs of the suffering of the American people. I do not blame those individuals. I blame the people that are saying that they want to save our country money by cutting entitlement programs to the very people who have sent us here to protect them. They do not have, the average American does not have a million dollar lobbyist to walk into the office and represent them. They have a Congressman that they sent or a Congresswoman that they sent to this floor to represent them. And if we fail in that duty, then it is beyond personal responsibility, it lies on the majority.

I want to make it clear that you have to make the decision on if you want to

lead or you want to follow. And I will tell you there are some folks in this House that are winning right now because we are not having a debate. We are just straight out saying that we are going to cut again the very programs that we just finished, that the majority just finished cutting, that are supposed to be helping the very people that we are trying to help. Better yet, we have asked billionaires to do nothing. We have given them tax cut after tax cut. We have men and women with sand in their teeth over in Iraq and Afghanistan and we are asking everyday punch-in and punch-out, retired, on Medicare Americans to suffer and to pay a price and to take a cut. We are not asking the most able Americans to do the same.

Now, I can tell you that this editorial goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, that the individuals that are being protected in this are the high-priced lobbyists and enriched constituencies. What it means by that by saying if you can pay to play in this House, then you are in good shape. You do not have anything to worry about. We have you, or they have you. And so I am glad that we are coming to the floor to be able to let not only the Members know but the American people know that this is an unacceptable practice, that I am glad that we are prepared on this side of the aisle to be able to put forth an amendment when you come to the floor with your budget that is going to not only move Americans forward but decrease the deficit.

This editorial goes on to say, You are saying that you are going to cut the budget and you are going to be fiscally responsible in managing the money of this country, but better yet, it does nothing to reduce the deficit. It increases the deficit.

Mr. Speaker, it is almost laughable if it was not true. And this is not just Democrats or Independents or some study group out there. You have the Washington Post, you have a number of other publications out there that are saying, wait a minute. You are doing this in the light of being fiscally responsible, but you are not. You are increasing the deficit. You are finding your money for your tax cuts for billionaires on the backs of working Americans, and I guess we are just supposed to sit here because it is in the light of trying to help Katrina victims.

Now I have a personal problem with that and I know the American people are going to have a problem with that also. We talk about this issue of a culture of corruption and cronyism, and I think it is important that we have an opportunity to talk about this a little bit more. This whole cronyism and individuals that are not qualified to lead is prevalent here in Washington, D.C., and it is continuing to happen, and I can tell you right now that it is truly unacceptable.

You want to talk about saving money on behalf of the American people? According to the AP, four out of

five companies that won the largest Katrina contracts are being reviewed for possible waste and abuse. Four of the top 10 companies. So what we are doing here is we are saying, hey, listen, it is okay for you to mismanage the taxpayers' money. Not only is it okay, we will reward you again with a no-bid contract.

That is almost like saying, I have a bad contractor working on my house. I have already given him \$200,000 to fix my house. Let me run out and get another loan and see if I give him \$500,000 to see if they can really mess that up.

But the sad part about that is I would be doing it with my own money. But the majority and this administration is doing it with the American people's money, and so it is very disheartening.

Mr. Speaker, I am so glad to see my good colleague from New York. We are not in the race for the World Series Championship this year like we were a couple years ago, being from Miami and New York. But the gentleman from New York (Mr. SERRANO), I am so glad he came down here today to share in this hour with me.

Mr. SERRANO. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the gentleman that he brought this week this issue up again and again. I think it is very courageous on his part and very profound.

Secondly, as far as the World Series goes, it is true that the Yankees and the Marlins are not in it, I also noted that you took our bench coach, our assistant coach, as your new manager so you will do better in the future.

One of the issues that come to mind as I was watching the gentleman, as we know, this is transmitted live on television, I am wondering if the folks who are watching us today were also the same folks perhaps that watched the victims of Hurricane Katrina as that national tragedy hit us. Regardless of whether you felt it was a State or local responsibility or a joint responsibility with the Federal Government or whether you think we as a Nation failed or not, those images are in your head.

Now you see this discussion. What is this discussion about and how do I see it? We all tend to come have the same feeling but we come to the table with perhaps slightly different views. My concern is, as a member of the Committee on Appropriations, is that in the appropriations process we have the ability to declare an emergency. An emergency means just that. That while we try to balance a budget and while we try to have expenditures that meet both the needs and our ability to pay, that there comes every so often a situation that requires us to spend the money and deal with the fact that we are spending that money rather than try to make somebody pay a major price for it.

Of course, my biggest example is the war in Iraq. Now, whether you support the war or you oppose the war; and, incidentally, one of the things that we

always need to clarify is that opposition to the war is not opposition to the men and women fighting the war. In fact, I could argue that you really support them by bringing them home tomorrow and ending the war. But that is a discussion for another time.

What is a discussion today is that the American people need to know that the way we pay for the war is by paying for the war. Whatever amount needs to be spent on the war in Iraq, we spend it. And it has gone close to or above \$300 billion that we have spent.

Now, if I was to be sarcastic up here I would say that basically what we have done is print the money. We have not taken it out of anybody's budget. We have not taken it out of anybody's pain. We basically printed the budget.

Now there is a word in the English language that I try very rarely to use and that is immoral immorality. The reason for that is who the heck am I to determine what is immoral and who is involved in an immoral act, when in fact we are all guilty of a lot of things in the way we behave in this society. But if there is anything that resembles legislative immorality it is the suggestion that for you to get whole again, for you to be helped after Katrina, the way to do this is by taking money away from the programs that in fact affect the very same communities in many ways that are being hurt while slipping in, slipping in permanently this gigantic tax cut for people who did not need it and some of them who publicly said we do not want it.

□ 1330

You recall some very wealthy people in this country saying we do not want that tax cut. We do not need it.

So that what the American people need to understand is that I cannot imagine, nor have we ever heard of one American who watched the videos, the scenes of Katrina, and said, good for them. Everyone was heartbroken and wanted to do something. Our country came together in the aftermath to try to help. But what I think most people do not know is that the majority party is trying to slip in all of a sudden a new legislative morality that says when you pay for certain emergencies, you have to take it out of somewhere.

Now, where do you take it out of? Well, if you take it out of people and places that can afford it, then perhaps that is balanced. But to suggest you are going to take and pay for Katrina relief by cutting out certain amounts of student loans or certain housing programs or what may be left of the Food Stamp Program in this country, which is now down to practically nothing, or to help children in our country, to suggest that you would pay for that by taking out of there is, in my opinion, totally improper. It is not in the best interest of who we are as a country and it does not make us look good.

So we saw many in the last couple of days allow perhaps a momentary slight retreat on bringing that approach to

the House floor. But the importance of the gentleman's comments and his being here today, and the reason why I joined him for a few minutes, is the fact that we have to keep mentioning the issue and the fact that that idea is still out there; that, again, if we cut the taxes of billionaire, that is okay; that if we put forth a war that half the country is still questioning why we are in it to begin with, that is okay to pay the \$300 billion; that it is okay to build schools, hospitals, playgrounds, temples, churches, and any kind of structure for the people of Iraq. But to rebuild New Orleans, we have to take it out of a social program or an educational program. That is what the people need to understand, and I know that is what we are trying to do here today.

Let me repeat that just one last time, not to be repetitious but to simply make the point and to drive it home. In Iraq it is not just a war. The American people need to know that we are rebuilding Iraq. Incidentally, not necessarily rebuilding anything the former government destroyed but maybe we destroyed in the process. So we are putting in new schools, new homes, new temples, new churches, new community centers, an infrastructure, and new transportation systems. We are rebuilding a country. But if you were caught up in Katrina, you are on your own. And if we help you, we are going to take it out of another part of your life or another part of your suffering.

That is wrong. That is where we have to wake up and say who are we, what are we, and I believe that we are much better than that. So I thank the gentleman for his time, and I really hope that we can wake up soon, in the next week or so, and stop this madness from going forth.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments, and I am glad the gentleman came down to the floor. I think it is very, very important to have as many voices as possible from different parts of the country sharing with not only the Members but the American people what is actually going on right now. Because by the time the American people find out what we do here, it is too late. It has already happened to them and they are saying, how did this happen. Many times they cannot follow the paper trail back to the source.

The gentleman mentioned the war in Iraq. Well, we have to remind ourselves that Republicans are in control of the House, Republicans are in control of the Senate, and the Republicans are in control of the White House, so it is not just the agencies that respond to the White House. They are the Federal agencies that are out there that are appointed by the President of the United States. So it is not our fault that things are going the way that they are going as it relates to dealing with Americans.

And what we are doing in Iraq is at top dollar. I must add that it is not

like building a school in your neighborhood. It is top dollar, because you have to pay those contractors big money. And a lot of that money goes towards these special contracts. Four of the contractors that are carrying out Katrina work in a no-bid contract are under investigation by this government for mishandling taxpayers' dollars. So we are going to reward them for wasteful spending and possibly stealing.

People get all teary-eyed when they come to the floor and they start talking about the troops and how they support the troops; and some say, well, I support the troops more than you. Well, I support the troops. Who does not support the troops? We all support the troops. I want to meet the caucus that does not support the troops. It does not exist. So let us take that away and start looking at the realities of governing and oversight and not rewarding corruption and cronyism.

The gentleman talks about the money that it is costing. It is borrow and spend. The Republican majority is borrowing and spending at the highest interest rate possible. A lot of Americans receive mail, I do, and I open it and there you might find a free credit card. You can just sign right here. And then you read the fine print and you see that after the first 6 weeks it jumps up to a 21 percent interest rate APR. It is not a deal. So we are chest beating and talking about how we have to help these poor Iraqis, but, meanwhile, when it comes down to Americans here on our soil, suddenly we want to become fiscally responsible on the backs of those very same people.

There is a lot of hypocrisy in the democracy within this Congress when it comes down to looking at that. And that is not just because I am saying it, that is what is actually happening, and that is the unfortunate part about this whole argument. If we could wait until the next round of elections and the American people could have their way with some of the individuals that are running to the floor and cutting the very things that are helping their own local communities in the light of being seen as fiscal conservatives, it would be fine. But guess what, there is too much out there for us to wait that long. It has to happen now and we have to fight now.

Mr. SERRANO. If the gentleman will yield for just a moment. In this profession of ours, we like to make predictions and, of course, we like to be right. I will make a prediction now, one that we have discussed before, and I hope I am wrong. I hope I am totally wrong. News flash: Making a prediction; I hope I am wrong.

When this war settles down to something other than it is, because we are going to be there for at least 10 or 12 years, but when it settles to something less or different than what it is now, there will be many of us coming to the House floor putting in legislation to say those folks coming back need spe-

cial medical attention, psychological, physical, all kinds of things. They need special housing and job training. They need all kinds of help. Well, the very people who are now saying we support the troops and are jumping all over the place spending all kinds of money on that ill-conceived war will be the ones saying we are fiscally irresponsible in trying to take care of the troops coming back home.

The best way to take care of the troops is, one, bring them home now, right away; and the second thing is to make sure they are rewarded and cared for for the pain they went through.

We know, sadly enough and unfortunately, that of the close to 2,000 Americans who have died we all know some personally. What we do not know, because this government will not tell us, is what is the total number of thousands of wounded, wounded who will come back, and are here already, with pain that needs to be dealt with. And the wounded in a war, as you know, could be getting shot in the hand to losing your eyesight or losing a leg or an arm. There are serious injuries coming back, but nobody is talking about that.

So I think the gentleman is right to continue to drive this home so that the American people can just get a wider look and then make their own decision, and I thank the gentleman once more so very much.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again I want to thank the gentleman for taking the time to come and join us here this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I am also joined here by our great local delegate, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON), who has been in the Congress quite some time and who has seen quite a bit, so I am so glad she is here and I yield now to her.

Ms. NORTON. Well, I want to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) very much for taking out this hour and taking the leadership on this vital issue.

Mr. Speaker, I was on my way to a markup. I got there and I thought I saw that there were a few minutes yet, and I said, I have to go down. Because I want my colleague to know that I heard from some of my friends on the other side get up and say words to the effect that our side did not want to see any budget resolution that had any cuts; and that, see, there go the Democrats again, they think you can just spend money. And comments like, even though they see the problem, they do not want any cuts to be made because they say that nobody will be for the budget resolution changes that are coming down now.

So I said to myself, my goodness, what is coming down now? The American people need to know that it is a perversion of what is required, a perversion of what they even say it is, which is an attempt to do the cuts so that there will be money for the Katrina victims. I did not think I could

let them get away with that when three or four of them got up with the same message.

I think the first thing to understand, because we have the credibility to say it, is that the Democrats stand for a balanced budget, including making some cuts at this time given this emergency. We have the credibility to say it because we have proposed a budget that would put us in balance by the year 2012. We have done it. It is balanced. It is there for all to see on our Web site.

This is the moment. It is a magic moment, and the American people should look for this moment. This is the moment when the Congress should reinstate PAYGO. That is the pay-as-you-go notion that in the 1990s brought us to surplus, the surplus that the Republican White House inherited of almost \$250 billion, a surplus as far as the eye could see, and in the snap of a finger it was gone.

We have pressed this Congress ever since the last administration left office to keep PAYGO. They have, in fact, said the only thing we are going to use PAYGO for are for spending other than tax cuts. So, we have had a perversion of PAYGO. We can do as many tax cuts, and they have been overwhelmingly for the most advantaged and wealthy people in our society, and you do not have to pay for those. But if in fact you are trying to help the poorest people in this society, such as those who were exposed for the world to see from the Katrina hurricane, then you better pay for those.

I do not think you could find any substantial number of the American people who would say, I am right there with you, and so we say, let us go with PAYGO right now. You will find that there will be Americans, those who are most concerned with the deficit, those who are most concerned with helping the poor saying, yes, now is the moment and we are for it.

Instead, what we see is amazing and brazen in how the resolution that appears to be coming down would operate. Since tax cuts cannot be touched, we have been told that, still, over and over again, the spending cuts are, in effect, going to take from services of the kind that the Katrina victims need. Do understand that. If you are a Katrina victim, even if you are middle class now, you need Medicaid when you did not need it before, you will need food stamps when you did not need them before.

I saw a woman on television who said, and this is a woman in her fifties, who said the very notion of food stamps and my family asking for them is so laughable that I did not even know how to do it. She had to have her daughter, who had also never been on food stamps, help her to find out how you apply for food stamps. So we are talking about of course the poor, the poor to our shame that we all saw but who somehow we had not seen before, but now we are also talking about hundreds of thousands of the new poor, or

the temporarily poor, and those are the victims of Katrina who simply will not be able to get from one day to the next unless they have access to the services that have only been available to the poor, like Medicaid and like food stamps.

□ 1345

If that is not enough under the topic of perversion, here is another one. This is supposed to be about cutting the deficit. We still leave the deficit at more than \$100 billion. We do not make any real inroads into the deficit, so what are we doing? Do we really think the American people are fooled? I do not think so. I think as technical as this stuff can get, they are beginning to understand it. We see it in the polls.

I must say to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK), I was here with his mother before him; and in my 15 years in Congress, I have never seen such a gap in the generic poll between Democrats and Republicans. That tells me our message of who believes in balance and who believes in making cuts but doing them in the right way is getting across.

I say to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK), the Republicans started with \$35 billion in entitlement spending, no tax-cut spending. That was cruel, but that is where they were, and that is what we had to take with all of our protestations. They said, no, that is not enough. After Hurricane Katrina, they said we need more. We need \$50 billion. They say to the American people with a straight face, we need to do this for the Hurricane Katrina victims. These are the very victims who are now having their Medicaid and food stamps cut.

As if there are no offsets on tax cuts, we are looking to the spending cuts paying for tax cuts and new tax cuts, as much as \$70 billion in tax cuts. We have been in the Congress long enough with Republicans in charge to know they believe in the reverse Robin Hood notion, take from the poor and give to the rich, but after Hurricane Katrina, how shameful, on the backs of poor give more in tax cuts.

The gentleman from New York (Mr. SERRANO) was clear when he says he knows where the rich would be. He said he cannot think of the rich in New York who would say this is the way to do it after Hurricane Katrina. We know and we want everybody to know we know where the money is, and it is in mandatory spending. We know there have to be cuts in the entitlement spending, and there have to be cuts where they hurt most, in Medicaid and Medicare. We hate that. But if there is a balanced budget resolution, we are prepared to eat that pain along with the rest of the country. What we are not prepared to do, what we are not prepared to do, after \$35 billion in cuts that have already been on the backs of the poor, to break their backs by, in fact, more cuts to them.

The House has already cut low-income energy assistance, 8 percent.

There was an 8 percent cut below last year's level. Middle-class people in our country are pulling their hair out trying to figure out how to heat their homes this winter, and we are going to cut even further the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program for the poor. We could shout it from the hill-tops because I do not think there are any Americans anywhere that would sanction that.

Every single winter we have left it at level funding; and to cut it this year when we know what has happened to energy, we know what has happened to oil and to gas, and everybody has informed everybody what they have to get ready for. They are telling middle-class people now is the time to shore up your houses, put in storm windows, and do the extras that will save you in your heating bills. Tell that to the poor people. They do not own the premises. They are the renters of this country. They are having a hard time finding enough money to pay the rent. They cannot fix the premises; and if they did, because they are so poor, they could not buy the storm windows. This is so cruel that you will not find Americans in any number who will sanction this if we tell it.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to tell it. We are going to tell it in the rich and the poor neighbors. We do not have the same access to the media the other side has, but just wait until we finish telling America about how you are taking money for Hurricane Katrina victims supposedly, from other poor people to supposedly pay for them when the money will in fact go to pay for tax cuts for wealthy Americans.

Let me give one more example that I think will get to the heart of the problem, and that is the possibility of a 2 percent across-the-board cut that will cut special education funding below the 2005 level, further reducing special education.

There is not a Member here who does not hear his school board, his local officials screaming about special education drinking up the lion's share of the education dollar. As it is now, we are down to covering only about 17.5 percent of special education. That is 17.5 percent out of the storied 40 percent we pledged the States we would cover when we passed the IDEA bill.

Mr. Speaker, who has the nerve to say to States, take from the traditional children if you have to, because the IDEA bill says you have to give to your special education children. So this time I say to my friend, we are not taking from the poor to the rich, we are taking from our traditional children and giving to our most needy children, and that is a trade-off nobody in America wants us to make.

Mr. Speaker, I say to my friend before I return to my markup, the gentleman has done us a service. I do not know how many Americans are watching, but I do say whatever happens here, we do not have the majority. The gentleman from Florida took this hour

so we could make it clear that the other side of the aisle cannot come on the floor and say whatever they want to say, even if what they say are patent untruths, without understanding that lie for lie, you will find us talking to the American people to try to set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) for her leadership. As I said at the top of this hour, we thank the Democratic Caucus of this Congress for standing up on behalf of the American people. When we start talking about issues, these issues we are all talking about, these issues are affecting the American people. It is up to us to be able to share this information. I am glad that the gentlewoman went further into the budget.

Mr. Speaker, we need to balance the budget. We are the only Members of the body that can actually say we balanced the budget and we had a surplus. The majority side cannot make that claim. I was not here, but the gentlewoman was here. They passed the budget that gave us a surplus. The other side cannot even say it because they all voted against it.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is almost like we need to have an opportunity to come to this floor like every 3 hours. There is so much going on here, the Members need to know that we are watching them. The American people need to know and the Members need to know that we have alternatives, and we are going to present those alternatives legislatively in committee, we are going to present those alternatives here on this floor, and we are going to present those alternatives in Special Orders to let it be known that we are not going to sit by and watch this country start to slide, not because of the American people, but because of the majority who are willing to stand on behalf of the most able Americans as it relates to finances on the backs of everyday Americans.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about it. I think there are so many issues we need to address as a Congress that are going either unaddressed or the actions of the Congress are hurting the average American people. That is why the Democratic Party is presenting proposals that will take us in a new direction. I think the country needs to go in a new direction. I do not need to go back to Ohio to figure that out. I think it is all over the country. We had a gentleman here last night from Oklahoma. We had a woman here from Florida. We had a man from New Jersey and a man from Ohio. From all over the country people are saying, Democrats, please take us in a new direction, in a direction that will change the country, and those are the kinds of proposals that we are offering.

As we look back as to what has been happening here for the past 5 years, it has been nothing but appointing crony friends to positions that are key in executing the game plan for emergency management, and then the job not getting done, hiding information on the true cost of the Medicare bill so we have a corrupted system here.

The Democrats want some transparency, and we want the opportunity to lead so we can take this country into another direction. I found it very interesting today in *The Washington Post* there was an article about a speech that Colin Powell's chief of staff for 16 years, Colonel Larry Wilkerson, gave. During the course of the speech, he talked a lot about what has been going on. This is one of the third-party validators that we like to have at the 30-something group. We like to validate our thoughts with someone who is independent of us. This is not the Meek Report or the Ryan Report. This is a 16-year chief of staff with Colin Powell, and he is a veteran. He was the director of the Marine Corps War College for quite some time. And what he had to say I found unbelievable.

He talks about him seeing a cabal between the Vice President of the United States, DICK CHENEY, and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, by cutting out the bureaucracy that had to carry out the decisions: "We have courted disaster in Iraq, in North Korea, in Iran, and generally with regard to domestic crises like Katrina."

If there is a nuclear terrorist attack or major pandemic, "you are going to see the ineptitude of this government in a way that will take you back to the Declaration of Independence."

This is a guy who has been in the Department of State for 16 years. This is a 16-year chief of staff, worked at the State Department, ran the Marine War College. This is a guy who has been around the block. He is saying if we have a terrorist attack of significant magnitude, we are going to see the ineptitude of our government.

What the Democrats are saying with our independent commission that we want to oversee what happened with Hurricane Katrina, we had better figure out what the answers are here. We had better figure out what we did wrong because the next time it may not just be New Orleans, it may not just be the gulf coast and then people are going to come to us and say in 2005, where was the United States Congress? Where were they in their oversight duties? Article I, section 1 of the Constitution, the people of this country govern in the House of Representatives and we have oversight over everything, over every executive function, including FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security.

The concern is when a man of this magnitude who has been around the block as many times as he has been, who has watched up close the misinformation with the war in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, all this other stuff, says

to us you will not even believe the ineptitude if there is a major nuclear attack in the United States, the ineptitude of the government. Now, our job is we should not have to wait.

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And that is why the Democrats want an independent Katrina commission just like we had an independent 9/11 Commission, bipartisan. And the committee that is set up right now might as well be chaired by Mr. Gillespie, the chair of the Republican National Committee, because it is a partisan committee. The Democrats do not have subpoena power, it is 11 to 9 Republican to Democrat. And I just feel that that is an unfair way to go about solving the problems, because it is about CYA, it is not about getting the facts. And that is a real problem.

And meeting our constitutional obligation, we stand here and we raise our hand and we swear to uphold the Constitution so help us God. Part of that responsibility is the oversight that I think we have been derelict of our duty. And the Republican Congress has been derelict of their duty, and that is why the Democrats want to take this in a new direction and change what is going on down here and do that by having an independent commission that will get to the facts, not to the politics.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Ohio could not say it better because that exactly goes to the marrow of this whole issue, of making sure that we engage not only the Members but also the American people. If it was something dealing with total politics, you could say, well, you know, in 2006 it will be dealt with. But there are so many things that are happening to Americans versus for Americans that we need change now.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The last part of this article about the Colonel, he says what my colleague just said, what he was just saying: You and I and every other citizen like us is paying the consequence. Whether it was a response to Katrina that was less than adequate certainly, or the situation in Iraq which still goes unexplained, we are paying the consequences.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Like I said, he is right and we are going to see.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. You are right.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I will take some of that, too. Because those of us that are here in the Beltway, and when I say Beltway we are talking about here in Washington, D.C. there is a Beltway that goes around this entire city. Those of us that are drinking the water, breathing the air, and eating the food here understand exactly what is going on, and it is our duty as Americans to make sure that we put light where light is not. And even where you have light, like here under the lights here in this Chamber, that we illuminate it even more as it relates to making sure that every Member knows exactly what he or she is doing or not

doing as it pertains to issues that are going to blanket, blanket and increase cronyism and corruption and going to increase the whole, or going to promote the whole theory of borrow and spend.

Folks, it is interesting, and the thing about being in Congress is that it is important that you understand that we all must tolerate one another. It is not personal, it is just business. And the bottom line is, is that if you want to talk about the business and you want to talk about spending, you want to talk about fiscal responsibility, you cannot just have a backdrop in the back of you at a press conference and say fiscal responsibility, and fiscal responsibility, that makes you a conservative. That does not make you a conservative. What makes you a policy maker and what shows that you have the ability to lead is being able to march down to the White House and tell the President: We are concerned about spending. Why don't you veto a bill for once?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Yeah.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. The President of these United States, our President, you want to talk about being a conservative, has not even vetoed one spending bill. As a matter of fact, of the transportation bill that has more fat, pork, everything else, a couple of raccoons in there, he did not even have the nerve to stop that. We have bridges going to nowhere. Meanwhile, we have got folks around here in shelters, and we are asking no one to sacrifice. No. As a matter of fact, the majority side, the Republican side, they are asking poor people to sacrifice. They are asking people that their kids are in Iraq right now and Afghanistan to sacrifice.

Meanwhile, you have billionaires saying: Do not worry, you do not have to say anything. This is what the majority is saying. You do not have to say anything, we will protect you. We will protect you, Republican majority.

So I think it is important that we continue every time that we get the opportunity, need it be out in the hall, in our office talking to our constituents, or on this floor talking to our colleagues, that we know and the American people will know exactly what you are doing to them, and it will not be something where that: I do not know, I did not understand what I was doing on that vote. And, if I would have had that opportunity. Do not come creeping in here under the doorjamb writing something into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD saying, well, I know I voted for this budget, to cut the budget of a lot of my constituents, but I really feel this way.

Do not do that. We do not want to have to pick up the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to find that you have a conscience about the vote that someone told you to do, a twist your arm.

The gentleman from Ohio and I talked the other day about violating the spirit of the rules of the House of Representatives. The so-called energy bill that went and passed this floor just

a couple of weeks ago, held this board open, the voting board here in this House open for 90 minutes, 90 minutes on a 15-minute vote. We came up to these mikes and called: Mr. Speaker, point of order. What is going on here? Did we not have a vote? Oh, wait, I am sorry. You mean to tell me you are not winning and the special interests are not winning on allowing them to stick the drill anywhere they want to drill, and you mean to tell me you are not winning because this is not a true energy bill that is going to talk about conservation and independence and go against price gouging? You mean to tell me until you are able to twist enough arms, or I must add, hammer people, okay, to the point where they are going to change their vote based on their thoughts of coming in here and based on the information that they have on this bill that it does nothing, you are going to hold the voting clock open until you have your way.

It is almost saying that we are at a little league football game and I happen to be the guy that bought the jerseys for one team and my cousin happens to be the ref that has the stop clock, I am going to tell him to stop the clock because we are behind by 7 points and I have got to go over and try to twist some arms and try to change the rules so that we can come up by 8 points, and then I want him to start the clock all over again. That is breaking the spirit and that is violating the rules. They are doing things because they can.

But I can tell you one thing, Mr. RYAN. Just like you talked about that decorated veteran that has worked in the State Department and worked with Colin Powell, the American spirit will prevail over politics, and that is what we have to bank on as it relates to this.

So those individuals that have a problem with us coming to the floor and sharing exactly what is going on, this is fact, not fiction, then they have a problem with the spirit of America. They have a problem with the blood, sweat, and tears. They have a problem with folks that are sitting in Walter Reed right now that laid it down on behalf of this country that we would come here and represent them. They are white, they are black, they are Republican, they are Independent, they are Native American, they are Hispanic, they are Americans. And we are charged with the duty of coming to this floor and making sure that they are represented. Even if the majority does not want to represent them, even if we are in the minority, we do not have the option to say we were bigger, they were smaller. They had the majority, we had the minority. Oh, we could not do anything. We are doing everything. As I speak now, we have Democratic members fighting in committee to make sure that they can get amendments on to bills to be able to help Americans. As we speak right now we are preparing to come to the floor to fight the battle with what we have.

What my colleague from Ohio is saying is 110 percent right. That bill that you have there, we have over 40,000 citizen cosponsors on it right now.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. 40,000? Wow. H.R. 3764, you can come to www.housedemocrats.gov/katrina. We are trying to get a grassroots movement together, and it sounds like we are well on our way. 40,000 citizen cosponsors for this bill to form an independent commission so we can go back and review and actually fix problems. Would that not be novel, for government to go back and actually have an independent commission, remove the politics, and fix the problem? That is what the Democrats want.

And all that you said there, I want to make one final point because we only have a couple minutes left. If you do not believe us and you do not believe our third party validators, Mr. Speaker, let us just use good common sense here. Every single cut that is being made to supposedly pay for Katrina is being cut in a program that does not have lobbyists. Can you believe that? Medicaid, after-school, free and reduced lunch, student loans, no lobby groups down here for those people. So we are going to pick on the little kids, we are going to pick on the people who cannot defend themselves. But meanwhile, the guys who are raising millions and millions of dollars for the Republican majority, we are not going to touch you. We could not possibly ask in this time of great national crisis, three wars, we have a natural disaster and high gas prices, we could not possibly go ask the wealthiest in this country to pay their fair share.

And I say this, and I do not say this lightly. This administration does not have the guts, the guts, to go and ask the wealthiest people in this country to help out. It is easy to cut programs for poor people. It is easy, because you know why? None of those people associate with the poor Americans. They are not sitting on the White House lawn drinking champagne and eating caviar.

But show the proper leadership and ask the hard questions and ask all Americans, including the ones making a billion dollars a year, to pay their fair share. Our Web site is www.housedemocrats.gov/katrina for our citizen cosponsorship, and you can e-mail us at 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank my colleague from Ohio for joining me. Mr. Speaker, I also would like to thank the Democratic leader for allowing us to have this first Democratic hour.

HEALTH CARE AND FISCAL ISSUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUH of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the leadership allowing me the opportunity to speak this hour and talk about a number of issues. We are going to discuss an important issue of health care. But before we do, I thought it would be appropriate to correct some of the misinformation that we have heard over the past hour. And the misinformation is truly remarkable, and so I have been joined by one of my colleagues here to address a couple issues and I will do the same as well, and then we will get into the discussion about health care. But I am pleased to be joined by my colleague from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), who is going to tell the rest of the story.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman from Georgia who is doing such an extraordinarily wonderful job, Mr. Speaker, as he represents the positions that our party holds on so many issues that are important to the American people.

I am going to be heading to my district for the weekend, as most Members are, spending some time there, having the opportunity to talk with them. But as the gentleman from Georgia was saying, we wanted the opportunity to just address and maybe do a little bit of correcting on some of the points that our colleagues from across the aisle have been saying and stating. Sometimes I think that they are just sadly misinformed on some of these issues.

They said that Republicans are not looking to cut spending. I just find that extraordinary. They said that Democrats are the ones that are wanting to cut spending. Mr. Speaker, the level of hypocrisy in that statement is absolutely astounding. We have a Democratic Party in this House whose message, and I honestly believe many days is the only message that they have, that message is: Spend more. Whatever it is, spend more. Whatever they are wanting to do, if they do not think the outcome is right, go spend more. And for years they have held this thought that if you just put more money in the pot, then the outcome is going to be what they want. Spend more. Spend more.

And what holds them together? Mr. Speaker, I think that is something that is a curiosity to many people, because they are not united on foreign policy, they are not united on winning in Iraq, they are not united on border control issues, they are not united behind working families who tell us repeatedly that what they want is lower taxes, lighter regulation, preserving individual freedom, and having their shot at hope and opportunity.

Our colleagues across the aisle are not united on that. The one thing that they repeatedly seem to be united on is spending more of the taxpayers' money, spending more of your hard-earned money. And it is amazing to me, government never gets enough of the taxpayer money. Government has this huge, voracious appetite for the