

their branch of service and the conflict and the war in which they served.

And I was so humbled to be in the company of such heroes. It just brings to the fore the incredible sacrifices that we as Americans have made over the past number of years for our liberty, for our freedom. I am so pleased with the leadership in the House, the Members who stood up this evening and talked about the difficulty that Americans have comprehending this war on terror; and we do, as you well know, because we do not think like terrorists.

We do not understand that mind. We do not understand the mind that would murder innocent individuals. We do not understand the mind that would chop the heads off of innocent individuals. That is just incomprehensible to us. So it does not come easily to us to comprehend the fact that we are in a war.

I was so pleased to hear Congressman CONAWAY talk about Iraq not being the end of this war. There are so many aspects to all of this war. So I am pleased with the leadership in the House, and I am pleased with the leadership of my colleague, the gentlewoman from Tennessee, who is willing to stand up and discuss these issues.

I also understood that this is not a Republican issue, it is not a Democrat issue. It is an American issue; it is an American challenge. And so my hope and prayer over the coming year is that all of the Members of the House of Representatives and all of the members of the Senate will embrace the challenge and the battle truly that we have to work together in this war on terror. I yield back to you, and commend you for your wonderful leadership in this area.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman from Georgia. I too remember singing that song: freedom is not free, you have to sacrifice for your liberty. I think that we all have sung that at camps as we were growing up. And how true and how meaningful it is as we talk about the men and women, whether they are working here domestically as first responders, as local law enforcement, as border security guards, protecting this homeland that we have, or whether they are fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan, around the globe. Whether they are deployed and away from their families, we know that they are doing this because they want to be certain that future generations grow up in a world that is free, is safe, is secure.

And we thank them for loving all of us enough to make that sacrifice and be willing to put their lives on the line. And we wish each of them a happy Valentine's Day. We wish their families a happy Valentine's Day, and we hope that they all know that we love them too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT). Under the Speaker's an-

nounced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for half the time until midnight.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to be here on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives again.

As you know, we have our 30-something Working Group that Leader PELOSI has formed over 3 years ago. And we meet constantly on issues that are facing the American people, and we ask the U.S. House of Representatives to address those issues in many cases. And there is an awful lot, Mr. Speaker, that is going on here in Washington, D.C.

I must say that I am really, really pleased at the innovation workshop we had earlier today that allowed Americans to be able to get a view of what the Democratic side has to offer in the area of innovation. And we are going to talk a little bit about that tonight.

But we are also going to talk about the ongoing costs of corruption and cronyism and incompetence in this institution that has brought about bad policies for the American people and affects the very lives of the American people that we are trying to serve.

As we work to try to better ourselves here in this Congress, we continue to point out the fact that we are not working in a bipartisan way to be able to get the best results for Americans. And we are going to talk about that also, Mr. Speaker.

I think it is important to point out the fact that we want to wish everyone here, not only in the U.S. House of Representatives but throughout our Nation, a happy Valentine's Day. And Mr. DELAHUNT is here, one of our esteemed colleagues. We are so glad tonight, Mr. DELAHUNT, that you can join the 30-something Working Group on this Valentine's night.

I know a nice man like you had to call a couple of folks and wish them happy Valentine's Day, including your family members, and it is a good day.

Mr. DELAHUNT. It was a long process all day, Mr. MEEK. But I just about accounted for everybody that it was appropriate. And a happy Valentine's Day to you and to your family. I had an opportunity to meet your family recently, and they are great folks. They really are.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, without family where would we be?

Mr. DELAHUNT. That is right. That is what this is all about.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Do you know what is interesting, Mr. DELAHUNT, is the fact that we have the issues that are floating here in Washington, D.C., and it is just kind of hard to keep up with them. There are so many things that are going on, and so many things that are happening to the American people. It is important that we get our house in order, and this House and the Chamber across the hall, including the executive branch, of getting back to the business of the people of this country.

We have families in the gulf that had visited the Capitol last week, coming with demands for their government: do not forget about us; do not leave us out; do not leave us behind. And reports are being released, but not only a summary report from the partisan House committee that was formed here about some of the mistakes that the administration made and where this Federal Government failed Americans.

Another report that Secretary Chertoff is talking about, he was supposed to come before the Senate today of the Homeland Security Committee, and they canceled the committee meeting because of Senate votes, to get down to the bottom of why we still have not prioritized the emergency management response.

I also think it is important that we point out the fact that the partisan commission here in this House that is charged, Mr. Speaker, with getting to the bottom of what happened and what did not happen in the case of the response and preparedness for Hurricane Katrina fell short of its duty to be able to make sure that we had sound, concrete recommendations to be able to move forward.

We still ask, Mr. Speaker, here on this side of the aisle, for an independent Katrina commission so that we can really get down to the nuts and bolts of what happened in this natural disaster and the disaster that followed that was the Federal Government's response.

I think it is also important that we talk about our fiscal situation, and some of tonight and tomorrow we will talk about what has happened with the reconciliation, budget recommendations that passed through this House and through the Senate, and where we are falling short there and being straight with the American people as it relates to the Republican majority.

Mr. DELAHUNT, I think it is important to point out the fact that so many Americans under this administration and under this White House have found themselves left behind economically and also socially.

The President talked about his health care plan here in this Chamber, a health savings plan that is already not working, and the way it should work and could work for Americans because it is not the right prescription for coverage for families.

To set aside money, to ask Americans to set aside money that they do not have in the first place is an oversight in itself. So many American families are living from paycheck to paycheck. It is not because they were so unfortunate to have a job and a family that they could not afford some of the high prices they are paying for fuel at this time and heating costs and other energy-related costs, but to say that we will allow you to put money aside for a rainy day for when a family member gets sick, that is not insurance.

Right now there is legislation here in this Congress to stop the Veterans' Affairs Committee from going up on insurance rates against veterans. And I want to also, if I can point out a few of those articles today just in the local Washington Post, Mr. DELAHUNT, I think maybe we can talk about some of the things our third-party validators are talking about here in this town.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. MEEK, if I can. I think you made a reference to reports that are now being released, and you indicated that it is a partisan report. I think it is very important to explain that the report from the House committee that reviewed this, the aftermath and the prelude, if you will, to Katrina and what went wrong, was for all intents and purposes a Republican effort.

Two Democrats sat with our Republican colleagues; and in the aftermath of their effort, these two Democrats, both from Louisiana, have recommended that it is essential to create, as we did in the aftermath of September 11, an independent commission that reviews again the prelude, during, and the aftermath of the natural disaster that devastated this country in the form of Hurricane Katrina back on August 29.

Maybe like the 9/11 Commission, we can have an 8/29 Commission that all Americans can have confidence in—in its integrity. But I think, too, that we ought to review really the damning findings of the Republican effort that really, in my judgment, speaks to the incompetence of this administration.

You know, we use the word or the term “culture of corruption” frequently in explaining what is occurring here in Washington. But I think you might agree with me that it is incompetence combined with cronyism that really are the building blocks, if you will, of that culture of corruption that creates a huge cost to the American taxpayers.

I am speaking in terms of billions of dollars and multiple lost opportunities, dashed dreams, and unfortunately this, let me use the term “corruption tax,” that even cost lives. And I think we have witnessed this because of what occurred by way of a natural disaster on August 29 and what has occurred in Iraq in the aftermath of our invasion.

And I do not want to delve tonight into the disagreement that I have in terms of the rationale for this administration to invade Iraq.

□ 2215

I do not want to talk about weapons of mass destruction. I do not want to talk about links to al Qaeda. I do not even really want to talk about the failures to bring democracy to far corners of this world according to the Bush doctrine. But I think it is important that we talk about the corruption that is ongoing and reveals itself on a frequent basis by reports coming from independent sources, coming from, actually, the special inspector general for

the reconstruction of Iraq and coming from trials that are now occurring in Federal district court.

But before we get to that I think it is important to review what went wrong with this administration's response for Hurricane Katrina. And again, I think we have to, in a sense of fairness, applaud some of our Republican colleagues who really said it better than you and I can say it, and I am sure they cannot be accused of being partisan since they are Republicans. But I thought what was particularly interesting to me was a quote in my hometown paper or one of my hometown papers, the Boston Globe. It was an observation by TOM DAVIS, who is the respected chair of the Government Affairs Committee.

He made the observation that President Bush is in Texas, Chief of Staff Card is in Maine, and the Vice President is fly fishing wherever. I mean, who is in charge? And I guess that is really the question.

We have had a Department of Homeland Security for several years with the ultimate Federal responsibility to prepare Americans for disasters, whether they are triggered by a terrorist attack or whether they come via a natural disaster; and the performance of this administration can only be described as a disaster, a debacle, if you will.

I thought it was rather ironic that today, as I was watching the news, the Secretary of Homeland Security, Mr. Chertoff, announced he was going to hire 1,500 disaster specialists. I guess my response was, what took so long? What took so long? How long has it been? Since 8/29, since August 29.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I can tell the gentleman what took so long. What took so long is that we have an administration and we have a Congress that did not give the proper oversight.

The Department of Homeland Security asked the questions when they should have been asked. The American people were told, trust us, trust us, trust us. When you talk about the Republican majority and really Homeland Security, FEMA, the White House, and oversight committees were not prepared to do what it was supposed to do and we failed the American people.

Now, let me just say this. The American people have been asked to trust the words of this majority time after time again. Trust us on the fiscal outlook for the country. Trust us on taking down the deficit. Trust us on making sure what they tell you is actually the reality. Trust us on your health care costs and your coverage. Trust us, trust us, trust us.

And almost in the same month the American people, it is revealed to the American people that it was not about them the whole time. It was about special interests having their opportunities and privacy through the executive branches in this Congress.

Now if I can just take a minute just to bring in third-party validators. You

talked about what you read in your hometown paper. I just want to put this picture right here. This is Secretary John Snow from the Department of Treasury. I want to put his picture there so folks know that this is not the Meek or the Delahunt report.

This is a report in a letter from the Secretary of the Department of Treasury to Senator MITCH MCCONNELL, and it says the administration now projects that the statutory debt limit currently at \$8.184 billion will be reached in mid-February of this year. At that time, unless the debt limit is raised or the Department of Treasury takes the authorized authority, extraordinary actions will have to be carried out, we will be unable to continue financing the government operations.

It goes on to say, I am writing you to request that the Congress raise the statutory debt limit as soon as possible or we will not be able to carry out government functions. That is basically what it is saying.

I have blown this letter up here because I think it is important. This letter is signed by the Secretary of the Treasury. Basically what he is saying in this letter is that, unless the debt limit is raised, the Department of Treasury will not be able to continue to finance government operations. Our government operations, not the government operations of a foreign country, not the government operations of the Republican party, not the government operations of the Democratic party, the government operations of these United States of America.

Now give me a couple more minutes. This came from the Secretary of the Treasury, the office right next to the White House, Mr. Speaker, appointed by the President of these United States and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. This is a letter that he wrote on December 29 of 2005, just the end of last year.

Better yet, Mr. Speaker, the American people are being asked, trust us with the money and the decisions. Let us have a treasurer here.

Mr. DELAHUNT is familiar with this chart. The President of the United States, George W. Bush, has borrowed more, and he could not do it by himself, he needed the Republican majority to do it, \$1.05 trillion from foreign countries. Foreign nations like China and Saudi Arabia and all of the countries that we are concerned about, we have borrowed more money in four years since 2001 to the present, to the end of 2005 than 42 Presidents combined, and that is \$1.01 trillion.

Now we had World War II, Mr. Speaker. We have had the Korean War. We have had World War I. We have had Vietnam. We had Gulf I. All of these wars, all of these conflicts, the Great Depression, a number of challenges to our country. This President and this Republican Congress has borrowed more, I cannot say that enough, has borrowed more from foreign nations in the history of our republic. And we can

say that from a standpoint as Democrats to say that we put forth a balanced budget recommendation here and it has actually happened.

I just want to make sure, and I know this is one of Mr. RYAN's charts here, but I am going to go ahead and say this is our debt right here now as you see it as of February 14, as of February 14 which is a special day on the calendar, and we talked about that a little earlier. This is what the American, this is what each American, if a baby was born when we started this special order here tonight, they already owe \$27,526.77 and counting.

So I go back to Secretary Snow's letter. Did the Democrats write this letter? No. The Democrats put forth recommendations of pay as you go. Is the Republican majority embracing that doctrine? No. Is the White House embracing that doctrine? No.

So when we start talking about fiscal responsibility and competence and saying no to corruption and cronyism that has an effect on the American people, this is the result of it.

You have got a letter. That is what the we are about. We are about shedding light on what is happening under this Capitol dome. If you let the majority tell you, oh, well, the Democrats have done this, that and the other. This is the biggest borrow-and-spend Congress in my opinion in the history of the Congress, borrow and spending in the worst way with interest.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If the gentleman would yield for just a moment, today I was at a hearing and the hearing happened to be on China. It was a subcommittee on which I serve as ranking member, and there was a reference made to the Bush doctrine.

Well, I would submit, given that President Bush has accomplished in one term more than all of his predecessors combined in terms of accumulating debt held by foreign nations, some of whom are particularly hostile to the United States, that we should describe the Bush doctrine as one of borrow and spend, not pay as you go, but borrow as you cut taxes. And I made the observation if you connect the dots how are we conferring a massive tax cut, 40 percent of which is reserved for 1 percent of Americans. Who is paying for that particular tax cut? Well, at least a trillion of it is being funded by Japan, China, Britain, the Caribbean, Taiwan.

And listen to this, that tax cut is also being paid for by money borrowed from OPEC, OPEC. That means that we are not just buying our oil from the OPEC cartel, but we are also borrowing money for them to support a tax cut for 1 percent of our affluent citizens. And then Korea, Germany, Canada and others makeup the difference. This is extraordinary.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it is good to join the gentlemen.

As we are talking about the debt and we are borrowing this money from the Chinese, from the Japanese, from the

Koreans, from the OPEC countries, as we borrow that debt we have got to pay interest on that debt.

So as we are paying interest on that debt, this chart will show us that out of our priorities that we have in this country, the red is what we are paying in billions of dollars in the 2007 budget in interest, compared to education, compared to homeland security, compared to veterans.

□ 2230

So when we are talking about borrowing the money and what we are paying the interest on and what country we are paying the interest to, that interest money, the red, is going back to China. It is going back to Japan. It is going back to Korea.

Mr. DELAHUNT. It is going back to OPEC.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is going back to OPEC.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Along with the dollars we are using to buy oil at \$60-plus a barrel to heat our homes.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Which is also going back to OPEC. So OPEC is benefiting from the high oil prices, high gasoline prices. They are benefiting from the net interest we have to pay on the money we are borrowing from them at the expense of education, homeland security, and veterans.

Let me just show you this, and let me just say this is a powerful, powerful, powerful group of information here that we need to share, and I have got to tell you something. I love this slide. I love this. I want to be friends with this slide.

Look what we can do. This says what else could the government do with the interest, the red that we just showed, what else could the government do with the interest that the country pays every day on the debt that we have. \$1 million in every congressional district per day. That means in the gentleman from Florida's congressional district, you get \$365 million; the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT), \$365 million for your congressional district; \$365 million for mine. I can tell you, with the health care priorities and education and veterans that live in my district, they would love to have an extra million a year.

With the debt every day, we could provide health care for almost 80,000 more veterans if we balance our budget, if we get our fiscal house in order here. We could improve Social Security solvency by almost half a billion dollars if we could begin to balance the budget.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Are you aware with the President's budget that 263,000 of our veterans will be denied access to veterans health care?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It goes a little further. They are going to pay higher copayments, too; and what the majority has to understand, Mr. Speaker and what the Senate has to understand and what the President has to understand, this is not going to change. This is business as usual.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. A track record here.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. A track record, a pattern of those who have made youthful indiscretions in their lives, need it be on credit, need it be some sort of criminal activity, you can no longer have access. You used to have the capital, if you do not have a good credit record. Am I right?

Let me just tell you something right now as it relates to the United States. I am looking at Japan. You can put Japan in the State of Florida, and the State of Florida will swallow geographically Japan. But, better yet, look what they are holding of the U.S. apple pie. The bottom line is this is about, Mr. Speaker, the incompetence, cronyism and, in some cases, corruption of these individuals being able to get access into this institution and into the executive branch to be able to get what they want.

I want to drive the point on here. I want to make sure this is crystal clear. It has to be crystal. The bottom line is the only way that we will be able to have a paradigm shift not only in thinking but in policy and action on behalf of the American people and unless the American people like you say, the majority, they do not have to be the majority. The American people can make that change. They can say that we are willing to allow the Democrats to lead so that we can hopefully start taking care of some of these issues that we have to take care of here at home, with our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and throughout the world so that we can get the respect of not only the world but our country, our own country.

Veterans, they signed up for all the right reasons, allowing us to salute one flag, as we see it now, are being asked to do more financially, meanwhile \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthy, while we have individuals, while we are having veterans affairs centers closing in rural America and in urban America. They are closing. Some of them are only open on Wednesday now. But, meanwhile, we have individuals, we have the President every time he gets a chance he is talking about let us make the tax cuts permanent for people who are not even asking for it.

So this is very simple. This speech on what the majority, Republicans, say, well, trust us, we know what we are doing. We showed the letter from Secretary Snow. I think we already know this. We did not write this letter. The guy has said the fifth time, the Secretary is saying we will not be able to operate the government. That is one letter.

Here is the other one here. Forty-two Presidents, this President and Republican majority has borrowed \$1.05 trillion, but, better yet, saying let us make a bad idea permanent, let us drive this number up, let us put a two here instead of a one. It does not make sense. Only the American people can stop this crowd. \$27,526.77, the average

American owes right now. This is not brought to you, Mr. Speaker, by the Democrats. This is brought to you by the Republican majority and this White House.

We have to save this country, and the American people have to save this country, and we have to get the word out to them that all of the rhetoric, all of the big money machine.

And, look, here is another one. This stuff is just here. It is almost too much to share, Mr. Speaker. We do not have enough time to share what the Members and the American people, clients reward keeping K Street lobbyists thriving.

I never blame the special interests for what happens here, but I am going to tell you right now they have a tax shelter right now where \$100 billion in U.S. taxpayer dollars are not going into the coffers because they have an offshore deal with this administration and with this majority. Meanwhile, we are sitting around here trying to figure out how our veterans are going to get health care. Meanwhile, we are trying to figure how small businesses will be able to afford health care for everyday Americans to be able to buy into; and, meanwhile, we have troops still without body armor and the things they need to be able to fight on behalf of this country. So we ask everyday Americans to go out there and suck it up.

Meanwhile, the majority, the Republican majority, based on incompetence, some may say corruption in some cases as it relates to the White House, I mean, every day, I am sorry, every day we turn on the television. What is new? What is going on at the White House? What is being held back from the American people? What is being held back from the Congress? Who came to the Hill today and conflicted a story that they told just months ago about the fiscal outlook on the country?

Meanwhile, you have Members that come up to this well on the majority side and say we are doing fine, I do not know what these Democrats are talking about.

But it goes against logic. We have letters from their very own administration that are saying we have got to raise the debt limit because of our irresponsible policies.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The fact of the matter is, as you just so eloquently put it and passionately put it, this money that we are borrowing is not going to fund education. It is not going to lower tuition costs. It is not going to fund No Child Left Behind. It is not going to fund the veterans. This money that we are borrowing from the Chinese and Japanese and the Caribbean and OPEC, the oil-producing countries, is going to fund corporate welfare to the oil companies, \$16 billion in corporate subsidies to the energy companies in the last energy bill, and billion upon billion upon billions of dollars that go to the HMOs and the pharmaceutical companies and all these other health care

providers who are getting all their money.

Your tax dollars, Mr. Speaker, are going for corporate welfare; and we do not have enough to give them so we have got to go to the Japanese to borrow them so we can give them to the wealthiest industries in the United States. This is craziness, and we need to stop it.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And the Chinese and OPEC.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It is the cost of corruption and cronyism. It is the cost. Who pays it?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is the cost of the K Street project, and the average person that pays taxes foots the bill.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Can I just get a third party validator in it for you? Just today, NewYorkTimes.com, the Members can go on to it: Huge giveaways were in the works for the oil industry. Not the veterans, not the working Americans, and it spells it all out here. Mr. Speaker, I do not have a conspiracy theory, but it is right here. It is clear.

I do not know. I am so glad that I am not a member of the majority because I do not even know how I could come to the floor and defend this. How can I even shape my mouth to say this is good? But somehow there must be some sort of in front of the mirror in the restroom kind of I can do this, because this is wrong. The sad part about it is that the country is paying the price; and the folks that are wearing the suits, being driven around with tinted windows in cars and sedans and all, do not even know the price of a carton of milk because they have someone else go out and get it. They are getting paid by the U.S. tax dollar. Meanwhile, we are telling veterans, schoolchildren, U.S. cities, to suck it up.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Now, of course, we are presented with a plan that would cut Medicare and cut Medicaid. So if you are a senior in this country, and, of course, we are here representing the generation of 30 somethings, but if you happen to be getting close to that point in your life where you receive a Medicare card, be careful. Do not count on it.

A while back there was a speaker who preceded over this Chamber who said Medicare, let it wither on the vine. Well, I wonder if that particular sub-mission to cut and slash Medicare is the beginning of the withering process. It just is not right. But, as we were saying earlier, a lot of it is just rank incompetence. But when you combine this magnitude of incompetence that we have witnessed surrounding Katrina and surrounding the reconstruction of Iraq, it easily evolves into corruption.

There was an audit done or at least a preliminary audit done by the General Accountability Office which, as Members know is a nonpartisan, independent agency to review government expenditures; and they discovered that the government has squandered mil-

lions of dollars in Katrina disaster aid, including handing 2,000 debit cards to people who gave phony Social Security numbers and used the money for such items as a \$450 tattoo.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Can you repeat that? I missed that.

Mr. DELAHUNT. A \$450 tattoo. Federal money also paid for \$375 a day beachfront condos and almost 11,000 trailers that were stuck in the mud and unusable.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Do you have the number on the trailers, how much that cost? Because I heard it today, and I am sorry to interrupt you, but I think this is a salient point that we need to make.

Mr. DELAHUNT. The GAO auditor, Gregory Kurz, told senators during a hearing that the amount of waste and abuse and fraud could be hundreds of millions of dollars. They just do not know yet.

□ 2245

As he indicated, FEMA may also have brought too many temporary homes, including 11,000 units that currently sit empty in sinking mud in Hope, Arkansas, while they are needed in Louisiana and Mississippi. It is the incompetence of the planning process that was nonexistent. Today, the Secretary of Homeland Security announces, I am going to address that, I am going to hire 1,500 disaster specialists. Good job, Mike, heck of a job.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I heard tonight on CNN earlier this evening that the cost of the 11,000 trailers was upwards of \$300 million. So basically what happened is FEMA is so screwed up, okay, because there are not many other ways to put it. They are so screwed up that they bought 11,000 trailers that they moved to Hope, Arkansas, and put them in a field that is full of mud. They sunk in the mud so they are not even good anymore. They will probably have to get rid of them.

Real estate people in Louisiana said that \$300 million could build 2,500 homes for middle-class people in Louisiana or in the gulf States. It could open up all of the schools in the gulf coast.

So when we come down here and we are talking about the debt, the deficit, and the recklessness and the irresponsible spending, reckless abandon for balancing the budget, that is one issue.

But another issue is look at the waste. My goodness, \$300 million to buy trailers that are now sitting in the mud in Hope, Arkansas, instead of actually housing people?

You mentioned Speaker Gingrich earlier. He was talking, and I read in the paper the other day, he is as critical of the Republican establishment in this House and in the Senate and in the White House as any of us are.

This is not about Democrat and Republican. This is about America functioning as a government in the 21st century with the communication capabilities that we have, with the technology that we have, with the know-

how that we have. To hear afterwards that experts were trying to tell folks in FEMA, and outside of FEMA, what would happen if there was a category 3, 4 or 5 hurricane that came into the gulf States. We knew.

What we are trying to say here is that the Republican majority in the House and the Republican majority in the Senate, in this administration, Republicans in the White House, do not know how to govern.

Now, because the whole philosophy is that all government from top to bottom does not work, it is worthless, it has no value, that is not true. That is just not true. We are saying that government needs to get out where it does not work, and it needs to be efficient and effective where it has responsibility.

Now, FEMA, for example, who else is going to coordinate between the gulf States and emergency response? Who else is going to protect us with Homeland Security, of which you are a committee member, Mr. MEEK? Who else is going to provide for the defense? Who is going to balance the budget? Government has some responsibilities to invest.

All we are saying is do it in a responsible manner. This nonsense is reckless, paying \$225 or \$230 billion in interest on the money you are borrowing from the Chinese Government, Japanese Government and the OPEC countries, and then basically raising tuition and underfunding No Child Left Behind.

In Ohio, No Child Left Behind is underfunded by \$1.5 billion a year. Cutting veterans benefits? Not funding Homeland Security? You know, this is not very visionary on behalf of our brothers and sisters on the other side of the aisle.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, in the same breath, the President is talking about we want to embrace innovation. We want to prepare the next generation to lead. We want to make sure that we put our fiscal house in order.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Well, then, this number, my friend, the purple lavender, it is a nice lavender, it needs to be at the level of the red. The education needs to be up here, and the net interest on the debt needs to be down here. Then we will start talking about innovation.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. One other thing that I want to make sure that we add, Members, so that Members will know exactly, because I believe in third-party validators. I also believe in sharing information.

I know, Mr. RYAN, you will give this information out, but I want to make sure that folks understand and the Members understand. Because I know some Members are in their offices saying, I need to know this, Republicans and Democrats. I want to get a copy of this, and you can, www.housedemocrats.gov/30something. You can go on there. All of the charts that we have here tonight will be post-

ed, and the articles that we have will be in the news section so that the Members can get it.

Because I think it is important, Mr. DELAHUNT. It is one thing to do something and not know. It is another thing to do something and know. I will tell you supermajority and Republican leadership know. Okay, maybe some Members may be a little bit confused about what is actually happening, maybe.

It is easy, because there are a lot of things that are going on. But while we are driving up the debt, and the highest that it has ever been, and while that whole interest piece that you have there, Mr. RYAN, Mr. DELAHUNT, that is not to build schools, that is not to put the gulf coast victims into homes, that is not to help our veterans, that is not even to have world-class health care. That is to make tax cuts permanent for millionaires.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And to pay the interest and our debts off to the Chinese, Japanese, the Koreans and OPEC.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Well, can I interject, because I can, this may be going to build schools; but it is going to build schools in China, because they are making money off of us. It is going to build schools in Japan, which of course we want the kids all over the world to be educated and healthy. We were all for that. But you know, not because of the recklessness that the Republican majority has been exercising here.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If I can, just for a moment, just to digress, because we have been talking about Katrina and the fraud and the mismanagement associated with the Katrina spending, I think it is important to remember, too, that about half of the 700 contracts that have already been issued were issued on a no-bid basis, and they were issued to corporations that have obvious political ties. But that is a subject for another night.

But, again, it goes back to just incompetence and lack of planning.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Basic stuff, basic stuff.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And lack of due diligence. But it also exists, tragically, in a far greater magnitude, with American tax dollars that are being used to build schools, roads, hospitals, dams, and levees in Iraq. I mean, I have a major concern about the fraud and the corruption that is going on in Iraq with the use of American taxpayer dollars.

I don't know if either one of you, but I am sure many who might be watching this evening, witnessed the CBS news "60 Minutes" program that aired this past Sunday. It really was remarkable. They highlighted one firm called Custer Battles. Custer Battles was started by an individual with the name Scott Custer, a former Army Ranger, and Mike Battles, an unsuccessful congressional candidate from Rhode Island, who claimed to be active in the Republican Party and have connections at the White House.

They arrived in Baghdad without any money; yet within a year, they had \$100

million in contracts. They have now been charged with fraud and abuse, mismanagement, et cetera. They were supposed to provide some security services for the Baghdad airport. The security director at the airport communicated via e-mail and had this to say: "Custer Battles, this is the company, has shown themselves to be unresponsive, uncooperative, incompetent, deceitful, manipulative and war profiteers. Other than that, they are swell guys."

The number two man at the Coalition Provisional Authority's Ministry of Transportation, the American-run temporary government running the affairs of Iraq immediately after the invasion, had this to say: "It was the Wild West. There were \$100,000 bricks of \$100 bills. The money was a mixture of Iraqi oil revenues, war booty and U.S. Government funds earmarked for the coalition authority." This is a member of the administration.

When asked about Custer Battles' performance, the top Inspector General for the Army in Iraq reviewed it to see if the company was living up to its contract, such as it was. His name is Colonel Richard Ballard. When asked, he said: "The contract looked to me like something that you and I would write over a bottle of vodka. Complete with all the spelling and syntax errors and annexes, to be filled in later. They presented it the next day and they got awarded about a \$15 million contract." They were supposed to provide security for commercial aviation at the Baghdad airport, but the airport never reopened for commercial traffic.

Now, do you think that they canceled or voided the contract? No, they got another contract after that. It was for a bomb-sniffing canine team.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I just want to make a point, and then kick it to my friend, that all of that money that is wasted, KENDRICK, is going to this. Okay? There was \$100 million here, \$100 million there. No oversight. No oversight at all on behalf of this Republican Congress.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. They don't want oversight.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That is the problem. Article I, section 1 of the Constitution creates the House of Representatives, and our job is to oversee everything, including the administration. So if they are at war, we should be overseeing this. And if there is a bunch of political hacks that are making money off this, then we need to go and bust them. We need to be involved. But this Republican Congress will not oversee what is going on in Iraq, and the hundreds of millions of dollars that Mr. DELAHUNT was just talking about, you are paying for, you are, I am, with interest, because we are borrowing it from the Chinese and the Japanese governments.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And OPEC.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And OPEC. And OPEC. Did I mention OPEC?

But this is an issue that, KENDRICK, we need to oversee what is going on

here and the Republican leadership does not want to provide the proper oversight. It is a waste of taxpayer dollars which goes to the interest on the debt, which we have to borrow from the Chinese and Japanese, which allows them to fund their economy.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. In my last 2 minutes, I am bouncing back to you to give the Web site address out, but I just want to make sure that we have a moment of clarity here. Mr. Speaker, we are not pointing these issues out as though we have not tried to stop these runaway majority borrow-and-spend Republicans here in this House.

□ 2300

For the RECORD, CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, I must add, not the Democratic Congressional Record, but the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Democrats have repeatedly tried to reinstate the pay-as-you-go philosophy. On March 30, 2004, Republicans voted 209 to 209 against Democrats, which killed the motion that was offered by MIKE THOMPSON of California to instruct conferees on recommendations as pay as you go. All right, that is the first example.

The second one, May 25, 2004, Republicans voted 208 to 215. Republicans voted 215 to reject a motion by DENNIS MOORE, another Democrat that voted on the pay-as-you-go principle.

November 18, 2004, Republicans took another vote to block former Member Stenholm's amendment to stop the debt limit from being increased. Time after time after time again. You can go on to our Web site. The Members can get this information. We have tried to stop this Congress. The only way you can stop this Republican Congress from doing what they are doing is make sure that we have more Democrats here in this House.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. www.housedemocrats.gov/30something. All of the posters that we had up tonight you will be able to access on the Web site.

Again, I think that is an important point. Democrats have consistently tried to put fiscal restraints on this runaway spending that the Republicans have been doing over the past few years here, trying to balance the budget here so we can get back on the right track and get back the surpluses. We have got our hands full. Housedemocrats.gov/30something.

Happy Valentine's Day to all the sweethearts out there.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Happy Valentine's Day, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MEEK. We would like to thank the Democratic leader, Mr. Speaker; and, with that, it was an honor addressing the U.S. House of Representatives.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT.) The Chair must remind

Members to use proper forms of address. The gentleman, for example, from Massachusetts is properly referred to as the gentleman from Massachusetts or Mr. DELAHUNT. It is not proper under the rules to use first names, and remarks should be directed to the Chair not in the second person.

BALANCED BUDGET PROPOSAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for the time remaining before midnight.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, as was stated earlier, I do consider it an honor and a privilege to come to the floor of this House to address you, Mr. Speaker, and to carry this message across the waves to the American people.

I would first take up the issue of a balanced budget, and I would submit that we can balance this budget, Mr. Speaker, and we do not need to do so by raising taxes. We need to do so by fiscal responsibility.

I raised an issue today, I testified before the Budget Committee here in the House of Representatives, and I laid out a scenario by which we can balance this budget for this year. And I also acknowledge that it is quite painful. It is not realistic from a political perspective, but I think it is important that the Budget Committee produce a balanced budget so that we can measure the pain to so many of the programs that would have to be cut.

But a simple version, and it is a quick version, it is not the thing that I would propose as a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker, but it is one the ways that we can easily understand the magnitude of the budget situation we have.

First of all, if you would reinstate the Bush tax cuts and calculate those back into the revenue side, it almost does not show at all on the bottom line as to whether we are running a deficit or a surplus in our spending; and I have a calculator in my computer that allows me to do that. It almost does not show on the graph when you calculate that.

But if you look what the Bush tax cuts have done, they have grown this economy and they have grown this economy at 3 percent or better growth each quarter for at least the last 10 consecutive quarters, and that is a growth rate that has been met or exceeded since the early Reagan years. And I would point out, Mr. Speaker, those early Reagan years were the years when we had high interest and high inflation. So this is a real growth in a very low inflation environment with a low unemployment environment with unemployment rates below 5 percent.

It is a very, very good economic time, Mr. Speaker; and it is as good a time as one could ask for. It is the best economic run that we have had in a long, long time. It eclipses any eco-

nomic run in the last 2 decades, and it also is a controlled growth. It is a growth that has not gotten out of hand, Mr. Speaker. It is a growth that grows from 3 to 4.7 percent quarter after quarter, with an inflation rate that is 2 percent or less and unemployment rates that are in the 5 percent and less range. That is where we want, not too hot and not too cold, a nice steady accountable growth.

And I would point out this that growth that we have in our economy is growing in spite of the fact that 3.5 percent, perhaps, of our GDP is going off the top to the litigation that goes on in this country. We have to overcome that and still grow at a rate of about 3 to 3.5 percent to match a targeted growth rate that will deal with population growth and to deal with inflation and help us develop our infrastructure in this country to accommodate the future as our infrastructure depreciates. That is what it is going to take to grow.

And what it is going to take to balance the budget, should we have the will to do that, would be to go into the nondefense discretionary spending. Recognizing that we have three large entitlements in our budget, and those are the spending that just goes on year after year that is growing at a rate of about 6.2 percent a year and that is aggregate, and that is Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Those three entitlements are essentially, unless we change some of the parameters, Mr. Speaker, are the right now the untouchable budget items; and eventually this Congress will have to look at them. But those three entitlements will grow at about 6.2 percent of their aggregate. The interest rate will grow perhaps even faster than that in the outyears.

You add all those things up, and if you recognize that to make changes in that for this year is very difficult to do and also recognizing that we have defense spending that is critical to our national security and we need to take that off the table from a cut perspective and what is left is the nondefense discretionary spending. That is the items of all, everything else that we spend that I have not identified as being an entitlement of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid defense spending, that nondefense discretionary spending. We will call that other.

To balance the budget Mr. Speaker, we would need to simply cut the nondefense discretionary spending by 5 percent, a real 5 percent cut, and that would be \$0.95 on the dollar. That would be asking Americans to get along with \$0.95 out of every dollar that they have right now, today, not grow in relation to inflation and not grow with any kind of a COLA.

Now, if I were looking at this from a business perspective, I would advocate that we just simply balance our budget in that fashion, Mr. Speaker. But I am also aware that the votes on the floor of this Congress will not accommodate