

vulnerable to developments far from our borders and not under our control.

Mr. Speaker, as a Member of the House Agricultural Committee and co-chair of the House Democratic Rural Working Group, I know firsthand that rural Americans feel this pain when they go to the pumps. But rural America will benefit from legislation my colleagues and I have introduced to encourage biofuel production and the usage of it in the United States.

Specifically this legislation will, one, increase production of American-made biofuels. Double the percentage of renewable fuels sold in America in 6 years, make sure that biodiesel and cellulosic sources are the key parts of that increase, and extends tax credits for ethanol and biodiesels through 2015, and increases tax benefits to small ethanol producers.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, the bill will expand the market for and the distribution of biofuels, invest in research and development to improve the use of renewable energy. And, finally, the bill will encourage local domestic ownership through Federal incentives to small ethanol and biofuel plants so that independent locally-owned facilities that produce biofuels can grow and thrive, improving our rural communities and creating jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I hope when Congress returns from the Memorial Day district work period that this House will pass this legislation to invest in America's energy independence.

I hope the administration will put the power of the Federal Government to work for the American people suffering at the gas pump, rather than the big oil CEOs enjoying record profits at their expense.

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

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

□ 2300

FOSTERING OUR FUTURE ACT OF 2006

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, this week I introduced the Fostering Our Future Act of 2006, along with my colleague, the distinguished gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. HART).

This is a bill to help our Nation's foster youth by strengthening dependency courts and requiring accountability.

Foster care is a critical safety net for half a million abused and neglected American children. It is, however, a system in need of support and reform. 20 percent of all foster kids will be forced to wait over 5 years for a safe, permanent family. Even worse, almost

20,000 older youth age out of the system without the assistance of a permanent family every year.

Frequent foster home transfers create turbulence and insecurity that heighten the emotional, behavioral and educational challenges faced by these youth. The doubling of the foster care population since the early 1980s compounds this problem by creating enormous caseloads and taxing the capacity of foster homes.

The end result is that foster kids through no fault of their own are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment and other life course problems despite their resilience and courage. Imagine what it is like to be 8 years old, neglected by your parents and then taken away from them. You are told that you must live with a family that is not your own. You would be confused by court proceedings that govern your future and frightened that you might be transferred to yet another home. You would certainly feel alienated from your peers who talk about mom and dad. Imagine what that must feel like.

These children deserve better. They should be guaranteed physical and emotional safety. They should have continuing relationships with caregivers and loved ones. They should have an informed voice in the legal decisions made about their lives. And they should enter adulthood prepared to live a happy, healthy and productive life. We have a responsibility to these children to meet these goals. Anything less is unacceptable.

Practitioners and policy experts have conducted thorough analyses and advanced proposals to overhaul the foster care system. The most prominent example, a comprehensive 2004 report by the bipartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care identified several areas where the Federal Government could support these kids by strengthening the Nation's foster care systems.

The Pew Commission found that State dependency court systems were failing to sufficiently track cases and train personnel, because they do not receive Federal funds to do so. Interagency collaboration and performance measurement where they exist have been inconsistent both within and between States and tend to focus on bureaucratic needs rather than outcomes.

I was pleased earlier this year when under the leadership of the Ways and Means chairman of the subcommittee, Mr. HERGER, the committee passed legislation that included \$100 million in new funding to improve our foster care system. These funds have been allocated to improve juvenile and family courts, help track and analyze caseloads, train judges and other court personnel and bolster collaboration between State courts and State child welfare agencies. While this is a critical first step, it is time we implement the rest of the court-related provisions recommended by the Pew Commission,

and this legislation we introduced will do exactly that.

Our State foster care system struggled to retain qualified dependency attorneys who are often burdened by substantial debt. A recent survey found that one-third of practicing dependency attorneys graduated with over \$75,000 in outstanding loans, and 44 percent of them currently owe more than \$50,000. High turnover among dependency attorneys has led to a dearth of experienced lawyers who have a comprehensive understanding of the system and maintain valuable relationships with their young clients.

The Fostering Our Future Act that we are introducing responds to these shortcomings. It encourages Statewide interagency collaboration and data sharing. It ensures effective representation is available to children and families. It establishes a loan forgiveness program to attract and retain qualified child welfare attorneys. And most importantly, by focusing on child welfare outcomes, this legislation will keep the needs of children and families rather than the needs of bureaucracies front and center.

I commend the child welfare workers of America for the invaluable services they provide and for constantly struggling to get this issue the attention it deserves. Foster care plays a crucial role in the Nation's child welfare safety net, but it is in desperate need of change and support. I call on my colleagues to join us working for the day when all of our Nation's children are protected, nurtured and loved. And I invite you to join me in that quest by co-sponsoring the Fostering Our Future Act of 2006.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

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

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, this week as we begin to go into this weekend to celebrate Memorial Day, it is most fitting that we take a moment to say a word about our soldiers, those who have fallen, who have given their lives in battle for the protection of this country and the enhancement of freedom around the world. And so it is with great pleasure and honor that I start this recognition off recognizing the great courage and work of our soldiers.

From the Revolutionary War, as we recall, many soldiers who gave their lives to start the foundation of this country, many of those soldiers whose portraits hang in this great Capitol, several of those soldiers who walked with bloody feet through Valley Forge through the winter because we could not get them the proper boots to wear. But they went on and they fought against the odds and brought freedom and started this country; to the War of 1812; all the way through the Civil War, where brother fought against brother; the greatest contests in war that

proved the metal of this country, up through the Spanish American War and World War I and World War II. From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli, our soldiers have been there for us. The Korean War and on down through the Vietnam War, maybe not popular, but the soldiers went where they were called and performed admirably; through Desert Storm and now in the sandy storms of Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I was just in Iraq in January, and one of the most memorable experiences I had during that trip was I was able to meet with our soldiers. And there was one soldier that, as I was in Camp Victory in Baghdad, who grabbed me and was hugging me so hard. Tears were coming down his eyes, tears coming down mine. And he said some words to me I will never forget. He said, Congressman SCOTT, when I am hugging you, it is like I am hugging a piece of home.

I never will forget that. And 3 weeks ago, that soldier was killed. And so, oftentimes, we go about our business, and oftentimes, we take our freedoms for granted. But that is why we have Memorial Day, to say to those who have given their lives for this country, for our freedom domestic, thank you. Because there is no greater love than the one that would give his life for another. To all the men and women in uniform, to all who have served this country, we say thank you on this, the beginning of the celebration of Memorial Day.

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 half the time until midnight as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House once again. I would like to thank the Democratic Leader for allowing the 30-Something Group to come to the floor, Ms. PELOSI and also our Democratic Whip, Mr. HOYER, and Mr. CLYBURN, who is our chair of the Democratic Caucus, and Mr. LARSON, who is the vice chair.

Mr. Speaker, we were here the night before, and as you know, we come to the floor talking about issues that we would like to see brought to the floor and also talk about how we on the Democratic side would like to work in a bipartisan way to make America stronger.

Last night we talked quite a bit about energy. We talked about the difference between what we would do if we were in the majority versus what the Republican majority has not done and the cost it has brought about to all Americans. And it is very, very unfortunate that this continues to happen, and there is very little leeway that has been given to the American people as it relates to gas prices. We talked about the fiscal irresponsibility of the Repub-

lican majority that we are willing to work to pay as we go as it relates to our budget. We talked about the fact that students that are now graduating, that will be walking across the stage, a very proud moment for many Americans across the country, watching their young people pick up their diplomas, knowing that as they go to college they will pay more for college because the Federal Government or the Republican majority has decided to cut student benefits and also make it harder, make more of a reality of debt for students who are going to college because we have cut back, and we have Democratic initiatives to roll back the Republicans tuition tax on students.

When we talk about tuition tax on students, it is a tax on the parents and on the grandparents and the family that is trying to help that individual get through college, that is making sure that we have a stronger and brighter America in the future.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we always talk about solutions, and we back it up with fact and not fiction. So we are here tonight, half of the time split before midnight, to talk about these issues quickly.

Tonight, as always, we have Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ from Florida. We have Mr. DELAHUNT, who is going to join us tonight. We look forward to a fruitful dialogue with an abbreviated time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, do you care to share anything because I am going to talk about the fiscal irresponsibility and how the Republican majority has allowed foreign countries to have a piece of the American apple pie? We talked about that last night as it relates to the irresponsible spending that has taken place, unaffordable and in many, many areas and is putting America more in debt, not only in domestic debt but foreign debt, unprecedented to any other time in the history.

Ms. Wasserman Schultz.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I am glad you touched on that theme. It is a pleasure to be here once again for our 30-Something Working Group, where we try to talk about the issues from the perspective of our generation and also talk about the issues important to our generation. And for people in our generation and the point that we are at in our lives, what blows my mind and continues to baffle me since I arrived in the Congress last year was the crushing debt that we are buried under right now, and that is not reversing itself; that there are no efforts on the part of the Republican leadership to reverse course, to turn around and go in the other direction and return to the days when President Clinton was in office. We had a surplus, a budget surplus, when we had no deficit, when we had a much smaller debt in terms of our debt to foreign countries. Of course, we had debt to foreign nations but not nearly what we have today.

We have more debt combined under this President than the 42 other Presi-

dents that we have had previously. And normally we have charts that we can highlight.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. We have had 224 years, Mr. Speaker, of leadership that has only has been able to borrow \$1.01 trillion from foreign nations. The Republican majority along with the President has in 4 years, from 2001 to 2005, has been able to borrow \$1.05 trillion in just 4 years. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, since we do not have our chart, I just wanted to give those facts.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely. The three things I just want to hit on that are on all in that same theme: Last week, we passed a budget led by the Republican leadership here that just continues down that same path of irresponsible priorities; \$6 billion cut to Homeland Security over 5 years; \$488 million in 2007 alone. Cut the Army National Guard by 17,000 troops. The National Guard, which, if we all recall, the President just talked about deploying to the border, to our Mexican-American border to assist States in border security. On top of that, we are also deploying them to Iraq and Afghanistan. How thin can we spread them? And then on top of that, we are cutting the number of troops we give them.

It cut funding for equipment for firefighters and police; \$6 billion cut to veterans' services over 5 years. It tripled health care fees for veterans for TRICARE.

Let's fast forward to the tax reconciliation bill, which is the tax cuts that we made permanent under the Republican leadership's insistence. Let's talk about what that tax cut meant for real people. The tax bill that was signed this week by the President had Americans who made \$20,000 a year, they get \$2, \$2 in their tax break. And when I stand at a town hall meeting and ask folks to raise their hands, Mr. MEEK, to let me know, who is it among you who have actually received money in your pocket from the tax breaks that President Bush and the Republican leadership have handed out over the last number of years, in a room full of several hundred people, maybe I get two or three hands. Maybe.

□ 2315

Now, if these tax cuts are targeted like Democrats would design to working families and to people who really needed that money and would actually put it back into the economy so that could revitalize the economy, like buying big ticket items like refrigerators and televisions and other things that would inject cash into the economy instead of investing it, which is what the wealthiest among us would do, then I could understand letting us make those tax cuts permanent all day long, but unfortunately, we do not have any of those tax cuts.

We have tax cuts that puts \$2 back in the pockets of people who make \$20,000, and Americans who make \$40,000, they get a whopping \$16, but Americans who