

brings fear and trepidation into the hearts and souls of those affected by this disaster.

Why? Many people that needed help never got it and never will. But some people did get help, and they profited on this disaster, and FEMA paid for it. The GAO says FEMA wasted \$1.6 billion of taxpayer money, or 16 percent of all funding.

Thieves used unlawful money to get season football tickets, vacation at Hawaiian resorts for 2½ months, paid for a divorce lawyer, go to topless clubs, and, get this, even pay for a sex change operation. FEMA even sent money to prison inmates pretending to be hurricane victims.

Mr. Speaker, this ought not to be. FEMA should only be responsible for passing out toothbrushes to these thieves, because that is all they will need when they go to prison. If employees at FEMA are accomplices they should go to jail too. Hurricane season is back. But do not expect FEMA to help in the next disaster, they are the disaster.

And that's just the way it is.

IMAGE OF THE UNITED STATES

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, a respected opinion poll, just released, shows that the image of the United States has been seriously damaged around the world as we attacked and occupied Iraq.

The U.S. war against Iraq as seen worldwide is a threat to world peace. The poet Robert Burns once wrote, "Oh, would some power God give us to see ourselves as others see us." Because the world is interconnected and interdependent, it would be helpful for us to see why the people of other nations, especially those who have been our friends, not only oppose our actions in Iraq but also question the so-called war on terror.

We have lost so much for a war based on lies. Right after 9/11, many asked, why do "they" hate us? That was the time to begin reaching out to unite the world in our common aspiration for safety and security. Not through war and occupation, but through truth and reconciliation.

The human unity which we celebrate as a Nation under God should remind us that the God which watches over the United States watches over the entire world. We can bomb to pieces but we cannot bomb the world to peace.

This is the time for us to try again to unite the world in our common aspiration for peace and for human unity.

AFGHANISTAN

(Mr. KELLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Speaker, I just returned from Afghanistan. I went there

to personally thank our troops and to speak directly with President Karzai and our generals to see how things are going. They told me that the U.S. and Afghan forces are working successfully side by side against the Taliban fighters and al Qaeda terrorists.

They are also working together to build roads, bridges, and schools to help change hearts and minds over the long term. As I rode down the streets of Kabul, I saw little boys and girls skipping on their way to school, carrying their American book bags. When the Taliban was in charge, there were no girls in school, and the country had an 80 percent illiteracy rate.

Now there are 6.7 million Afghan children in school. I met with several of the 68 women who were recently elected to Afghanistan's Parliament. They are excited about their new-found freedom and democracy. The Taliban are hoping that democracy in Afghanistan will fail so they can return to power. But the people there have tasted freedom and they like it.

URGING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR TAXPAYER DOLLARS

(Mr. EMANUEL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, this Congress has cut and run from its responsibility of oversight, to ensure that the taxpayer money is spent wisely. By last count, nearly \$10 billion of the funds set aside for Iraq reconstruction cannot be found. Vanished. \$10 billion gone.

And now the Government Accountability Office reports that 16 percent of the aid distributed after Katrina, \$1.4 billion, was spent fraudulently. Some of the money went to pay for a bottle of Dom Perignon, Caribbean vacations, "Girls Gone Wild" videos.

That may be one heck of a vacation, but it is a horrendous use of the taxpayer dollars. Instead of rooting out incompetence and fraud and waste and abuse, the Congress has actually protected it. No oversight. No accountability.

By failing in their oversight responsibility, by failing to ask the tough questions and hold the administration accountable for their actions, the Republican Congress is a willing accomplice to the greatest taxpayer ripoff since the Teapot Dome. We just sent an additional \$94.5 billion to Iraq and the gulf coast without a single act of accountability or oversight. It is time for a change. It is time for a new direction.

FOCUS ON WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING IN IRAQ

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, democracy dealt terrorism another major blow last week with the defeat of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the mastermind behind countless brutal acts of terror.

This was a crucial victory for Iraq's new democracy, and major setback for the terrorists who seek to destroy that democracy.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the sacrifices our military has made to ensure our freedoms and our safety. They fought bravely and served honorably. That is why I cannot understand why some members of the press and some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle put a negative spin on our military's accomplishments.

These folks need to focus on the great progress we are making and stop listening to liberal newspaper editorial columns. Last week's silencing of al Qaeda's top leader in Iraq should silence their false views on the war on terror.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close with a quote by an Army major serving his third tour in Iraq. "For every vividly portrayed suicide bombing, there are hundreds of thousands of people living quiet, if often uncertain, lives. For every depressing story of unrest and instability, there is an untold story of potential and hope. The impression of Iraq as an unfathomable quagmire is false and dangerously misleading."

RUBBER-STAMP CONGRESS

(Mr. McDERMOTT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I brought my rubber stamp to the floor today because I want to remind everyone that tomorrow you have got to bring your rubber stamps to endorse the President's proposal in Iraq.

The majority leader's plan is nothing more than let us do more of the same. Now, there is no plan from the White House. What they say, and listen to these words, when the Iraqis stand up we will stand down.

That gives the control to the clerics, from the Shia and the Sunni. When they stop the civil war, then we can come home. We have put our troops under the control of the Sunni and Shia clerics in Iraq. That is not supporting the troops.

We have to have a plan about when they come home. We will decide. We say there are 250,000 trained. And there are only 20,000 of those insurgents out there. How many do they have to train before they can handle 20,000 insurgents?

Well, the Iraqi clerics will tell us. Do not forget your rubber stamp tomorrow.

GUN CONTROL MYTHS

(Mr. McHENRY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. McHENRY. Mr. Speaker, the Washington Times reported last week that while firearms sales in the United States remained on the rise, gun-related crime and gun accidents are on the decline.

Figures released by the Treasury Department show that retail sales of firearms and ammunition rose by almost 3 percent in 2005. All told, 4.7 million new guns were sold during this past year. Yet government figures and independent statistics revealed that firearm crimes and accidental fatalities, including among youth, all trend downward.

A recent assault on the Mall, ironically involving one of the Capitol Police chief's children who was one of the victims, underscores the importance of making guns available to law-abiding citizens in Washington, DC.

Residents here deserve the same self-defense measures that we do in our individual States. The second amendment applies to all Americans, not just some. It does not take a constitutional scholar to figure that out.

Mr. Speaker, anti-gun activists attacking our second amendment rights are perpetuating a myth of more guns equals more violence. It is not true.

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STOP GLOBAL WARMING

(Mr. INSLEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, last week, the President of the Marshall Islands visited Bainbridge Island, Washington. In discussions with me he made a specific plea. He asked America and the U.S. Congress to finally do something about global warming. The reason he said that is that rising sea levels literally could drown his entire nation.

He basically told me that his entire nation could become the first nation state to be environmental refugees, and he said, you know, we don't hardly put any carbon dioxide in the air. You put 25 percent of all the carbon dioxide in the world into the air, and your Congress does nothing. I think he had a pretty good point.

While the science of global warming becomes unambiguous and inarguable and clear, this Congress has lined the pockets of the oil and gas companies with giant subsidies and done absolutely nothing about global warming. It is a tragedy.

You know, we have had a lot of Republicans historically to stand up for the environment, such as Teddy Roosevelt; Bill Ruckelshaus, who met with us yesterday, who said do something about global warming. We need some action instead of passivity.

U.S. FLAG MUST BE PROTECTED

(Mr. PENCE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, it is Flag Day, and I rise in support of the Flag Protection Amendment. February 23, 1945, after surviving the bloodiest bat-

tle since Gettysburg, a platoon of marines trudged up Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima with a simple task, to raise the American flag above the devastation below.

When the flag was raised by SGT Mike Strank and his platoon, history records that a thunderous cheer rose from our troops on land and on sea and in foxholes and on stretchers. By adopting the Flag Protection Amendment, we will raise Old Glory again.

We will raise her above the decisions of a judiciary that were wrong in the law and the history of our values. We will raise her above the cynicism of our time. Out of respect for those who served beneath it and those who died within the sight of it, we must say that there are boundaries necessary to the survival of freedom.

Let us pass the flag amendment and restore to Old Glory the modest protection of the law that she represents.

HOUSE GOP IGNORES THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF AMERICA'S MIDDLE CLASS

(Mr. MEEKS of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MEEKS of New York. Mr. Speaker, the House Republican Do-Nothing Congress refuses to do anything to address the economic conditions that have led to large majorities of middle class Americans feeling squeezed to make ends meet.

Since taking control of both the White House and the Congress 5 years ago, Republicans have chosen to focus their attention on America's wealthiest, claiming the benefits would trickle down to the middle class. Well, Mr. Speaker, the American people have waited for 5 years, and they have not seen any results.

Instead, they see a monthly paycheck today that is not much different than the one we received back in 2001. While their wages have stagnated a lot of their monthly costs have increased dramatically. Housing costs are at their highest levels in 14 years. Health care costs for the average family have increased more than \$1,200. College tuition is up 40 percent and gas prices have doubled. The middle class is indeed squeezed, and yet they are getting no help from the Republican Congress that chooses to listen only to the wealthiest few.

Mr. Speaker, House Democrats are ready to take America in a new direction. We will start by listening to all of our constituents, not just the wealthy elite.

IRAQ AND THE WAR ON TERROR

(Mr. GINGREY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank our brave servicemen

and women for their exceptional work in fighting the global war on terror.

I recently spent time in Iraq with the 48th Brigade Combat Unit of the Georgia Army National Guard. This unit was doing some incredible humanitarian work for the Iraqi people, building schools and managing health clinics. Of course, these aren't the stories that you read about on the front page of the New York Times, so I want to share one with you today.

One evening during my trip, I was having dinner with a young sergeant named Keith Weathers. This sergeant would explain to me why his unit was doing so much to help the Iraqi people. Sergeant Weathers said it was because he and most Americans have hope and opportunity, and it was his mission to share the abundant opportunities our Nation enjoys with those struggling to achieve freedom in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers are bringing hope and opportunity for the Iraqi people every day. The war on terror is not an easy fight, nor is it an expedient fight, but it is undoubtedly the right fight.

I hope we all take Sergeant Weathers's words to heart and continue supporting our troops and their mission.

MINIMUM WAGE AMENDMENT

(Mr. MORAN of Virginia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Ladies and gentlemen, the American people want a new direction. And Mr. Speaker, yesterday the House Appropriations Committee finally acted on something that the House Republican leadership has refused to address for over a decade.

Finally, yesterday, the full Appropriations Committee passed the amendment to the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill that will very gradually increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25. Do you know that those who were working at the minimum wage in 1968, if today they were getting a comparable compensation, it would be over \$9 an hour.

I commend the Appropriations Committee for passing this in a bipartisan fashion, because expanding economic opportunity for over 7 million hard-working wage earners, plus another approximately 9 million members of their family should not be a partisan issue.

Unfortunately, the Republican leadership has said they do not intend to allow us to vote on the House floor on this critical issue. Today's minimum wage is at its lowest level in 50 years. Let's change that for America's hardest working families.

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)