

schools, governmental services, businesses, and offices were closed. Our streets were silent, and no one dared to walk them.

“Our people were barricaded in their homes out of fear; death awaited them around every corner.

“Terrorists occupied and controlled the only hospital in the city. Their savagery reached such a level that they stuffed the corpses of children with explosives and tossed them into the streets in order to kill grieving parents attempting to retrieve the bodies of their young.

“This was the situation of our city until God prepared and delivered unto them the courageous soldiers of the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, who liberated this city, ridding it of Zarqawi’s followers after harsh fighting, killing many terrorists, and forcing the remaining butchers to flee the city like rats to the surrounding areas, where the bravery of other Third Armored Cavalry Regiment soldiers in Sinjar, Rabiah, Zumar, and Avgani finally destroyed them.

“I have met many soldiers of the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment; they are not only courageous men and women, but avenging angels sent by The God Himself to fight the evil of terrorism.

“The leaders of this Regiment, Colonel McMaster, Colonel Armstrong, Lieutenant Colonel Hickey, Lieutenant Colonel Gibson, and Lieutenant Colonel Reilly embody courage, strength, vision, and wisdom. Officers and soldiers alike bristle with the confidence and character of knights in a bygone era.

“The mission they have accomplished, by means of a unique military operation, stands among the finest military feats to date in Operation Iraqi Freedom and truly deserves to be studied in military science. This military operation was clean, with little collateral damage, despite the ferocity of the enemy. With the skill and precision of surgeons they dealt with the terrorist cancers in the city without causing unnecessary damage.

“God bless this brave Regiment; God bless the families who dedicated these brave men and women. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank the families. They have given us something we will never forget.

“To the families of those who have given their holy blood for our land, we all bow to you in reverence and to the souls of your loved ones. Their sacrifice was not in vain.

“They are not dead, but alive, and their souls hovering around us every second of every minute. They will never be forgotten for giving their precious lives. They have sacrificed that which is most valuable.

“We see them in the smile of every child and in every flower growing in this land. Let America, their families, and the world be proud of their sacrifice for humanity and life.

“Finally, no matter how much I write or speak about this brave Regi-

ment, I haven’t the words to describe the courage of its officer and soldiers. I pray to God to grant happiness and health to these legendary heroes and their brave families.”

Mr. Speaker, there are no words that can improve upon this letter.

PORT SECURITY

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

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, for more than a decade I have been expressing concern about our ports and our port security. Let me explain.

The United States has signed onto international agreements, consensus agreements, where we allow ships to be owned secretly and flagged under flags of convenience from countries that barely exist, Liberia, other countries, like Malta and Panama, who look at it as a way to make money, but care nothing about safety and security. And even they will freely admit they do not know who owns these ships.

Osama bin Laden may own a fleet of freighters. We are not allowed to know that, but they can sail into a U.S. port under a Liberian, Panamanian, or Maltese flag. That is a concern. We do not know who the crews are on these ships.

After an accident on my coast, where I started investigating the credentials of the Filipino captain, I found out that at an International Maritime Organization-approved school in the Philippines, which has never been visited or inspected, which does not exist; anybody, any terrorist, anybody, can buy captain’s papers for about \$2,500 and they are a captain. So if Osama bin Laden owns a ship, a terrorist buys fake papers, he is now a captain on that ship.

Well, but there must be measures to secure the cargo. Well, not really. We require a manifest, a piece of paper, or in this day and age, an electronic transmission of a list of what is in the containers on that ship.

Now, that is pretty hard to phony up. But then they put these little seals on there that a 6-year-old kid could peel off and open up if the container has been inspected. It would be too expensive, \$1 to \$2 per container, to have tamper-proof seals. So we cannot have tamper-proof seals. So we do not know who owns the ships. We do not know who crews the ships, and we do not know what is on the cargo on those ships that are coming into U.S. waters.

Then we have the “thin blue line,” the United States Coast Guard. Here are the concerns they raised about this UAE deal: The Coast Guard said, “There are many intelligence gaps concerning the potential for DPW or PNO assets to support terrorist operations that preclude the completion of a thorough threat assessment. The breadth of the intelligence gaps also infer potential unknown threats against a large number of potential vulnerabilities.”

But then, when they were backed into a corner and their funding was probably threatened by the White House, the Coast Guard said, “The DP World’s acquisition of PNO in and of itself does not pose a significant threat to U.S. assets in ports in the continental United States.” Notice the qualification, “In and of itself.”

The Coast Guard knows that we do not know who owns the ships. The Coast Guard knows that we do not know who crews those ships. The Coast Guard knows that we do not know what is on those ships. So they are saying this is another level of concern, this government which supported the Taliban, Mr. Khan and his nuclear proliferation, actually controlling the physical facilities. If all that other stuff was taken care of, if we knew who owned the ships, if we knew who crewed the ships, if we knew exactly what was on the ships, if it was tamper-proof sealed, then maybe you could think about this.

Now, the President says he did not know a thing about it, but he knows it was absolutely fine because all his people took care of it. You would think that that might have included the Secretary of Defense. He says he did not know a thing about it, but he knows it is just fine too. And now they say, well, we will have a review for 45 days, but we know it is just fine. We just need that time to tell people it is just fine.

This is plain and simple the Bush administration once more putting commerce, putting multinational corporate profits ahead of the safety and security of the American people. This is about a free trade deal they are negotiating with the UAE. This is about our huge and growing trade deficit where more and more foreign countries are going to be coming back here, buying up critical assets in the United States of America, because we have a totally failed trade policy under this administration.

And what do they want to do? They want to do more of it, and now they want to allow people to buy terminals in our ports and jeopardize the security of the American people.

Enough is enough. It is time to stop this madness.

U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my objections to the proposed United Nations Human Rights Council.

The proposal offered by the U.N. General Assembly President is a far cry

from the reforms that we envisioned just a year ago. If adopted as is, the proposed Council could continue the U.N.'s roll down to irrelevance and would inhibit the efforts of the United States to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

Mr. Speaker, in creating the United Nations, an entity born from the ashes of the Holocaust and the struggle against tyranny in World War II, the nations of the world committed themselves to one goal: "Never again." We would never again tolerate violations of fundamental freedoms and liberties endowed to each and every human being. A Commission on Human Rights was established to ensure that we would not waver in this commitment. It sought to protect the oppressed while holding the oppressors accountable for their actions. However, this commission has become a rogue's gallery, a country club for pariah states, a speaker's forum for dictators.

No farmer would designate a fox to guard his henhouse. No member of the international community in 1945 would have Heimler serve as a judge in Nuremberg; yet the United Nations deemed it acceptable and credible to have the likes of China, Cuba, Iran, and Sudan to sit on its Human Rights Commission.

We had to take action. As a result, the U.N. Reform Act was adopted by the House not once but twice, and it contained provisions to fundamentally reform the entities dealing with human rights at the United Nations. The Henry Hyde bill called for the United States to leverage our influence as well as our financial contributions to the United Nations in order to ensure that countries could only serve with members of any human rights body if they uphold the values embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We provided specific criteria for membership, criteria which seemed obvious, even self-evident, or so we thought.

It appears that it was not so obvious, not so self-evident, given that the current proposals for the U.N. Human Rights Council have no concrete human rights prerequisite for membership. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are other areas of grave concern.

The draft for the creation of the U.N. Human Rights Council does not establish criteria for membership. All members of the U.N. would be eligible for membership. This means that gross human rights violators could easily serve on the newly renamed council. It would give greater power and influence to certain regional groupings. These nations would hold 55 percent of the votes, therefore marginalizing the influence of Western democracy while heightening the collective power of despotic regimes.

It also makes it easier to call for special sessions of the council. Due to the new composition of the council, democratic nations such as ours and Israel

would become targets for these special sessions. It would also require members to rotate off every two terms, which means that every 6 years the United States would be off the council.

The United States must stand firm against these attempts. I commend John Bolton, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, for doing just that and raising the bar for other democratic nations to do the same. We must make it clear to the United Nations that we will not accept a simple reshuffling of the deck chairs on the Titanic. We will not be pressured into a hasty vote on this Human Rights Council while much needs to be done, much needs to be reconsidered and studied.

Let us recall our promise of "Never again." Let us ask ourselves, does the proposed U.N. Human Rights Council fulfill that promise? If it does not, then let us make every effort to ensure that it does. We must prevent the Human Rights Council from also being hijacked and manipulated into a tool of oppression and tyranny, rather than standing for freedom and democracy.

NICS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. McCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. McCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking on the 109th Congress and still we have done nothing to stop illegal guns from getting into the hands of criminals.

I am not proposing anything new about laws or a ban on certain weapons, but helping our States enforce the current law that prevents criminals from buying guns.

NICS, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, is the database used to check potential firearms buyers for any criminal record or history of mental illness. In large, NICS has been a success. Since 1994 more than 700,000 individuals were denied a gun for failing a background check. The background check goes back to the 1968 Gun Control Act, and that would basically be what we are enforcing.

However, the NICS system is only as good as the information that the States provide. Twenty-five States have automated less than 60 percent of their felony convictions into the NICS system. That means that 40 percent of people are not in the system that should be denied guns. In these States many felons will not turn up on the NICS system and would be able to purchase guns with no questions asked.

In 13 States domestic violence restraining orders are not necessarily put into the NICS system. Common sense would dictate that you do not sell a gun to someone who has been served with a restraining order.

Thirty-three States have not automated or do not share mental health records that would disqualify certain individuals from purchasing a gun. Sadly, this particular loophole in the

NICS system cost two of my constituents their lives.

On March 8, 2002, Peter Troy purchased a .22 caliber semi-automatic rifle. He had a history of mental health problems, and his own mother had a restraining order against him as a result of his violence. It was illegal for him to purchase a gun, but like so many others, he simply slipped through the cracks in the NICS system. Four days later Peter Troy walked into our Lady of Peace Church in Lynbrook, New York, opened fire and killed Reverend Lawrence Penzes and Eileen Tosner.

Peter Troy had no business buying a gun, and the system created to prevent him from doing so failed.

□ 1945

It is only a matter of time before the system's failings provide larger tragedies. We must fix the NICS system. While we lay the responsibility for the NICS system on the States, many of our States' budgets are already overburdened and will have even fewer resources if the President's budget passes as is intact, which is why I introduced H.R. 1415, the NICS Improvement Act.

This legislation will provide grants to States to update the NICS system. States would be able to update their NICS database to include felons, people with certain mental and emotional disabilities, and domestic abusers. We need the NICS Improvement Act to become law, and we need more bills like this to pass. These are ideas that impose no new restrictions open gun owners, but give the government the tools to ensure existing laws are enforced. In fact, the NICS Improvement Act already passed this House in the 107th Congress by a voice vote. It came through the Judiciary Committee with no dissenting votes. The bill had the endorsement of the National Rifle Association. Unfortunately, the other body never acted upon the bill.

This is commonsense gun legislation we can all agree on. This bill will save lives while not infringing on anybody's second amendment rights.

Mr. Speaker, I call Congress to act quickly on H.R. 1415. We can prevent tragedies throughout this Nation. Certainly we hear the NRA talking all the time about enforcing the laws on the books. We can do this if we enforce the laws on the books. If we bring up the NICS system the way it is supposed to be, we can save lives.

One thing that people don't talk about, with the injuries and the deaths that we see in this Nation from daily gun violence, it is costing our medical system, our health care system over \$2 billion a year. That is money that can certainly be better spent on other health care issues.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that the House will see its way to take this important information, bring the NICS system up to where it should be, and let us save lives.