

The battle to free ourselves from fear is by no means a battle to the exclusive benefit of the citizens who live in a democratic system. It is a battle that benefits above all those who today languish under authoritarian, repressive regimes.

History has shown that the aspiration to democracy is universal and that liberty and democracy are contagious. When people are exposed to the winds of democracy, they inevitably demand respect for their right to freedom from their governments. You are well aware of that because your country is the leading force behind this wind of freedom.

But there is another, equally important reason to forge a common strategy among all democracies.

The United Nations forecasts that over the next 25 years the world's population will increase by another 2 billion people, but a large part of those 2 billion people will be born and will live in countries that today are on the fringes of affluence.

So on the one hand, we will have 6 billion human beings living in destitution; and on the other, fewer than 2 billion living in wealth. Migratory pressures will inevitably soar.

In order to prevent this from happening, and even more, to prevent hunger and desperation from generating hatred and being exploited by fundamentalists, we must raise those countries out of poverty and start them down the road to well-being. It is our moral duty, but it is also in our vital interest. This will only be possible if democracy is allowed to spread and strengthen. All of our efforts must therefore be directed at fostering the development of institutions that ensure good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and free market economies in those countries.

Only democracy can provide liberty, and only liberty can guarantee that individuals will be able to develop their talents, channel their energies, achieve their dreams, and conquer prosperity. The only possible road is to work together to spread democracy.

My government has relentlessly sought to forge a grand alliance of all of the world's democracies. It is for this reason that I lent my vigorous support to President Bush's initiative to establish a U.N. Democracy Fund.

It is for these reasons that I am convinced that the task that lies ahead of us is to promote a culture of respect for human rights and its fundamental freedoms in all countries.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to complete this mission successfully, it is essential that the bonds linking the United States and the European Union remain strong and sound.

It is this belief that prompted me to start a decisive, continuing diplomatic and political initiative with my European colleagues to ensure that the European Union did not weaken its ties to the United States in reaction to the events in Iraq.

For the same reason, we cannot ignore the danger that a united Europe might seek to define its identity in contrast to America. The necessary political and institutional integration of Europe must not mean the creation of a "Fortress Europe," closed to the rest of the world in the belief that in doing so it can preserve its prosperity and liberty.

A conception of European unity founded on a fanciful wish for self-sufficiency would be morally suspect and politically dangerous. Disagreement or, worse, opposition between the United States and Europe would be entirely unjustified and would jeopardize the security and prosperity of the entire world.

The West is and shall remain one. We cannot have two Wests. Europe needs America and America needs Europe. This holds equally true on the political, economic, and military planes.

It is therefore absolutely necessary, indeed fundamental, to sustain and reinvigorate the Atlantic Alliance, the alliance that for more than half a century has guaranteed peace in liberty.

From defense alliance, NATO is gradually becoming a security organization. While defensive alliances are exclusive, created to protect against the threat of other blocs, organizations that protect security must be inclusive, because they become even more effective as the number of member countries increases.

This is why I strongly supported the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, bringing the Russian Federation into the security architecture of the free world.

I am proud to have worked together with President Bush and President Putin to ensure that this came to pass, and that this momentous decision, which confirmed the Russian Federation's decision to join the West and embrace its values, would be consecrated in Italy, at the historic summit at Pratica di Mare, near Rome.

That day in 2002 marked the end of the nightmare of mutual annihilation by two blocs in arms against each other that had lasted for more than half a century.

NATO must remain the fundamental instrument to guarantee our security. The new European defense capability must therefore be complementary to NATO's. Together, NATO and the European Union shall be democracy's instruments for guaranteeing security in a globalizing world. I have always worked to achieve this objective, which I consider strategic, and will continue to do so.

In this context, the United Nations through a process of reform will have to recover their central role to become more efficient and to be able to tackle the challenges of the new millennium.

Mr. Speaker, our values of democracy and liberty allowed the West to ensure that their peoples enjoy a degree of prosperity unparalleled in the history of humankind. History has shown that

only democracy permits a sound market economy to flourish, because political freedom and economic freedom are but two sides of the same coin.

Nonetheless, we are aware that there are countries that are opening to the market economy, but where authentic democracy does yet not reign and human rights are not adequately respected. The more developed and democratic countries must therefore work with determination to ensure that everywhere the opening to the free market is accompanied by the strengthening of democratic institutions and respect for human rights.

The market economy has always been a powerful drive for countries to transform from autocratic or authoritarian regimes into genuine democracies.

Action to expand the market economy in the world is therefore a key part of our efforts to affirm our values, to affirm liberty for a safer, more prosperous and secure world.

[Spoken in English:]

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, the bonds between Americans and Italians are strong and enduring. I am convinced that they will continue to strengthen and that the United States will always find in Italy a partner nation with which it can share the same vision of the world.

Allow me to conclude by sharing with you a brief story. It is the story of a young man, one who had just graduated from high school. His father took him to a cemetery that was the final resting place for brave young soldiers, young people who had crossed an ocean to restore dignity and liberty to an oppressed people. In showing him those crosses, that father made his son vow never to forget the ultimate sacrifice those young American soldiers had made for his freedom. That father made his son vow eternal gratitude to that country.

That father was my father, and that young man was me.

I have never forgotten that sacrifice and that vow, and I never will.

Thank you.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

At 11 o'clock and 35 minutes a.m., the Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, accompanied by the committee of escort, retired from the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The Deputy Sergeant at Arms escorted the invited guests from the Chamber in the following order:

The Members of the President's Cabinet;

The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

JOINT MEETING DISSOLVED

The SPEAKER. The purpose of the joint meeting having been completed, the Chair declares the joint meeting of the two Houses now dissolved.

Accordingly, at 11 o'clock and 38 minutes a.m., the joint meeting of the two Houses was dissolved.

The Members of the Senate retired to their Chamber.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. The House will continue in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1245

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO) at 12 o'clock and 45 minutes p.m.

PRINTING OF PROCEEDINGS HAD DURING RECESS

Mrs. KELLY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the proceedings had during the recess be printed in the RECORD.

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

There was no objection.

THE NEED FOR SMALL BUSINESS TAX RELIEF

(Mrs. KELLY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. KELLY. Madam Speaker, small businesses are the local engines that drive our national economy, so we must always keep their needs as a centerpiece in our budget priorities in Congress. As we analyze our future budget outlook in the weeks ahead, we need to work together to protect our small businesses.

Yesterday, I met with a group of small business owners from the Warwick Valley Chamber of Commerce back in my district. Hearing them talk about the myriad challenges facing them and their businesses served as a reminder of how critical it is for us to continue providing them the tax relief that they need to continue to create new jobs across our country. We need to extend and make permanent small business tax relief provisions that are critical to our continued economic growth.

We need to continue the increased expensing rules for small businesses, and we should increase the deduction this year to an amount of greater than \$100,000. This Congress has many concerns where it needs to focus on budgetary concerns, but let us not forget the needs of America's small businesses.

The more we do to help small businesses, the more jobs they create for local residents in New York and across the country. Small businesses in America create almost seven out of 10 new jobs. We need to keep those small businesses and the people working.

THE REPUBLICAN-DUBAI PORT DEAL

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

Mr. STUPAK. Madam Speaker, the United Arab Emirates port deal is nothing new from the Bush administration. Over the past 5 years, President Bush has mastered back-room deals and secrecy, but now his administration's actions are threatening our homeland security. The United Arab Emirates deal was approved by the Bush administration despite national security concerns raised by both the Department of Homeland Security and the United States Coast Guard.

The bipartisan 9/11 Commission has identified America's seaports as particularly vulnerable to attacks because only 6 percent of all cargo containers are screened. The world's busiest port, Hong Kong, can screen 100 percent of their containers. Why can we not do it here at home?

The Bush administration shares responsibility with Republicans here in Congress for the vulnerabilities that now exist at our ports. Democrats listened to the Coast Guard and we listened to the 9/11 Commission, and we tried to increase funding for port security.

House Republicans have opposed these efforts despite the fact the Coast Guard says they need \$4.6 billion over the next 10 years to properly secure our ports.

Madam Speaker, Republican rhetoric on homeland security is not enough. It is time for action. Put Democrats in charge, and we will get 100 percent container inspection, and we will have real port security in this country.

AMERICA'S ECONOMY IS BOOMING

(Mrs. BLACKBURN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam Speaker, our economy is booming. I know that may come as a surprise to some of our colleagues across the aisle, and certainly to some of the mainstream media. But our unemployment rate is now at 4.7 percent, and that is lower than the average unemployment rate in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. Yes, lower than each of those decades.

And where are the headlines that would praise the smart tax plan that helped to get us there? In January, America created 193,000 new jobs. That is 2 million new jobs in just over the past year.

4.7 million new jobs in the past 30 months. Republicans are not going to play I-told-you-so, but it is pretty obvious that the tax reductions passed in 2003 helped Americans dig out of a recession and get back to work. We will keep on pushing that sort of fair, flatter, simpler tax code that Main Street

America needs to keep creating great jobs.

CELEBRATING THE 45TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEACE CORPS

(Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. MCCOLLUM of Minnesota. Madam Speaker, 45 years ago today, President Kennedy created the Peace Corps, saying: "It will not be easy. None of the men or women will be paid a salary. They will live at the same level as the citizens of the country to which they are sent, doing the same work, eating the same food, speaking the same language."

On this anniversary, let us celebrate the service of the more than 180,000 brave Americans who have answered President Kennedy's call to service and served our Nation and the world as Peace Corps volunteers.

In 1961, President Kennedy made peace a priority, and peace must remain a priority for our Nation. So for their commitment of hope, friendship and peace, I applaud the nearly 7,800 Americans, including almost 200 Minnesotans who are currently proudly serving as Peace Corps volunteers.

The service of these volunteers and all of the returned Peace Corps volunteers make America proud.

Happy Birthday Peace Corps.

AN EASY MATH EQUATION

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

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the positive economic news that continues to pour in. These new numbers demonstrate that Republicans' pro-growth economic policies are working.

January's unemployment rate fell to 4.7 percent, which is the lowest monthly rate since 2001, and lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. There have been 29 consecutive months of job gains. The economy has created over 2 million jobs over the past 12 months.

Real household net worth is at \$51.1 trillion, an all-time high. And finally the Commerce Department just reported that the GDP grew at a 1.6 percent rate in the fourth quarter, up from an original estimate of 1.1 percent.

This encouraging economic news is proof that lower taxes, plus restrained Federal spending, equals economic growth. However, this is a math equation that Democrats just cannot seem to grasp. Perhaps it is because they keep trying to substitute new variables: taxing plus spending will never equal economic growth and prosperity.

However, the Republican formula of lower taxes plus restrained Federal spending will always come out in favor of the American taxpayers and their checkbooks.