

who are retired will decline sharply in the near future.

Two vehicles are used to fund this wild spending. First, the Federal Reserve creates dollars out of thin air and purchases Treasury bills without limit, a very nice convenience.

Second, foreign entities, mostly central banks, own \$1.5 trillion of our debt. They purchased over \$200 billion in just the last 12 months, increasing their holdings by 15 percent. This is a consequence of our current account deficit and the outsourcing of more and more American manufacturing jobs. Few economists argue that this arrangement can continue much longer.

Excessive spending, a rapidly growing national debt, the Federal Reserve inflation machine, and foreign borrowing all put pressure on the dollar. Unless we treat our addiction to debt, it will play havoc with the dollar, undermine our economic well-being, and destroy our liberties. It is time for us to get our house in order.

#### EVALUATING HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS IN THE AMERICAN MINING INDUSTRY

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

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Education and the Workforce Committee had a subcommittee hearing dealing with the mine safety issues around the recent tragedies that happened in the Sago mine disaster in January of this year. Unfortunately, that hearing was arbitrarily gavelled to adjournment at a time before members could have exercised their rights to ask questions of the witnesses that were there from the Mine Safety Administration, the United Mine Workers, and the mine association of the companies.

Had we had the opportunity without the arbitrary adjournment of the hearing, we would have tried to ask the Mine Safety Administration how they have come to delay and weaken and scrap the 18 regulations that were put forth to protect the miners in the coal mining industry of this Nation and, in fact, regulations that may very well have been able to save the miners, the 12 miners who died in the Sago mine disaster. But we were not allowed to ask that question because of the adjournment by the chairman of the committee.

We would have asked them whether or not they have ignored the requirements of the law that no standard put in place be less protective than the existing standard, as they have continued to chisel away at the safety standards for the miners working in deep coal mines of this Nation, meeting our energy demands for this Nation, for the miners and their families, who every day make the decision to go into the mines in this hazardous occupation.

We would have also asked them whether or not, when they see the fail-

ure of the regulations to protect these miners, whether or not this shift of enforcement and the loss of enforcement personnel to a compliance assistance philosophy to work voluntarily with the mining companies, whether or not that led to this mine accident, especially when this particular mine, the Sago mine, had 208 violations in 2005.

It is clear that the owners were interested in maximizing their profits and not complying with safety laws, and it is clear that the penalty system that we have in place does not deter repeat violations, because the Sago mine had many repeat violations, serious violations of the safety rules dealing with combustible gases in the mine and the protection of these miners.

We would have also tried to ask them whether or not they felt that Congress had exercised its oversight authority, since this was the first oversight hearing on mine safety in 5 years.

We would have also asked them to stop shutting out the public in the decision-making process. We would have asked the administration to open up all of its records, including the inspector's notes, to public scrutiny around the Sago mine disaster so that we can be able to do the work to determine whether or not we could have prevented this disaster that took these lives.

We also would have made sure that they would have put in place common-sense rules dealing with the ability to communicate with the miners who were in the mine. We now think we are learning that it might have been possible for those miners to walk out of the mine had they known where they were and had we been able to communicate with them. And while communications devices are available, they are used in some American mines, they are used in some Canadian mines, they are used in Australian mines, they are not very well used, if at all, in the U.S. coal mining industry; and yet the government has done nothing to try to push this technology so we could have had communications with these miners.

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Also the idea of locators, so that we would have been able to send a message to these miners about what their situation was and what they might have done to prolong their lives, because we now know they were down in that mine for a very long time waiting to be rescued, but that did not happen.

As we heard from Amber Helms, the 23-year-old daughter of Terry Helms, who died in the explosion, he died in the explosion, she asked us why if she can set up a Web page in her computer, if we can communicate to the solar system, if we can communicate around the world, why couldn't we have communicated to her father and those other men down in that mine that lost their lives?

Why wasn't this put in place when the cost of the items to protect their

lives ranged from apparently \$20 to \$200? It means nothing in terms of the profits of these mines, the revenues they generate and the overriding concern for the safety of their miners.

But, no, we didn't have a chance to ask these questions, because after one round of questioning, the chairman decided that enough was enough, that we were not going to have the opportunity to ask the Mine Safety Administration, Where have you been for 5 years on the issue of rescue chambers in mines and the protection of these miners, and when are their families going to get these answers?

Well, they didn't get them today, and apparently they are not going to get them from the Congress for a very long time.

This Congress has been blind to the need to maintain even the protections that already exist under the law. It was not long ago that some members of our committee, including its former chairman, were actively seeking legislation to abolish MSHA and NIOSH and to cut back critical enforcement provisions.

Under that legislation, 3 out of the 4 mandatory annual inspections at every underground mine would have been eliminated. Inspectors would have needed a warrant before entering mine property. Only miners in unionized mines would have had the right to accompany inspectors as they examined the mine. The circumstances in which an inspector could shut down an unsafe section of a mine would have been restricted. Mine operators would not have had to pay fines for typical citations as long as the hazards were abated. And on and on.

That legislation was defeated. But that apparently hasn't deterred Administration officials from trying to gut MSHA anyway. Now they're just dismantling it and taking it out the back door, where they think no one is watching. Well, we are watching, and legislation must be enacted to ensure that changes are made, changes that make the safety and health of these mine workers a priority, and that prevent the industry from being allowed to get away with further abuses.

I want to commend my colleagues, Congressman RAHALL of West Virginia, and the West Virginia delegation, for their prompt hearings and action on these issues. On February 1st, they introduced H.R. 4695, the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 2006, which enhances and reinforces the original purpose of the landmark Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, as amended by the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977. This legislation is a vital step in this process, and an effort that I am hoping will be a catalyst for change.

Amber's testimony, and the powerful and courageous testimony provided by all

The witnesses at the forum is documented on DVD. I strongly urge all members of this subcommittee to watch the footage of the forum, and the incredibly important questions

posed by these witnesses, questions that have unfortunately, been asked before, but that have not been answered, not by the administration, and not by MSHA. As Amber said:

I understand that nothing that I say today or nothing that happens in the future is going to bring my Dad back. But my Uncle Johnny, my Uncle Mike, my cousin Rocky, as well as every other miner that is underground and every other son who's getting ready to go into the coal mines—because that's where the jobs are in West Virginia and maybe some of these other states—we can prevent their families from going through this.

We owe it to Amber and every other American who has lost a loved one in a mining accident to learn what more we can do to make mines safer. And then, just as Amber says, we must take action to prevent more families from going through the hell that she has had to go through.

#### CELEBRATING THE INDEPENDENCE OF TEXAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on March 2, 1839, the Republic of Texas declared its independence on the banks of the Brazos River, which eventually gave rise to the great Lone Star State. Tomorrow, in honor of this historic event in Texas and American history, we will celebrate Texas Independence Day.

I am proud to say that part of this great story of freedom, independence and democracy took place in the 10th Congressional District of Texas, the district I am proud to say I represent.

Texas Independence Day marks a time when today's Texans honor and celebrate the work and sacrifice of Texans many generations ago, people who heroically claimed their freedom from Mexico and sought out their own destiny governed by the laws of a true democracy, a constitution written by the people and the colors of their country's flag waving over what would become the free and independent Republic of Texas.

Between 1820 and 1836, the Mexican Government offered Americans the opportunity to live and work in Texas under Mexican rule, but they grew disheartened by the tyranny and depression. In the Steven F. Austin Colony, which was the first colony, Texans first established a provisional government in 1835 with the intention of writing a declaration of independence soon after. However, the Mexican army was intent on destroying any move toward Texas independence, and the Consultation of 1835, as it was known, adjourned without the organization needed to continue the cause for freedom.

Less than a year later, many of the same delegates present at the Consultation of 1835 arrived along the banks of the Brazos River in the town of Washington, just north of the Austin Colony, which is now Austin County.

By the spring of 1836, the encroachments on Texans' basic freedoms had reached a flash point. On March 1, 1836, 59 delegates hailing from all corners of Texas arrived at the village of Washington along the Brazos River to decide the principles they would invoke in claiming their freedom from Mexico.

There, these brave men drafted the language that would declare their independence from Mexico, and they did so knowing full well that they may have to pay the ultimate price for freedom. As the delegates along the Brazos River wrote the Texas declaration of independence, patriots like Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and William Travis fought and died for Texas freedom at the Alamo.

After successfully gaining independence from Mexico, Republic of Texas President Sam Houston in 1842 moved the Republic's capital to the birthplace of Texas, Washington on the Brazos River. Three years later, by an act of the United States Congress, Texas was made part of the American Union and became the 28th State of the United States of America.

There can be no argument about the Lone Star State's significant contributions to American history, and we must remember the actions and the sacrifices of those who made Texas independence a reality.

Washington on the Brazos represents an historic event that took place long ago, but tonight we remember Washington on the Brazos as the place where the proud Republic of Texas was born with the desire for freedom and an undying spirit of democracy.

Today, we see that same spirit and determination for freedom and democracy in our fighting men and women overseas and in the people and countries they have liberated. As with the first Texans, those people in distant lands know what it means to be liberated from tyranny and drink from the cup of freedom. They, too, will succeed and flourish in a free and democratic society.

#### PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETERANS

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I have spoken many times from this podium, over 130 times actually, about the moral imperative of bringing our troops home from Iraq. With sectarian strife reaching a bloody, violent high in Iraq last week, it is clear that our military presence is doing more harm than good. But for many of our Iraq veterans, even an immediate end to the occupation would be too late to spare them a possible lifetime of physical and psychological damage.

Much is made, and with good reason, of the physical wounds suffered in combat, but even those who return home physically unharmed often face terri-

fying demons. Even the toughest, bravest and best trained soldiers are not immune to devastating trauma, the result of daily exposure to danger and unspeakable carnage. These demons must be addressed, and they must be addressed medically in order for many soldiers to return to normal, productive lives.

But the Washington Post reports today that not enough veterans are getting the mental health care they need. One-third of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are seeking mental health services, and the great majority of those who are diagnosed with psychiatric problems are going untreated.

It is a budget problem and it is a diagnostic problem. Given the nature of the war in Iraq, we must adjust the official standards for what constitutes trauma and, thus, what qualifies veterans for subsidized treatment.

Because the combat danger in Iraq is anywhere and everywhere, many, many of our troops are exposed to conditions that lead to mental distress. As one psychiatrist at Walter Reed explained, "There is no front line in Iraq, and everyone in a convoy is a target." Steve Robinson, head of the National Gulf War Research Center, told the Post that there are few sanctuaries in Iraq. "Every place," he said, "is a war zone."

Meanwhile, it seems the Department of Veterans Affairs is poorly equipped to deal with this situation. Today's Washington Post article cites budget constraints and worries that the Department won't be able to handle the huge influx of returning soldiers in need of mental health treatment.

But who caused those budget constraints? Certainly it wasn't our troops in Iraq who foolishly promised that we could fight a quarter-of-a-trillion-dollar war and dole out billions of dollars of tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. It wasn't our troops who twisted arms to pass this Medicare Part D boondoggle, which is subsidizing the drug companies and the insurance interests while leaving seniors to wrestle with a bewildering bureaucracy.

Is there any reason why we couldn't have anticipated an enormous demand for Iraq-related mental health services? Of course there wasn't. Couldn't we have included enough money into the war supplemental bills this body has passed? Couldn't we have sacrificed other budgetary handouts and goodies, the ones that benefit people who haven't offered a fraction of the sacrifice for their country that our Iraq veterans have?

I guess if you assumed that our troops would be greeted in Iraq as liberators and if you assumed that we would be in and out of Iraq in a flash, you never got the got to the point where you worried about the mental health of returning veterans.

Once again we see the disastrous, tragic consequences of failed planning and poor execution of this war.