

There was no objection.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, last week, Army General George Casey, the top American military commander in Iraq, presented civilians leaders here at home with a plan for sharply reducing the number of U.S. troops in Iraq for September of this year.

According to reports, General Casey shared his plan with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Peter Pace; and even President Bush himself.

The idea of an actual plan for how to end the war in Iraq is something that many of us in Congress have been calling for over the last several months and years. General Casey's plan reportedly suggests reducing our troop presence by as much as 60 percent. But, unfortunately, without a plan about how best to accomplish bringing our troops home, a plan to protect the safety and ensure the safety of 135,000 American soldiers, this could haphazardly actually endanger the remaining 40,000 to 50,000 soldiers and leave them behind as sitting ducks.

Mr. Speaker, I have been calling for the President to present a plan for bringing our troops home since December of 2005; and in May of last year, when we held the first debate on Iraq on the House floor after the beginning of the war itself, 128 Members of the House, more than one-third of the Members of the House of Representatives, agreed that the President needed to come up with a plan for bringing our troops home and share it with the appropriate congressional committees.

Today, more than a year later and with the majority of the American people agreeing that this senseless war needs to end as soon as possible, that number would be surely higher.

The idea that the President invaded a country in the very first place without a strategic goal in mind and without a plan for how to win and how to leave is absolutely incomprehensible. And no one should confuse the Bush administration's tired old line about staying the course for an actual plan or a strategy. Lines like "we will stay in Iraq until the job gets done" are nothing more than trite slogans.

What most Americans and nearly all Iraqis understand is that open-ended U.S. military presence in Iraq does not serve either Americans or Iraqis. The very perception that we plan to stay in Iraq permanently at any level is one of the greatest catalysts spurring the Iraqi insurgency. Just yesterday, 11 Sunni insurgent groups publicly stated that they would immediately halt all terrorist attacks in Iraq, including those against American troops, if the United States would publicly commit to leaving within the next 2 years.

It is clear that the time is long overdue to bring our troops home. For goodness sakes, the American people are for this. The Iraqis are for this. Why can't Congress be for this? Is it not time we caught up with the people we are supposed to be working for?

Every week, every day, every hour we stay in Iraq is costing us dozens of American and Iraqi lives, hundreds of physical and psychological wounds, and billions of dollars. Let us send a message to our troops, let us send a message to the rest of the world that the values of diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and respect for others' freedoms are the paramount American values, the qualities we stand for as a Nation, not endless war and certainly not the occupation of a sovereign people.

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Since the beginning of the war, President Bush has said we would leave Iraq as soon as the military commanders on the ground told him it was time to do so. Well, now the highest-ranking military leader in Iraq has presented a plan for bringing our troops home. For the sake of our soldiers, their families and the people of the United States and Iraq, it is time for the President to keep his end of the bargain, but, Mr. Speaker, not without a plan, one presented to the Congress. He didn't have a plan going into the war, he didn't have a plan to win the war, but he must have a plan leaving the war. Otherwise, our troops will once again be under great danger.

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

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

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

#### REUNITING MISSING CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand tonight and thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for passing H.R. 4416, a bill I introduced to help missing children be reunited with their families. Let me first begin by thanking Chairman TOM DAVIS and Ranking Member WAXMAN for reporting this measure out of the House Committee on Government Reform. I would also like to thank Chairman Ehlers for the role that he and the Committee on House Administration have played in moving this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, my bill will permanently authorize the use of official franked and penalty mail to assist in the location of missing and exploited children. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita opened many eyes to the undeniable reality that faces so many of America's most vulnerable. In the aftermath of those disasters, TV screens across the country aired photographs and other information about missing children throughout the gulf region. Fortunately, in the days and months since, the children missing as a result of these hurricanes have been reunited with their families, and that is very good news.

However, one thing remains clear. This Congress should take every reasonable step available to help families, not only those from the gulf coast but all across America be reunited with their loved ones that have been missing. My bill represents one step in that effort.

I have reviewed this matter at great length in the course of my work as ranking member of the Committee on House Administration and as a member of the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards. In my judgment, the congressional frank presents an ideal opportunity to distribute information about missing and exploited children in addition to being an effective way for Members to communicate with their constituents about our important work.

Beginning in 1985 and for a period of 3 years, section 3220 of title 39 of the U.S. Code authorized the use of Federal penalty mail to assist in U.S. Department of Justice efforts to locate and recover missing children. Congress subsequently reauthorized this law three times for various lengths of time, but the last reauthorization expired 4 years ago, and unfortunately it has not been renewed or extended.

This program, which is entirely voluntary, has been a joint effort between the Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. By permanently authorizing this legislation, we are providing Federal agencies and the United States Congress with the opportunity to help in the recovery of missing and exploited children throughout this country.

Under the provisions of my bill, biographical data and pictures of children featured in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's photo distribution program can be included in various categories of official Federal Government mail.

According to the center, one in six of these featured children is recovered as a direct result of someone in the general public recognizing the child in the picture and notifying authorities. The U.S. Postal Service reports that in fiscal year 2005, U.S. Government agencies mailed over 1.3 billion pieces of penalty mail. If only 50 percent of this mail had included a picture and biographical sketch of one of the more

than 797,000 children currently reported as missing, there would have been over 708 million chances of a missing child being identified and reunited with his or her family.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to include in the RECORD a letter that I received from the president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Mr. Ernie Allen, urging reauthorization of this program and emphasizing its value and importance.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important piece of legislation that Congress has supported for almost 20 years. I am grateful that this body will continue that support by the passing of my bill on Monday so that we can do our part to help bring these children home safely.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING &  
EXPLOITED CHILDREN,

Alexandria, VA, March 24, 2006.

Hon. JUANITA MILLENDER-MCDONALD,  
Rayburn House Office Building,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE MILLENDER-MCDONALD: On behalf of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children ("NCMEC"), I am writing to commend you for introducing H.R. 4416, a bill to reauthorize the use of official and franked mail to assist in the location and recovery of missing children.

NCMEC can attest to the fact that distributing photos of missing children is extremely successful. We began our photo distribution program in 1984 and now have 345 public and private partners. We are pleased to report that one out of every six missing children in our program has been recovered as a direct result of the photo being recognized by a member of the public. We are grateful to the members of Congress and executive branch offices that have chosen to join us in our efforts over the years.

Thank you for your initiative in continuing this program that has proven to be a valuable tool in the search for missing children.

Sincerely,

ERNIE ALLEN,  
President.

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

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

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

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

#### CALLING FOR INCREASE IN MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the house for 5 minutes and to claim the gentleman from Illinois' time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. KAPTUR. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, people who work full time should not live in poverty. Yet America's minimum wage has been set at \$5.15 for the last decade, while the costs of housing, health care, education and gasoline have skyrocketed. This stagnant wage represents a decline in purchasing power for the working class, so great that it is at its lowest value in a half a century when adjusted for inflation.

The Democrats have a proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 over the next 2 years. The Republican leadership of this Chamber, however, saw fit to block this legislation from reaching the House floor for a vote. Ironically, that Republican majority then voted to raise their own pay.

Last week, I voted once again to block the automatic pay raises for Congress, called cost-of-living adjustments. Don't those at the low end of the pay scale deserve more than those at the very top? Don't they deserve more attention? My office has been flooded with letters and emails urging the increase in the minimum wage. Some of my constituents write because they are struggling to pay their bills with minimum-wage salaries. Others are earning more than the minimum wage, but promote the increase, anyway, as they realize this is also a moral issue. Yes, people who work should not live in poverty.

One of my constituents wrote me a series of questions that I believe my Republican colleagues who are opposed to increasing the minimum wage could benefit from hearing. One constituent asked: "How do you distinguish between the working poor and their need for a raise and Congress' need for a raise?"

Another: "Do you ever decide not to go to an event because you have to make your auto's gas last until the end of the week?"

Or: "When your child is sick, do you look at your budget to see where the \$20 copay for the prescription is going to come from?"

Or: "When I get an extra \$50, I put it towards my running bill at the VA for my prescriptions. Basic needs. What are Members of Congress going to do with their raise?"

The American people are asking.

Frankly, they should turn them down and let them be given to those who need the help. Unfortunately, millions of Americans are faced with vital decisions daily, things too many Members of Congress take for granted. These Americans are among the working poor with full-time jobs earning \$5.15 an hour. Millions fall into this boat, even more when you consider that the poverty line has not been adequately adjusted to reflect the true level of poverty in this country.

My Republican colleagues who are against the minimum wage cannot identify with that struggle. Opponents argue the market should dictate wages.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know the market works very imperfectly. They favor those with capital and those who inherit it, even with no work of their own. A market where chief executive officers make 262 times that of the average worker and 821 times that of the minimum-wage worker is not a market that is working well. And it is surely not working well enough to build a solid middle class.

This same erroneous argument of letting the market dictate has been used to tout the value of flawed trade agreements like CAFTA and NAFTA. These lopsided agreements have been structured in a way to favor capital over workers across borders, outsourcing more of our jobs and putting a crushing downward squeeze on the middle class and on keeping the minimum wage at rock bottom.

Trade agreements that do not have protections for workers are fueling the influx of immigrants into our country. These workers do not necessarily prefer America to their home country. It is just that these poor trade agreements have really wiped out their livelihoods, and they are fleeing to the United States. These workers are willing, due to dire circumstances, to work for sub-minimum wages which in turn depresses all wages in our country.

People who go to work every day and perform the services essential to keeping our economy functioning deserve to live above the poverty level. America is the richest nation in the world. It should be able to pay a living wage and build a middle class for those who hold the least in society. We need to reward work itself, or it will lose its value. The definition of opportunity in this country will lose its value. We should follow our conscience and raise the minimum wage.

I ask those who are listening in this Chamber and elsewhere to write their Member of Congress and urge an increase in the minimum wage in our country from \$5.15 an hour to \$7.25 an hour over the next 2 years. It is the right thing to do.

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to address their remarks to the Chair.

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

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

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

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