

break the sound barrier many times over in heavier-than-air, high-powered aircraft defying, it seems, the very forces of gravity and transcending the previously incontrovertible dimensions of human capacity. Even at this very moment, the Air Force is working to defend our assets in a new frontier of national security: space itself.

Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 60th anniversary of the year in which the United States Air Force became an official separate military service within the Department of Defense. Since then, the ability to protect the forces of freedom all over the world through flight in air, space, and cyberspace has transformed warfare in a way that perhaps only can be truly appreciated by the enemies of liberty.

Air power was born through the courage and resilience with which our noble men and women in the Air Force overcame in the crucibles of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. And today the courageous airmen and women of this generation are shaping history still as the enemies of liberty feel the just fury of the Air Force in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The U.S. Air Force has risen to meet the challenge of international terrorism by attaining a new level of technological capability to surveil a battle space virtually encompassing the entire planet.

Mr. Speaker, I have the precious honor of representing the Second Congressional District of Arizona, which includes Luke Air Force Base, a vital strategic asset to our national security and the largest fighter wing in the United States Air Force. Luke Air Force Base trains over 95 percent of all U.S. Air Force F-16 pilots and over 50 percent of all U.S. fighter pilots. The commanders at Luke are entrusted with the solemn mission of effectively equipping the Nation's greatest F-16 pilots and maintainers to be deployed as mission-ready war fighters. It is a center and symbol of excellence to the Air Force and a beacon of courage, honor, military strategy, and effectiveness for our armed services throughout America.

As the Nation commends 60 years of noble and selfless service in the cause of the freedom and security of these United States, it is an honor for me to stand here on the floor of the United States House of Representatives and thank Luke Air Force Base and the entire United States Air Force for their selfless dedication and their commitment to the cause of human freedom. None of us can ever fully convey the gratitude that we owe to these warriors who have answered liberty's call to service and sacrifice.

So, Mr. Speaker, may I pause this moment and offer my deepest and heartfelt gratitude, and that of the entire Nation, to the gallant men and women of the United States Air Force who have now, for these 60 years, borne upon their noble wings of freedom the cause of America and the hope of humanity.

God bless them all, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

□ 2245

THE POLARIZATION OF WASHINGTON: FACTIONALISM IN AMERICAN POLITICS

THE SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ALTMIRE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me this time and recognizing me. Just so folks who are here can kind of plan on their evening, I don't intend to go more than a half an hour, but there are some things that have been on my mind that I wanted to talk about.

In 2004, we passed a law that every school or college that receives Federal dollars must teach about the Constitution on September 17, the day the Constitution was adopted. We call this Constitution Day, or Citizens Day.

I found myself thinking about this from the perspective of my witnessing what is taking place in Iraq, where they're wrestling with their constitution. And so I found myself thinking that we can learn a lot about ourselves and our great Nation by looking at one of the world's oldest civilizations and its people, a people struggling under the most difficult circumstances to construct a governing constitution that will allow them to unite their nation, survive and prosper.

In my first visit to Iraq in April of 2003, I literally had to sneak into the seaport city of Um Qasr near the Kuwait border. The State Department was helping me, but the Department of Defense was trying to track me down and stop me from entering this historic land. As I approached the border, the British guards at the gates were asking for identification. My Save the Children driver, talking with DoD officials by satellite phone, was cooperating with them as little as possible, and I sat quietly in the Land Rover's front seat feeling like an anxious prisoner trying to gain my freedom by escaping into Iraq, not trying to get out.

We did get into this land of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, and so began my first of 18 trips seeking to exercise my constitutional responsibility of congressional oversight over a reluctant executive branch.

The irony of this experience was not lost on me. Here I was trying to fulfill my responsibility as the chairman of the National Security Subcommittee of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, with specific jurisdiction over both the Departments of Defense and State, and one of these Departments, Defense, was trying to prevent me from exercising that responsibility, and the other, State, was trying to help me carry it out.

So why would we want such oversight? The reality is, if more Members

of Congress had done proper oversight and gone to Iraq, abuses like Abu Ghraib never would have happened. Some Members would have toured the facility, and one of the soldiers in that dysfunctional Reserve unit would have quietly approached a Member and said, Sir or Ma'am, I don't know the first thing about being a prison guard, and by the way, some pretty bad stuff is going on here. The Members of Congress would more than likely have waited until the soldier left, and then asked some tough questions of the supervisors and demanded to see all of the facility. If he or she had gotten any "push back," they would have come home asking even more questions, and the military would have been forced to look into the issue and take corrective action before things got out of hand.

Abu Ghraib was about a military unit run amuck. With proper oversight, the abuses would have been easy to correct and been corrected without a lot of fanfare or publicity. The press would not have had a story, our Nation's reputation wouldn't have been in question, and a primary recruitment cry of al Qaeda would never have existed.

As it was, Abu Ghraib happened. The press ran the story, with little obligation or inclination to contain it, particularly after part of it was out. Al-Jazeera and al Qaeda used it to inflame the Muslim world, and hundreds of American soldiers, sailors, marines and air men and women died as a result.

In our Constitution, there are checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches, but the fourth estate, the press, is on its own. Our Founding Fathers knew the tension between the legislative and executive branches makes both branches perform better, our country stronger, and our people safer. The fact is, the failure of the first Republican Congress to consistently do aggressive oversight hurt the President, his administration, the country and helped them elect a new Democratic Congress.

The first year I traveled primarily outside the umbrella of the military, staying in places like Um Qasr, Basrah, Al Kut, Arbil, Sulaymaniyah and Khanagin. That year turned out to be an undeniable disaster. Regrettably, the President sided with Defense and Rumsfeld. State and Colin Powell were put on the sideline. Paul Bremer was brought in to rule as a dictator, and I saw firsthand the result of such a government. The voice of everyday Iraqis was not being heard, and predictably one bad decision piled on another.

Following the faithful decision to arbitrarily disband their police, border patrol and army, as I traveled outside the umbrella of the military, I was continually asked by everyday Iraqis, why are you putting my neighbor, why are you putting my uncle, why are you putting my brother, why are you putting my cousin, my nephew, my father, my son, why are you putting my husband out of work? Why can't he at

least guard a hospital? That question still haunts me to this day. You see, Wilfredo Perez, Jr. of Norwalk, the first Fourth Congressional District casualty, was killed guarding a hospital.

I found myself asking, why did we leave 26 million Iraqis no indigenous security in a country larger than New England? Why did we put so many Iraqis out of work, leaving the general population completely defenseless and in the process endangering all our troops?

Yes, one thing is clear. During the first year, the voices of the people of Iraq were never heard. They had no representation, their dictator wasn't even an Iraqi, but an American who had no real sense of their wants and fears, and certainly no sensitivity to their culture. If only we had listened in the beginning and allowed Iraqis, not us, to shape their future.

Their anger was palpable. Americans, if you are here as our guests, you are welcome forever. If you are here as occupiers, we will fight you to the death.

When we transferred power to Iraqis in June of 2004 and allowed them to establish their own government, they, and we, saw what turned out to be 18 months of tangible progress. To their immense credit, in January of 2005 they elected a transitional government, wrote their constitution, ratified that constitution in an October plebiscite, and just 3 months later elected a government under their new constitution.

The year 2006, however, was another matter. The Samarra bombing ignited sectarian violence. It took 4 months just to form the Maliki government. And once in power, Prime Minister Maliki, particularly in the early stages, lacked the political will to get things done.

With this small margin of supporters and belief that the government needed to be more deliberate and not rush the tough decisions, it has been difficult for Iraqis to find common ground based on our timeline on when things need to get done.

But before we become too self-righteous about what Iraqis have done or should have done, it cannot be lost on any of us that our Constitution was preceded by the Articles of Confederation, and 13 years, from 1776 to 1789, of blood, sweat and toil. And even then, we did not get it perfect. If you were black, you were most likely a slave and two-thirds a person. In fact, dialogue about the issue of slavery and how to deal with it was such a non-starter, it wasn't even discussed.

As an American history major in college, I truly loved studying about our Federalist era. I marvel at how so many great men found themselves in one place with such a difficult and monumental task: build a Nation, establish a democracy, create a Republic. We are seeing Iraqis faced with a similar challenge. The meetings of our Founding Fathers in Philadelphia were filled with passion, courage, devotion,

great intellect, humor, optimism, experience, and most importantly, a willingness to take chances, build trust, and compromise for a common goal and a greater good.

There was George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, and of course Connecticut's own Roger Sherman, to name a few. Thomas Jefferson was absent, but he was not absent when it came to the Bill of Rights, demanding its inclusion if Virginia was to be part of the Union.

I haven't identified an Iraqi George Washington, Madison or Franklin, nor have I seen in the Iraqi governing council the dynamics found at our own Nation's Constitutional Convention.

The tension between Virginia and New Englanders seems like child's play compared to the ethnic gravitation of the Kurds towards autonomy, and even more significantly, the sectarian conflict between Shias and Sunnis. One thing is clear to me: while Iraqis wrestle with sectarian violence, they do not wrestle with their nationality identity. They know who they are. They are Iraqis, people of two great rivers, descendants of the Fertile Crescent, where, as they tell me, it all began.

So when I ask an Iraqi, Are you Sunni? They reply, Yes, I'm a Sunni, but I'm married to a Shia. Or when I ask, Are you a Shia? They often respond, I'm a Shia, but my tribe is Sunni, or my son or daughter is married to a Sunni.

In the United States, I am constantly being told Iraq is not a real country. But when I'm in Iraq, I am told, We are Iraqis. We are the cradle of Western civilization. Your roots come from us. We may be Sunni or Shia, but we are all Iraqis. This point was emphasized to me by an Iraqi intern who worked in my office during the 2006 summer. He told me he never thought or identified himself as a Sunni. He always thought of himself as an Iraqi until his family in Baghdad became threatened by Shia militia and sought refuge among other Sunnis. This is not an irrelevant point.

When it comes to the creation of a diverse nation, sectarian and nationalistic tendencies can break a country apart. It was not at all certain our 13 colonies would form a perfect union, but fortunately patriotism trumped nationalism, regional and sectarian tendencies lurking beneath the surface.

While Iraqis don't seem to have the optimism or experience to govern, they have the passion, humor, intellect, devotion and courage that would match the bravest of any of our patriots. As an example, I think of Mithal al Alusi, whose meeting with me in my Washington office a few years back after his two college-age sons were killed 2 months earlier during an attempt on his life. Mithal had attended a conference of Muslims, Christians and Jews in Israel, and upon return to Iraq was taken off the Supreme National De-Ba'athification Commission and stripped of his security. There were already two attempts on his life before

the third, which killed his only children. The assassins have made it clear they will not stop trying to kill him until he is dead.

So there he was, sitting in my office, a truly marked man, and I said to him, Mr. al Alusi, you cannot go home. I will do everything I can to enable you to stay in the United States, to which he replied, in true disbelief, I can't leave Iraq, my country needs me.

A year later, I visited Mithal in the so-called government's Green Zone, where we found him a place to live so at least in his home he and his wife could be safe.

□ 2300

During this visit, I noticed there were no pictures of any family members, so I asked him if he would show me a picture of his two sons. He brought out an 8-by-11 color print protected by a thin plastic sheet which he told me he keeps in a file because his wife cannot endure the sadness and pain of looking at her two precious sons. The picture shows Mithal's arms stretched out around both his sons, they are taller than he is, with his head leaning on the shoulder of one of them. It was such a loving image that it breaks my heart to think of it and know that his is not the only Iraqi story of intense devotion, sacrifice and loss.

This great Iraqi patriot, Mithal al Alusi, was elected to the parliament later that year. So how is this new government doing? The Shias, Sunnis and Kurds, in the early stages of government, reminded me of a sixth grade dance where little interaction takes place except for a brave few willing to risk some contact. They interact a lot more now, but as a fledging democracy, the Shias, who constitute 60 percent of the population, understand "majority rule" but struggle with the concept of "minority rights." This struggle over minority rights is the center of their differences. The Shias fear repeating history and losing power to the Sunni minority. They believe if this happens, like in the past, we will not be there to help them. And Sunnis fear having little or no power under an unsympathetic majority. In Iraq, it is easy to advocate for majority rule. They get it. The majority rules. But it is very difficult to explain and advocate for the power and freedom that comes to a nation that protects its minorities and makes sure they are not outside the government but an important part of that government.

As I witnessed democracy take root in this ancient land, I will never take for granted the essential nature of "minority rights." Minority rights is the lubricant that makes the whole system work. Without it, democratic governments would come to a grinding halt.

So we have a people that have spent 4 years and 5 months trying to create the perfect union for themselves. With the death of over 3,780 of our troops and over 12,512 seriously wounded, and the

expenditures of over \$1.5 trillion, we are losing patience with Iraq. Americans feel justified, given the sacrifice of our military and the expenditure of so much money, to lecture Iraqis how they need to get their act together, forgetting they didn't attack us, we attacked them. And then, we proceeded to eliminate their security, all their police, border patrol and army after Saddam, to add insult to injury, had already let out of jail all the criminals throughout Iraq.

One U.S. politician after another berates the Maliki government and the Sunni, Shia and Kurds for their intransigence and failure to work out their differences and find common ground. I can't help but wonder, who are we to talk? When was the last time Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate, White House and Congress, worked together on any major piece of legislation facing our country? The Senate, once again, has only now begun to pass any of its 11 appropriations bills necessary to fund the government. And by the way, the new funding should be done, but won't be, by October 1. We can't even agree in this Chamber on what to do in Iraq. The irony of that is mind-boggling. We blame Iraqis for not agreeing. And we can't agree.

So what about us? When it comes to Iraq, the former Republican Congress was blatantly partisan. The new Democratic Congress has returned the favor. And a very opinionated press, rather than encouraging Republicans and Democrats, the White House and Congress to come together, has picked sides and marshaled the facts to fit their own conclusions.

It is hard to know, I might add, with a press that is accountable to absolutely no one, where you can go to get the unadulterated facts. The reality is we went into Iraq on a bipartisan basis with two-thirds of the House and three-quarters of the Senate supporting the resolution to use force. The only way we are going to successfully bring most of our troops home is if we come together, find common ground, and compromise.

But I don't think this is likely to happen in the near future since both sides of the aisle seem captive to their so-called party's base. The Republican religious right and the Democratic anti-war impeachment left leave most Americans wondering, who is speaking for us? In this highly intense, politically charged environment, the answer is, practically no one.

The largest number of Americans aren't on the right or the left. The bell curve is pretty much in the middle of the political spectrum. In the past Presidential election, 42 percent of the American people said they were neither red nor blue, Republican nor Democrat, but purple. This leaves Republicans and Democrats with just 29 percent support each. Why is this relevant? The majority of Americans are not being heard or represented.

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The extremes focus on ideology and berate the fact that, according to them, the Republicans and Democrats are no different from each other. So they keep pushing extreme positions. But the American people are still in the middle of the political spectrum. They want solutions, not ideology. They want problems solved, not ignored. And they are getting neither.

Our Constitution was created by men who knew the meaning of compromise. During their time together, they grew to trust and respect each other. In the process, they gave up hardened views. They allowed themselves to be drawn to the middle of the political spectrum. In the process, they created the United States of America where the people rule and have ruled for 218 years.

The question that confronts all of us today in Congress is, do we have this same capacity, like our Founding Fathers, to grow to trust and respect each other, give up hardened views and find solutions to the plethora of inconvenient truths that confront us? Of this we can be certain. Now is not the time for Congress and the White House to do nothing. There are so many inconvenient truths we must confront, but we won't successfully address any of them until we have honest debate and until compromise and coming to the middle becomes something Americans value again.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for spending your time with us, and I thank the staff for allowing Members to address this Chamber tonight.

I yield back the balance of my time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois (at the request of Mr. HOYER) for today after 6 p.m.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas (at the request of Mr. HOYER) for today and until 6 p.m. on September 27.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. WOOLSEY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WATERS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. SPRATT, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. FOXX) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. POE, for 5 minutes, October 2.

Mr. JONES of North Carolina, for 5 minutes, October 2.

Ms. FOXX, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CONAWAY, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Member (at her own request) to revise and extend her remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mrs. MALONEY of New York, for 5 minutes, today.

BILL PRESENTED TO THE PRESIDENT

Lorraine C. Miller, Clerk of the House reports that on September 24, 2007 she presented to the President of the United States, for his approval, the following bill:

H.R. 3528. To provide authority to the Peace Corps to provide separation pay for host country resident personal service contractors of the Peace Corps.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 8 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, September 26, 2007, at 10 a.m.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 8 of rule XII, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

3448. A letter from the Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget, transmitting a copy of proposed legislation that seeks to bring the funding structure for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) into line with the funding of other Federal financial regulators by establishing a fee on the settlement of commodity futures and options contracts overseen by the CFTC; to the Committee on Agriculture.

3449. A letter from the Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, Department of Defense, transmitting the Department's final rule — Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement; Limitations on Tiered Evaluation of Offers [DFARS Case 2006-D009] (RIN: 0750-AF36) received September 17, 2007, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Armed Services.

3450. A letter from the Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, Department of Defense, transmitting the Department's final rule — Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement; Reports of Government Property [DFARS Case 2005-D015] (RIN: 0750-AF24) received September 12, 2007, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Armed Services.

3451. A letter from the Deputy Secretary, Department of Defense, transmitting the Department's Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization second quarter report as required by section 1402 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2007; to the Committee on Armed Services.

3452. A letter from the Chief Counsel, FEMA, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Changes in Flood Elevation Determinations — received September 17, 2007, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Financial Services.