

It is also important to support domestic violence shelters. These agencies provide essential services, help advocate for victims, and spearhead efforts to increase domestic violence awareness throughout the country. Tonight I commend those who work every day to help victims of domestic violence, especially those who work in the nine service areas that I am aware of back home in Kansas in my district: Dodge City, Emporia, Garden City, Great Bend, Hays, Hutchinson, Liberal, Salina, and Ulysses.

We must not forget the role Congress has to play. Federal grants made under the Violence Against Women Act provide essential funds for shelter operations and support services. We must ensure that shelters and crisis centers receive sufficient funding to provide this safety net to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, but we must fight domestic violence and address its consequences all year long. Through education, enforcement and support, we can continue working together to break the cycle of domestic violence and bring hope to victims so terribly affected by these acts.

Tonight, I pray for the end of violence within our families and for the healing of those who suffer.

IT IS TIME TO END THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the American people are opposed to the occupation of Iraq. And when I say “the American people,” I am not referring to members of one party or one political persuasion. I am referring to members of both parties who live in every part of our country, in cities and towns big and small.

According to the organization Cities For Progress, approximately 300 States, cities and towns have passed resolutions or referenda opposing the occupation of Iraq. They include places like Kalamazoo, Michigan; Carrboro, North Carolina; Ladysmith, Wisconsin; Butte, Montana; Chicago, Illinois; Guilford, Vermont; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; South Charleston, West Virginia; and Sacramento, California.

They also include 17 States that have either passed a State House or State Senate resolution opposing the occupation or sent letters to Congress signed by large numbers of the State legislature's members. These include the red States of Colorado, North Dakota, and Arizona and the blue States of Minnesota, New Jersey, and Oregon.

In addition, the United States Conference of Mayors has passed a Bring Home the Troops resolution. In their resolutions the cities and towns decry

the terrible loss of life in Iraq. And they describe how the soaring costs of the occupation consume resources that would be much better spent on the needs of local communities.

I want to read portions of a few of these resolutions so that Members of the House can get a sense of the anguish that's out there in the heartland.

The resolution passed by South Charleston, West Virginia, declares that the conflict has “mired American Armed Forces in an internecine, centuries-old conflict of ethnic, cultural, and religious rivalries.” The resolution of the U.S. Conference of Mayors declared that “the continued U.S. military presence in Iraq is reducing Federal funds available for needed domestic investments in education, health care, public safety, homeland security, and more.” The Cincinnati city council echoed that sentiment and said that spending on the occupation “severely lessens the ability of the city of Cincinnati to rebuild its urban core, promote homeownership opportunities in Cincinnati, and provide critical housing services for the poor.” The Chicago city council warned that the occupation has “inflamed anti-American passions in the Muslim world and increased the terrorist threat to United States citizens.” The resolution of Cambridge, Massachusetts, laments the “grievous impact of the loss of lives in the Iraq war on families and communities on both sides of the conflict and the destructive social and economic effects of the war.”

The city of Bellingham, Washington, said that “the killing of civilians is an unspeakable crime against humanity.” The Cleveland city council declared that “the costs to the States of the call-up of National Guard members for deployment in Iraq have been significant, as reckoned in lost lives, combat injuries and physical trauma, disruption of family life and damage to the fabric of civic life in our communities.”

The New Hampshire House of Representatives urged “the President to commence talks with the neighbors in the Middle East and begin the orderly withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq.”

And the Vermont Senate declared that the escalation of the conflict “is exactly the wrong foreign policy direction and the presence of American troops in Iraq has not and will not contribute to the stability of that nation, the region, or the security of Americans.”

More information about these resolutions, Mr. Speaker, can be found on the Web site of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and I urge my colleagues to read these resolutions in their entirety. They represent the true voice of America, the America that has compassion for the people of the world, believes in international cooperation, and knows that restoring our moral leadership is the best way to guarantee our own security and freedom.

Mr. Speaker, the people have spoken. It is time to end the occupation of Iraq.

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.)

ON OUR WATCH

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

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, last evening I came to the House floor to talk about one of the most critical issues facing our Nation today.

Our country's financial outlook is desperate. How do we stop the red ink and the bleeding? How do we come together as Republicans and Democrats and make certain that the American people don't suffer for our out-of-control spending?

I'm talking about entitlements and other mandatory spending. How do we change course? Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security combined with interest on the national debt will consume all of the government's revenue by the year 2026.

According to the GAO, balancing the budget in 2040 would require cutting total Federal spending by 60 percent or raising taxes by 2½ times today's level. Both would devastate the economy.

The longer we wait to get serious about this reality, the harder and more abrupt the adjustments will be for the American people.

I ask every colleague in the House, how will you feel when there isn't enough money for medical research, for cancer research, for Alzheimer's, for Parkinson's, or for autism? How will you feel when you know it was today's Congress, this Congress that we all have the honor to serve in, that passed the buck to the next generation, that avoided the issue, and said it was just too hard?

I'm challenging every Member of this House to come together, to know that while we served in Congress, we did everything in our power to provide the kind of security and way of life for our children and our grandchildren that our parents and our grandparents worked so hard to provide us.

Congressman JIM COOPER, a Democrat from Tennessee, and I have come together because we know what is at stake. We have a bill that we believe is the way forward to help stop the bleeding. And, quite frankly, I would say to my friends on both sides of the aisle the American people desperately want to see us working together, Republicans and Democrats, to deal with these important issues.

The bipartisan SAFE Commission will send its recommendations to Congress. We will have an up-or-down vote

similar to the base closing process, which we now have in effect in the Congress, on getting our financial house in order.

There are other ideas, too. I am inserting Robert Samuelson's op-ed in today's Washington Post. He hits the nail on the head when he talks about the need for bipartisan work, a bipartisan panel, to help us do our job. "Everything else has failed," he says.

I urge you to think about this issue and the real problem we face now. Not an issue for next week or next month or the next Congress but an issue for this Congress. An issue for now.

In the song by Simon and Garfunkel, "The Boxer," it says, "Man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." I urge us to tell the American people not what they want to hear but what they need to hear. And I urge us to come together and work in a bipartisan way for our young people, for our children, for our grandchildren, and for all Americans.

[From the Washington Post, Oct. 3, 2007]

ESCAPING THE BUDGET IMPASSE

(By Robert J. Samuelson)

Almost everyone knows that the next president will have to wrestle with the immense costs of retiring baby boomers. Comes now a small band of Democrats and Republicans who want to do the new president a giant favor. They want to force the new administration to face the problem in early 2009. Why is this a favor? Because dealing with this issue is so politically unsavory that resolving it quickly would be a godsend. Otherwise, it could haunt the White House for four years.

Let's review the problem (again). From 2000 to 2030, the 65-and-over population will roughly double, from 35 million to 72 million, or from about 12 percent of the population to nearly 20 percent. Spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—three big programs that serve the elderly—already represents more than 40 percent of the federal budget. In 2006, these three programs cost \$1.1 trillion, more than twice defense spending. Left on automatic pilot, these programs are plausibly projected to grow to about 75 percent of the present budget by 2030.

Stalemate results because all the ways of dealing with these pressures are controversial. There are only four: (a) massive tax increases—on the order of 30 to 50 percent by 2030; (b) draconian cuts in other government programs (note that the projected increases in Social Security and Medicare, as a share of national income, are more than all of today's domestic discretionary programs); (c) cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—higher eligibility ages or lower benefits for wealthier retirees; or (d) undesirably large budget deficits.

The proposed escape seems at first so drearily familiar and demonstrably ineffective that it's hardly worth discussing: a bipartisan commission. But what would distinguish this commission from its many predecessors is that Congress would have to vote on its recommendations. The political theory is that, presented with a bipartisan package that cannot be amended, most politicians would do what they believe (privately) ought to be done rather than allow pressure groups, including retirees, to paralyze the process.

There is precedent for this approach. Since 1988, Congress has allowed more than 600

military bases and facilities to be closed or streamlined using a similar arrangement. An independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission evaluates the Pentagon's proposed closings and listens to objections. With the president's approval, it then submits its own list, which goes into effect unless vetoed by both houses of Congress. This process provides members of Congress bipartisan "cover" and prevents amendments from weakening the package.

Two prominent proposals would adapt this approach to the budget. The first, offered by Sens. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), the chairman and ranking minority member of the Budget Committee, would create a 16-member commission, evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. All eight Democrats would be from Congress, as would six Republicans. The administration would have two members, including the secretary of the Treasury.

Conrad's notion is that the impasse is political and that only practicing politicians—people with "skin in the game"—can craft a compromise that can be sold to their peers. The commission would report in December 2008. Twelve of its 16 members would have to support the plan, with congressional passage needing 60 percent approval (60 senators, 261 representatives). These requirements, Conrad and Gregg argue, would ensure bipartisan support.

The other proposal comes from Reps. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) and Frank Wolf (R-Va.). It would also create a 16-member commission, with two major differences. First, only four of its members would be from Congress. Second, though Congress would have to vote on the commission's proposal, there would be some leeway for others—including the president—to present alternatives as long as they had the same long-term budget impact. Any proposal, however, would have to be voted on as a package without amendments.

A combination of these plans might work best. A 20-member group would be manageable and should include four outsiders to provide different perspectives and, possibly, to build public support. Perhaps the head of AARP should be included. And it would be a mistake to present the next president with a take-it-or-leave-it package. The Cooper-Wolf plan would allow a new administration to make changes—and get credit—without being able to start from scratch.

This commission approach has potential pitfalls: It might create a face-saving package that does little. But everything else has failed. The main political beneficiary would be the next president. It would be revealing if some of the hopefups—Democrats and Republicans—would show that they grasp this by providing their endorsements. Otherwise, the odds that Congress will even create the commission are slim.

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

(Mr. DEFAZIO 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 South Carolina (Mr. BARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my strong support for enacting a free trade agreement with our strongest ally in Latin America, and that is Colombia.

In May, the House leadership brokered an agreement with the administration to pass the Peru, Colombia, Panama, and South Korea Free Trade Agreements, in that order, Mr. Speaker. And, actually, I am very pleased to see that the House Ways and Means Committee took action this week on the Peru Free Trade Agreement. I think it's a great step in the right direction. However, I am concerned about the apparent lack of support from the House leadership for a Colombia Free Trade Agreement, an agreement that publicly was committed to by the House leadership.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that this Congress pass a Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Excluding our strongest ally in Latin America from preferential trade treatment would send a devastating message to the region. That message would be that if you are a strong ally, the strongest ally of the United States, if you are willing to stand up to anti-American dictators like Mr. Hugo Chavez, and if you are willing to fight the narcoterrorists, this United States Congress will not support you.

A free trade agreement with Colombia would not only help further bolster the Colombian economy and help show our strong support for their efforts in fighting the war on drugs, it would also help the U.S. economy by opening up our business to this huge democracy, this huge export market.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot send the world the message that if you support the United States, if you are willing to stand up even against our enemies, that this United States Congress will not stand with you. Please, let's not slight the Colombian people and their democracy.

I urge the Democratic leadership and the House Ways and Means Committee, Mr. Speaker, to bring forward a Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)