

John Steinbeck, one of our famous native sons, born in Salinas and raised in and around Monterey Bay. At home in my district this month, the National Steinbeck Center will get the whole community to read one book together, "The Grapes of Wrath," one of the best, well-known tomes by Steinbeck.

The book is being read across the country as part of NEA's Big Read program, designed to bring reading for pleasure back into our lives. Since I am a citizen of Monterey County myself, I would like to offer my own participation in this celebration by reading the following passage from "The Grapes of Wrath":

"The people came out of their houses and smelled the hot stinging air and covered their noses from it . . . Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly, for the corn could go, as long as something else remained . . . The children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break . . . After a while, the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But all was all right. The women knew it was all right and the watching children knew it was all right . . . The men sat still—thinking—figuring."

This is Steinbeck at his best.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

U.S. MUST FOCUS EFFORTS IN AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening to discuss more recent developments regarding the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban and al Qaeda seem to be growing in strength, and the evidence shows that they are in the planning stages for a spring offensive.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken on the floor many times about the forgotten war in Afghanistan. It was promising to see the Bush administration finally wake up and bring the issue to the forefront this weekend with Vice President DICK CHENEY making a trip to Af-

ghanistan and Pakistan. I was relieved to hear that Vice President CHENEY was not hurt after a deadly suicide bombing took place near the U.S. military base he was visiting in Afghanistan.

A few hours after the attack, a Taliban official took credit for the tragic bombing and claimed that it was an attack on the Vice President, and this incident only underscores the recent resurgence the Taliban and al Qaeda have seen in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The details of Vice President CHENEY's trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan were kept extremely classified. This is in contrast with last year, when President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice both visited Pakistan with far less secrecy. The increased level of confidentiality for Vice President CHENEY's trip illustrates the growing strength of al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and shows that the administration is obviously aware of the increased dangers that al Qaeda poses in the region.

During his trip to Pakistan, the Vice President apparently delivered a stiff message, as he said, to Pakistani President Musharraf. The administration will not provide details of the encounter between the two leaders, but reports claim that the Vice President warned President Musharraf that American aid to Pakistan could be in jeopardy.

The Vice President is obviously referencing provisions in H.R. 1, a bill crafted by Democrats in Congress, that implements the recommendations of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. These provisions will end U.S. military assistance and armed sales licensing to Pakistan unless the Pakistani President certifies that the Islamabad Government makes all possible efforts to end Taliban activities in Pakistan.

Now, President Musharraf responded to these comments from Vice President CHENEY by claiming that "Pakistan does not accept dictation from any side or any source."

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It is unacceptable though, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, for the Pakistani President to completely disregard the numerous accounts that show al Qaeda training camps flourishing in the western region of his country.

The Pakistani President seems to forget that the U.S. has sent over \$10 billion in aid to Pakistan over the last 5 years alone. It is my opinion that unless President Musharraf takes necessary steps to eradicate al Qaeda training camps in Pakistan, this aid should be put to an end.

It is encouraging to see the Bush administration increase the focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan, but more needs to be done to ensure the Taliban doesn't reach the level of power it achieved prior to the U.S. invasion in 2001. Taliban commanders are already claiming that they have 10,000 fighters

and thousands of suicide bombers at their disposal.

The U.S. and NATO must also work to support local elders in towns such as Musa Qala, where a failed peace deal between town leaders and NATO troops has allowed the Taliban regime to regain control of the town. It is clear that the Taliban has regrouped and that peace deals, such as the one in Musa Qala, are dangerous and cannot be relied upon without proper support from U.S. and NATO troops.

Furthermore, our country must focus the humanitarian assistance we are sending to Afghanistan on rural development efforts that give Afghan farmers an alternative to the illicit opium trade.

Mr. Speaker, President Bush wrongly continues the war in Iraq at the expense of the largely forgotten war in Afghanistan. I urge my colleagues to keep the attention on where the real war on terror is happening, and that is in Afghanistan.

CONGRESSIONAL CONSTITUTION CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ALTMIRE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GARRETT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce and renew our hope to be a regular occurrence on the House floor for the 110th Congress. The members of the Congressional Constitution Caucus will use this opportunity to emphasize for our colleagues and for the Nation as well the necessity of ensuring that our government is operating according to the intent of the our Founding Fathers. As the 10th amendment affirms, the authority over most domestic issues belong to the States and local governments and the people themselves.

But before I begin, let me express my sincere gratitude to my friend Utah who has led this important education effort in the past and this year as well. He has faithfully championed the notion of a limited, effective and efficient Federal Government, and continues to fight for the authority granted to his home State and the other 49 states as well when each was admitted into this most cherished Nation.

I look forward to working with other like-minded Members of this Congress who share the sentiment that our Federal Government has seized control of programs that State governments have traditionally been much more effective in administering. I invite my colleagues to consider joining this important effort regularly as well.

This Congressional Caucus, I strongly believe that this body must begin to focus on the principles delineated in the 10th amendment. Our Founders were precise when they established our system of government. They intended to set up a republic of sovereign, self-governing States with a small central

government operating under clearly defined, limited powers.

Dividing sovereignty between the Federal Government and those of the States prevents an unhealthy concentration of powers at any one level of government. As James Madison in the Federalist Number 51 said, this arrangement is a double security in protecting the rights of the people.

Throughout the last few generations in particular, the intent of the 10th amendment, that of a limited and efficient central government, has been fading away. There are those I know who support a bigger, more centralized government. They believe a central government run bureaucracy can make the best decisions for the American people.

They believe in the public good of higher taxes. But on that I strongly disagree. As a member of the House Committee on the Budget, I am very much aware of where such faulty reasoning leads our Nation. It leads to our current situation, a bloated Federal Government consumed by a deficit upwards of \$400 billion, which, in turn, delivers sub par public services.

Now then, to be fair, much of the spending that recently caused this deficit to increase is temporary relief on the gulf coast region and the global war on terror. It may not show up on the bottom line. And while this eases the short-term picture, the bigger problem is still one that must be addressed. And if we do not curb this foolish Federal spending habit now, our children will have to pay the price.

Congress, you see, on almost a daily basis allows, our government to grow, pushing it is further into deficit. And we are swiftly drifting away from the limits set by our Founding Fathers.

Each time a Member slides his card to cast a vote, he needs to ask himself this one question: Does the bill that I am voting for violate the Constitution? Does it take away rights promised to our constituents and put them in the hands of a bureaucracy in Washington instead?

I remind this body that the Constitution does not only protect the rights of the people though. It also protects the rights of the states. In Federalist number 45, James Madison wrote, "The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the Federal Government are few and defined. Those which will remain in the states governments are numerous and indefinite."

I have long served in this House long enough to know that it makes our lives easier at home when we come to D.C. and support increased funding for every conceivable type of program. Yet James Madison and his colleagues were less concerned about their ability to write glittering press releases than they were in developing an efficient system of government, one that would operate at the lowest cost to the people paying it, the people at home.

That is what this caucus is all about and what these weekly information sessions are about as well. We must

turn a critical eye on the Federal Government. This is how we will lower the deficit, grow the economy and assure that America remains that beacon on a hill.

Aside from being informational, this Caucus also seeks to make specific legislative gains in the name of governmental efficiency and Constitutional adherence. So we will support legislation that seeks to return power and authority back where it belongs, to the States, local governments and to the people.

And so tonight, I specifically ask all Members to consider supporting the Reaffirmation of American Independence resolution that will soon be reintroduced by Congressmen FEENEY and GOODLATTE. This is a resolution I know our Founding Fathers would be original cosponsors of, were they able. Article VI of the U.S. Constitution states, "This Constitution and the laws of the U.S. shall be made in pursuance thereof; shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every state shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws or any state or the country notwithstanding."

This legislation goes in the direction to ensure that all such laws abide with our Constitution and not by foreign governments.

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.)

MESSAGE TO THE PRESIDENT: END THE OCCUPATION

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, last week British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that more than 1,600 British soldiers would be sent home from Iraq. By recalling troops from Iraq, the British government has sent a very clear message that increasing the number of troops is not the right strategy. In fact, the British government has come to the same conclusion that many Americans have reached almost 4 years ago. We should be ending the military occupation of Iraq, not expanding it. We should be supporting the men and women who have served bravely in Iraq by sending them home, not sending them back for their fourth or their fifth tour of duty after only a very few months of spending time with their families.

The British government's decision to scale back its military commitment in Iraq should have been another important wake up call to President Bush. However, the President has continued his course to go it alone, regardless of the staggering costs to our Nation.

President Bush has drained America's reservoir of goodwill by ignoring the facts on the ground, the advice of his generals, and the will of the American public. By stubbornly pursuing the same misguided policies over and over again, he has left it to Congress to stop him.

Two weeks ago, the House took an important first step by overwhelmingly passing a bipartisan resolution condemning the President's decision to send more than 20,000 additional American soldiers to the front lines. I commend the Democratic leadership, and I commend my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for having the courage to stand up to the President and to oppose his escalation. This vote, however, is only the first step.

Now that the House has stood up to disagree with the President, we must use this consensus to take on the urgent job of bringing our troops safely home.

As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and a co founder of the Out of Iraq Caucus, I have introduced a comprehensive and detailed plan to end the occupation while ensuring that we achieve security and stability in Iraq. My bill, H.R. 508, the Bring the Troops Home and Iraq Sovereignty Restoration Act, now has 47 cosponsors.

H.R. 508 will provide for a fully funded withdrawal of U.S. troops and contractors from Iraq within a 6-month period. During the time of that 6-month passage, our troops will return home to receive the full health care benefits they deserve because we owe them, we owe them no less for their sacrifices. And while they are coming home, we will be putting those laws into place, ensuring they get their benefits.

Also during that 6-month withdrawal period, our government will accelerate the training and equipping of Iraqi security forces, and if requested by the Iraqi government, we will work with the international community to provide a stabilization force to enhance Iraq's security.

Additionally, my bill would prohibit the establishment of permanent U.S. bases in Iraq, and we would return control of Iraq's oil resources to the Iraqi people. The only way to restore stability to Iraq is to return the country to the Iraqis, and we must work with our allies to achieve this. But when the Bush administration, in spite of all the advice to the contrary, decides to escalate the occupation, and the British government takes the sensible path of withdrawal, they both can't be right.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford to wait for the President to realize his mistake. Too many brave men and brave women have died and suffered to continue this occupation. We must stand up, we must demand, we must bring our troops home. That is how we can protect our troops.