

there near the top of the Democrat's agenda. This legislation replaces government-sponsored secret ballot elections for union representation with a public card-signing system."

Mr. Speaker, another reason union membership is down is because of the abuses of the unions, and, as I said before, because our economy is so good. We know that we have the best economy we have had in 50 years and people don't need the unions in the way they needed them before.

There was a time probably in the early part of the last century when there was a need for unions. There were worker abuses, and that is very unfortunate. But we know that era is gone, and we don't need that anymore. So we know that we don't need the unions, and people are voting with their feet.

There is another quote that I want to share with you from The Wall Street Journal, which comes toward the end of the article, which points out another part of the hypocrisy of this bill. Let me again quote from the Wall Street Journal article, because I think it says it very well:

"The final proof that this bill is about union power, and not worker choice, is revealed by its treatment of the flip side of unionization: Decertification elections. These are secret ballot elections in which workers get to decide that they have had enough of the union. So under the Employee Free Choice Act can a majority of workers decertify the union by signing a card? Not on your life. Here unions want the chance to engage in a campaign to give workers both sides of the story, and maybe do a better job of representing them, before the union's fate is decided by a secret ballot vote."

You see, they oppose a card check for decertification of the union. That is just not right. If they want it one way, why don't they want to allow it the other way?

The last paragraph says, "No one has ever argued that secret ballot elections are a perfect mechanism, either in politics or in deciding unionization. But they are far and away the best mechanism we have devised to minimize intimidation and maximize the power of the people who really matter, whether citizen or worker. Congress should think a lot harder before it decides to do away with workers' right to vote."

Again, I cannot think of anything more undemocratic than saying to people, "We are going to allow you to be intimidated into joining a union. We are taking away your right to vote in a secret ballot election. We don't think secret ballots are the right way to go in the greatest republic in the world. We do think that secret ballots are the way to go in Mexico, but we don't think that they are the way to go in the United States of America." Again, it is unbelievable to me that these people can stand up and say it.

I want to say again, who are the people who supported this bill and point out the kind of folks that these people

are associating with and say again that the fact that the communist party of the U.S. is one of the major supporters of this bill should tell us a lot about what this bill is doing.

Elections in communist countries are not like elections in this country. There aren't choices given to people. They don't have free elections. What they do is have the kind of election that is going to come about by people doing a card check for these union elections, and that is the kind of election that they want there.

We have heard again comments made over and over again by the people who have supported this bill, but I want to say to you, I am sorry I don't have the Official Truth Squad emblem up here tonight, because we could have both of them here. We need to set the record straight on what is being said.

Doing this bill, if this bill were to pass the Senate and become law, it would be one of the greatest travesties against American workers that has been done in this country, and it would be done by people who say that they support American workers.

□ 1800

It would be done by people who treat American workers as though they are helpless individuals, unable to do anything for themselves, unable to walk away if they don't like a job, unable to bring a suit against someone who might have discriminated against them.

Again, I don't want anybody to think that I would ever tolerate anyone being discriminated against or anyone being mistreated; I don't support that in any way. However, that is not what is behind this. What is behind this is power and money. These people have been bought by the unions. The unions got them into office, and they are now asking for their payback. And that is exactly what is happening here. And that isn't the way it is supposed to be done.

Our folks on the other side of the aisle have railed against that in the past. They rail against it when they accuse us of doing that, but they are doing it in ways that are really unconscionable, in my opinion.

And, again, I want to quote from the letter that 16 Members of Congress sent to Mexico where they said: "We feel that the secret ballot is absolutely necessary in order to ensure that workers are not intimidated into voting for a union they might not otherwise choose."

I cannot, again, hear how they can justify wanting the people in Mexico to be able to have the secret ballot to vote for a union and take that right away from our great American workers who want the same right for themselves.

I hope that the Senate will do the right thing and vote this bill down, if it even ever comes up for a vote, and say to the American workers, and hear what Republicans are saying: we respect American workers. We will do ev-

erything we possibly can to protect your rights. We are not going to take away from you the right to a secret ballot. That is simply wrong in the greatest Republic that has ever existed in the world.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to address the House once again.

As you know, the 30-Something Working Group, we come to the floor with great pride and information to not only share with the Members, but also the American people, and make sure that we, the 110th Congress, the people's House, carry out the wills and the desires of Americans as it relates to making sure that they are represented in a fair and equal way, and also in a bipartisan way. And that is something I take great pride in because I believe that, as the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD will reflect or has reflected in the major votes that have taken place on this floor, had a lot to do with the American people and the way they live, and the way students were paying high interest rates. And we know it is still going through the legislative process, but it has now passed off the floor of the House of Representatives. And also as it relates to the minimum wage and small business tax cuts. It has all moved through in the 110th Congress under the Democratic leadership, and in a bipartisan way, with a number of Republicans voting for those measures.

We know the will and the desire was there to do so in the past, but the leadership was not there. So what we want to do, when I say "we," Democratic majority, we want to make sure that we keep that even keel that we are on now, to encourage more bipartisanship, and to also encourage and push more leadership out of this House of Representatives. And I want to commend the Speaker and our Democratic leadership for allowing that to happen in the way that it has.

Saying that, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to continue to talk about what we were touching on just the other day. The 30-something Working Group has been on the floor all of this week. This will make the final evening that we will be addressing the Members, on not only Iraq, but also how our veterans are being handled by, need it be the Department of Veterans Affairs, need it be the Congress or the administration. And I read off last time, which I will do before this hour is over, about the lack of funding and the cuts that have been made from the Bush administration in the past. And I think it is important for us to reflect on that.

I think it is also important for us to talk about, in the supplemental that passed this floor, how we put in billions

of dollars to make sure that we are able to take up the slack. Case in point, Mr. Speaker, this is the most recent Newsweek that has been published, Newsweek magazine. It is dated March 5, 2007. I have a copy of it. It actually came to my office. I took the opportunity to read this article.

You have Specialist Strock, who is on the front, Marissa. She is age 21. As you can see, she lost both of her legs from the knee down in Iraq. And it is entitled, "Failing Our Wounded." As you know it is a special investigation report, and I think it is important that Members pay very close attention to what Mr. RYAN and other Members who will be joining me shortly have to share with you on this issue on making sure that our veterans are taken care of.

Now I know, as a Member of Congress, Mr. Speaker, and I also know just as someone who has been paying attention to the lack of dollars, especially as it relates to outpatient care of veterans, I think for Members like myself who have been in field hospitals in Iraq, that have gone to Germany and have visited the troops on more than two occasions, seeing the kind of care they get there. I have been to Walter Reed, I have been to Bethesda Hospital, but once you start getting out away from the general hospital treatment that our veterans are getting when they first are returning back to the United States, when you start getting into outpatient, even at Walter Reed, which a lot of this is being addressed, a lot of the bad stories are being addressed here in this Newsweek article, when you start getting out in the Midwest, when you start getting even down in my area in south Florida and you start getting a little up from Washington, D.C. into New York and out west, away from the eye of the four-star brass and all the folks that have an opportunity to go to Walter Reed and other places, you start really getting down to the nitty-gritty of what has been wrong with the planning, not only of the war, but the care of the men and women.

Now, you have heard me time after time again, Mr. Speaker, and Members, talk about how Members of Congress come to the floor and chest-beat about how they support the troops. Sometimes the debate really goes beyond the reason for a Member to come to the floor. I mean, I have been in my office and watched Members talk and they say, well, I support troops 110 percent. And then you have another Member say, well, I support the troops more than you do. As a matter of fact, I have a tattoo on my arm saying that I support the troops. I am saying that just to say that we have to go beyond our words and we have to act as though we support the troops, the full troops.

We have troops that have served, soldiers that have served, sailors that have served, airmen and women that have served, Coast Guard members that have served, and on and on and on

in World War II, I, you name it, Korea. You have Afghanistan; you have even some folks from there. You have folks from the first gulf war. You have Vietnam. All of these men and women that have allowed us to salute one flag, they are getting the real deal. They have been on a waiting list. And now we have put a mountain of new issues on the Department of Veteran Services, or some may call it the Veterans Administration. And I think that it is important for us to realize what is happening and what is happening in the real world.

Members of Congress and others, people of influence can go to a local hospital and Congressman, oh, you are here? Don't wait in that waiting room, we will take care of you. Oh, you have a family member that is sick? Don't worry about it, the hospital administrator will meet you at the front door. But to the person that volunteered to defend this country, they don't have that prerogative. They don't have a Member of Congress to show up with them and they can get to the VA.

A former friend of mine, still a friend, but he has moved on to a greater place now, Orange Hayes called me one day on my cell phone in Miami, he was at the Miami VA Hospital and he said, Kendrick, I'm not getting the kind of service that one deserves here in the VA. I am not highlighting my hospital, but one thing that I can say that he knew me, he knew my cell number, he knew he could call me. And what did I do? Of course I was there in a matter of two hours. And who was there? Well, let's put it this way: the head of the department dealing with his illness was there, the assistant administrator of the hospital was there, and the director of the nurses, RNs there at that hospital. He got what he needed. And he said, you know, in the best way he could, sat up in his bed and said, I'm so glad that you are my friend because now I have been able to get the kind of service that I need.

Well, that should have happened anyway. And I think we have good people in the VA. I know we have good workers there; they are committed. We have good docs there; they are committed. But as it relates to the resources and the priorities in this Congress, the question is, are we committed?

Now, this Congress is committed because we already talked about what we did in the supplemental budget. That is a budget that Members didn't even have an opportunity to work through the legislative process. That was left over from the 109th Congress Republican Congress that we decided to do the right thing and cut some projects that were nonpriorities and put over \$3 billion in there to be able to assist in providing the kind of care for veterans. And we haven't even gotten started yet.

Now, let's just talk about getting started. And we want to thank The Washington Post for what they have done in highlighting the issues at Wal-

ter Reed outpatient. I have been there before. I didn't see some of the things that they saw; but luckily we had some men and women that stood up and said, you know, things are not what they should be there. And I understand, Mr. Speaker, you know, a two-star general stepped down today who was over the hospital. But you know something? I know within the coming days, Mr. Speaker, we are going to get down to the bottom of what it is all about for the veterans when they come back and when they go home.

When they come through Washington, D.C. and they land at Andrews Air Force base from Germany? When they land there, they are getting the care and all of the attention. But what happens when they go back to Sioux City, Iowa? What happens when they go back to Jacksonville, Florida? What happens when they show up at an airport in Wisconsin, are they still prioritized? Do they feel that we have their back because they had ours? And that is the resounding question.

Now, I am excited because, unlike the 109th Congress, the 30-Somethings would give our presentation and meet and talk about what should be happening. And if we had had an opportunity to lead, Mr. Speaker, and Members, and I know that Members who served in the 109th Congress and 108th Congress knew the 30-Something Working Group, if we were given the opportunity, if we asked the American people to have an opportunity to lead, things would be different. I am going to tell you the reason why it is different right now.

I am happy that the Budget Committee had hearings on this in the House, not several weeks from now, but have already had hearings. Chairman JOHN MURTHA of the Defense Appropriation Committee has scheduled a hearing on Friday, which is tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. I want our veterans to know that this Democratic House of Representatives has been on the side of making sure that our veterans get what they need, even when they leave the battlefield, even when they go back home; and that we do have Members on the other side of the aisle that feel the same way. But we are willing to provide the leadership of making sure that your issues are heard and that they are resolved, not just heard.

Having a town hall meeting talking about what can we do to make things better and not come into Washington and do something about it is not even worth anyone showing up at the town hall meeting or reading a letter and responding to it, though we are trying to do the best we can. This is actually taking place.

□ 1815

This is the action that is taking place. We also have oversight committee on government reform subcommittee chairmen will conduct a field hearing at Walter Reed on Monday, this Monday, not next Monday,

not some Monday in the future maybe we will get around to it. The Senate Armed Services Committee has planned a hearing for Tuesday. This is right now. This is right here right now in the moment, and again, I am so happy that these hearings are taking place.

The House Armed Services Committee on planning and oversight is also planning a hearing, and I am pretty sure that is days, not weeks.

So as we start to respond to what is already a major issue in our country, and we have outlined it as a major issue, we know that within the budget that there has been a number of veterans affairs programs that have been cut, health care programs. We have had fist fights mentally, I do not want to say literally, mentally and through dialogue with colleagues on the other side of the aisle about making sure that we do what we are supposed to do for veterans.

It is easy for someone to sit here in an air conditioned Chamber and pull out their voting card and say let us go to war, no problem; I am tough, I voted for it; you did not vote for it. Well, I am tougher than you. That is fine and that is good for Hollywood, but here in Washington D.C., it is important that we plan and that we make sure that the troops and the soldiers and the airmen and the sailors, we make sure they get what they need all the way around 360. You just cannot go a 180 and stop say, well, the veterans, the care is the hard part. You cannot stop there because that is not the responsible thing to do.

I think it is important to point out for every one soldier that dies in Iraq, 16 are injured. We talk about the fallen, rightfully so, and we should. We should highlight that, but we have to look at the injured. Sixteen, so think about it when you are watching television and when you pick up the newspaper and you see 3,158 of our men and women that have paid the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq, think about the 16 on top of every one that has been injured, and it is very, very important.

The veterans deserve a lifetime guarantee from the American people, a promise of proper medical care and treatment forever. That is what we have to back up here in this Congress, and I know that the will and the desire is here on this side of the aisle to make sure that that happens.

I think it is also important that we send legislation to the White House after we have these hearings to make sure that veterans know in the field that we have their back, that the men and women know that we have those individuals and also those individuals that are veterans who—already standing in line—that they get what they need.

Many of our veterans hospitals, Mr. Speaker, and outpatient centers, in some parts of rural America you have these clinics that are only open twice a month, and because of cuts, you have

some clinics that are open even half a day on that twice a month. We have buildings that are crumbling, and we have VA hospitals that are still in the World War II era. I mean, they have not received the kind of renovation that they need.

There is a superinflux of veterans that are coming back from two wars that are ongoing now. Some people may not know it, but there are two different wars that are going on as I speak here on the House floor. We have to make sure that we are prepared to deal with those issues when they return back.

Now, I know the Secretary of Defense has already been to Walter Reed, but I can only imagine what we are going to find out in the coming days. I know that a number of other committees will continue to start to look at the issue of how the men and women are served.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke time after time again here on this floor, members of the 30-something Working Group, on the responsibility of oversight. I would be worried if we were on President's break last week, this week staff visited Walter Reed Hospital, and our staff from the House of Representatives continued to be deployed throughout the country of getting down to the nitty gritty on what is actually happening in our VA hospitals, what has been the result of cuts year after year. Meanwhile, we have in the President's budget here to make tax cuts permanent, Mr. Speaker, not sunsetting in 2010, but permanent for the super wealthy in this country.

Meanwhile, we have veterans that are waiting to see the ophthalmologist or a cardiologist for weeks, some cases months, depends on where they are in the country.

So I think it is important, especially as we start to go through the hearings for the 2008 Appropriations Act, I think it is important as we lead into the emergency supplemental, the 99-plus billion dollar supplemental for the war in Iraq, Afghanistan and other areas, that we think about what I am talking about right now.

We have some men and women that are on their third, some fourth, deployment. We have hearings now in the House Armed Services Committee about increasing the size of the Army and the Marines. Right now, there is a request for three new Marine brigades. This is 9,000 more troops and to grow it into 20,000. The Army will take some of those soldiers, but as we continue to make our military bigger, to be ready to carry on future conflicts, because of the lack of planning in Iraq, we are in this situation.

As we see other countries pull back their troops and start talking about deployment, the administration is saying that we need an escalation in troops.

I think it is important for us to realize, especially when you have future generations reading the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, wondering what went wrong and who were the leaders, to make sure we got back on track.

Now, in November, the American people voted for a new direction. I am 110 percent in the front seat of that new direction, Mr. Speaker. They did not want what they had in the last Congress, a rubber-stamp Congress, and you have not seen the rubber stamp here that we used to have sitting right here, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, it was almost like a passenger in the left side of the car, steering wheel here, but it sat right here, to talk about the rubber stamp Republican Congress. I think the American people, and I am not talking about proud Democrats. I am talking about Independents, I am talking about Republicans, I am talking about folks who never voted before in their lives voted this time because they wanted a new direction.

In this new direction comes a great deal of responsibility, and in that responsibility, you have to have courage and you have to be willing to lead. I say to my Republican colleagues on the other side, many of whom are my good friends, my very good friends, that when it comes down to leadership, you have to be alone sometimes. You have to be one of the five, you have to be one of the 25 that are saying I am voting on behalf of my constituents, in this case that I am talking about here, my veterans, and making sure that our men and women have what they need.

There are a number of other issues that we can get into, but I think that it is important that we highlight the leadership when it is happening, not, oh, you know something, when you go home. Member, I want to make sure you go home and you tell your constituents there are hearings that are taking place. And you know who can take pride in that, Mr. Speaker? Not just on the majority side, Democrats say we are having hearings. Republicans can go back to their district and say we are having hearings. You know why we are having hearings? Because the leadership demands it here in this House. The Democratic leadership demands hearings on this issue to make sure that veterans know that we are not leaving them behind.

I think what is also important here, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that in the last Congress, we had the chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee who said, you know something, I am going to do what the veterans want me to do; I am not going to do what the Republican leadership wants me to do; I am going to do what is right. And guess what, he was stripped of his chairmanship. Not only stripped of his chairmanship, thrown off the committee. This is a man who went through whole process, whole seniority, serving on the committee and was thrown off the committee because he did the right thing on behalf of the men and women that wore the uniform. Not in this Congress.

In this House of Representatives, in this Democratic House of Representatives, we look forward to leadership opportunities. This is an opportunity.

In the supplemental budget, over \$3 billion were given to veterans health care because we took the leadership opportunity to carry it out. We said we had the will and the desire. We have it. So I think it is important to speak in a bipartisan way, to be able to allow Members to go back to their districts, need it be Democrats and Republicans, and say we are having hearings. Matter of fact, the hearings that took place this week, there will be hearings tomorrow, there will be hearings on Monday, there will be hearings, I guarantee you, on a couple of days next week, and out of those hearings, action will take place. Not just hearings, say okay, let us just show, but action will take place. And as we figure out what is going on in other parts of the country, it is important.

What I want to make sure I do is I have the Web site because I want Members and I want to make sure veterans know and report where these issues fall short. I want to make sure the Members have it so this is the 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov. We also ask you to visit, which we will give you more information about what is happening here as it relates to hearings, and go to www.speaker.gov/30something/index.html. That is a lot there but on the top here, 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

We want to hear it, Mr. Speaker. We want to do something about it, and I think it is important that we have the opportunity to do that.

One thing I want to also point out here, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage the Members once again, is if you have it, it should be in all the Members' offices, the latest Newsweek article or Newsweek magazine which is March 5, 2007. It came to my office. I know it went to a number of other offices. This is compliments of Newsweek. I get one at home, too. "Failing Our Wounded," a special investigation. In this publication here you will hear a lot and see a lot. Also, you can go on washingtonpost.com, and in case you missed it, there is an area there where you can read about some of the failures of not only Walter Reed, but veterans services that are in so bad a condition right now because of the lack of funding and because of the lack of leadership from Washington, D.C., in prioritizing the needs of our veterans.

In the article, you have a number of hospital officials that knew of the neglect and also complained about it and voiced their opinion for years but have not been heard, and we know that we have a number of veteran organizations that have come to Washington, D.C., looking for justice. But guess what, I think they are coming this time knowing that they will have an opportunity to sit before a committee. I think they will come knowing that they will have a chance to see something happen this year and in the future budgets as long as you have Democratic control here in this House, and I think it is important

and also with some of my friends on the other side joining us.

We talked about oversight. We talked about accountability, but I also want to say, as of a week ago, 52 hearings as it relates to oversight of the Iraq War have taken place.

□ 1830

Unlike the 109th Congress, the 108th Congress, and Congresses before that one, there have been a number of hearings that have taken place under the Capitol dome.

Why are these hearings important? Members are being educated on the issues. Why is education important? We can govern better. We can govern better on behalf of who? The American people.

That did not happen at the beginning of this war. That did not happen when we had bills sweep through this House of Representatives, and Members were challenged: if you didn't vote for it, you with not for the troops.

Well, the bottom line is that I think we are all, I haven't run into a Member of Congress who says I am against the troops, or an American who has said that I am against the troops, we are all for the troops. The real issue is, do we have enough leadership, or have we had leadership in the past to be able to make sure that we have our troops' backs like they have ours, in the care that they deserve for the rest of their lives?

And when we talk about that, we have to talk about individuals going back to their families, Mr. RYAN, who have real issues. Some of those issues can be between the years of being in warfare for 3 years, 4 years, and being asked to go back. We are talking about families, we are talking about communities, we are talking about something that needs special care and needs counseling and treatment. And so when we talk about those things, we have to do something about them.

So that is why I am very, very pleased that these hearings are taking place, Mr. Speaker, because the leadership is there to make those hearings happen. There will be Democrats and Republicans a part of it. I am glad that staff was deployed from the Democratic Congress to Walter Reed Hospital and other hospitals here in the Washington area, outpatient centers, to make sure that we can get to the bottom of the problem and make sure that we start working towards a solution.

And I want to say, Mr. RYAN, before I yield to you, that I commend the individuals that work in our veterans hospitals for blowing the whistle and talking to the press and talking to the staff about some of the issues that veterans had to face. I want to commend those veterans or those active duty and those individuals that are no longer on active duty, also our National Guardsmen and our Reservists that have been activated for sharing information. And we encourage you to continue to share

information so that we can do better, because the willingness and the desire here is in this Democratic Congress to make sure that you get what you need and what you have coming to you.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I appreciate it, Mr. MEEK. And I was watching you earlier talk about this, and I appreciate your concern and your passion on the issue. And I just can't help but thank Mr. MURTHA and the Speaker for taking such quick action on this.

This is the kind of thing that unfortunately has been going on for a long time, not only in this particular institution due to a lack of oversight, but also this is what has been going on in Iraq. The stories that we hear coming out of some of the oversight committees are absolutely atrocious to hear about the waste of money and some of the situations on the ground in Iraq.

Then to hear the story about Walter Reed, it just seems to consistently be a lack of owning up to what the current situation is on the ground or in the hospitals or wherever the case may be. And that is why you have to have an open process. That is why you have got to have hearings. And if we would have maybe over the past couple of years had more oversight hearings on these situations, maybe we wouldn't be in the situation that we are in today.

I want to share with you, Mr. MEEK, and I apologize because I have to leave in a couple minutes but I wanted to come by and support you and add my two cents here, today in the Washington Post regarding the complaints at Walter Reed, and this is what is really damning here as far as the issue goes, on the front page of the Washington Post:

"Top officials at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, including the Army's Surgeon General, have heard complaints about outpatient neglect from family members, veterans groups, and Members of Congress for more than 3 years.

"A procession of Pentagon and Walter Reed officials expressed surprise last week about the living conditions and bureaucratic nightmares faced by wounded soldiers staying at the D.C. medical facility. But as far back as 2003, the commander of Walter Reed, General Kiley, was told that soldiers who were wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan were languishing and lost on the grounds, according to interviews.

"But according to interviews, Kiley, his successive commanders at Walter Reed, and various top noncommissioned officers in charge of soldiers' lives have heard a stream of complaints about outpatient treatment over the past several years. The complaints have surfaced at town hall meetings for staff and soldiers, at commanders' sensing sessions in which soldiers or officers are encouraged to speak freely, and in several Inspector General's reports detailing building conditions, safety issues, and other matters."

That is what hurts, Mr. MEEK, is the fact that people knew about this. And

one of the most prestigious obligations that we have as Members of the United States Congress, as Members of the House of Representatives, being the most closely, directly elected officials for the people of this country to represent them in their Federal Government is that we have oversight responsibilities. And to neglect those duties, as the 109th Congress did, on Iraq, on contracting, on intelligence, on all of these things, blistering accounts that we are learning about, this is what hurts, that these kinds of situations could have been prevented, and if not prevented, immediately fixed.

And when you think about this, just ask, just ask us, is this Congress, whether Republican led or Democratically led, going to say “no” to our soldiers? That is not going to happen. But the fact that this administration refuses, talk about a culture which we talked about in the 109th Congress, a culture and a complete culture of an unwillingness to accept the fact that things can go wrong. We are all human beings. Things go wrong; mistakes are made. The key is to fix them. The key is to not make the same mistakes twice, or in this case, many, many, many times over. And the fact that a few soldiers had to go through this is a shame. But when the problem isn’t fixed, when the problem continues and we have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of soldiers go through this same situation, Mr. MEEK, when it could have been fixed I think is a tragedy.

So I want to commend you for bringing this up and sharing this with the House of Representatives and the American people. And I want to commend you for your service on the Armed Services Committee in these difficult times and a lot of the tough decisions that you have to make on that committee.

So I yield back to my friend, and I apologize for having to cut out on you early; but you are doing all right on your own.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, I appreciate you coming down, sir. You are one of the most dedicated members of the 30-something Working Group. And I know now that you are an appropriator that you have many more responsibilities. And I want you to continue to do those great things that you do on the Appropriations Committee, and I want to thank you for your service on the Armed Services Committee in the last two Congresses. But this is a very, very serious issue, Members; and I am glad that you did find time enough to come down here.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that we look at some of the issues that we are facing here, not only on this article, or articles, out of The Washington Post, not only what Americans are going to be reading in Newsweek and other publications that are going to uncover or shed light on the obvious that so many veterans have been talking about for so many years. One thing

for myself, being in the political minority in the last two Congresses and the frustration of not having the opportunity to schedule a hearing, Mr. RYAN said something and I want to just be able to shed light on it, because we have a lot of new Members and I want to make sure they understand.

Of course, when you are in the minority you can’t call the hearing. It is what it is, like so many people say on the street. You are in the minority, that is it. You can try to do what you can do, but you are not going to call a hearing. And the fact that we have hearings that have been called and hearings that have already taken place and staff that has been deployed to tackle this issue already allows the American people to witness change, to witness a new direction. If I said it three times in my talk here this evening, I will say it again. In politics and what gives people the will and the desire to go vote in the first place is to witness change when they feel that it needs to happen.

We talked about a new direction, Democrats did, in the last election. And to actually talk about it and then do it is extraordinary, especially here in Washington, D.C. to be able to go back to your district and say we are going to do something about this lack of service, outpatient service, lack of priority, cut in funding.

I spoke earlier, and I am going to highlight what has happened and then I am going to say what we have done in the first action of being able to direct appropriations in the area that it should go in versus special interest giveaways, versus you have to be plugged in or connected to get certain things out of this Congress just on behalf of those that have served.

I just want to run down this line here, and I have a chart here. As you know, we have a lot of charts in the 30-something Working Group because we want to make sure that Members know exactly what they need to know, when they need to know it, so that their constituents and my constituents, I can’t go home and say, I didn’t know that, no one said anything about it. These bills are moving around, some of them are 500 pages. I didn’t know what was there. So as we look at what is happening or what has happened, we have to reflect on the past to have a better future. And that is the good thing about what we are doing here.

Bush and Republican budget funding for veterans: January 2003, the Bush administration cuts off veterans health care for 164,000 veterans, 68 Federal Reg 2670, 2671, January 17 of 2003.

The reason why I read that probably means nothing to the lay person, but for those of you that know where to find this information, it is gold. As a matter of fact, it is platinum. Third-party validators is what we do here on the 30-something Working Group. And on the Democratic side, we believe in third-party validators. The Washington Post is a third-party validator of what

we have been talking about in the minority. Now we are glad we are in the majority to do something about it.

Third-party validator is a Newsweek cover: “Special Investigation on Failing Our Wounded,” that we have been talking about and 12 years in being in the minority. Now we are in the majority, we are doing something about it, what I talked about and what am going to highlight again.

March 2003, Republican budget cuts off \$14 billion from veterans health care. It passed the Congress with 199 Democrats voting against it. 199 Democrats. That is House Concurrent Resolution 95, vote number 82, and that took place on March 21 of 2003.

I think it is important also, on March 2004, Republican budget that short-changed veterans health care cut by \$1.5 billion.

I think you are getting the message here, Members, of what we are talking about here. And I can go on and on and on about what has not happened and what we have fought for; but I want you to look right down here at the bottom, because this is proof in the pudding and this is the new direction, Mr. Speaker and Members, that we speak so much about here on this floor, and it gives me great pride. I mean, I feel almost fulfilled spiritually, leave alone professionally as a Member of Congress, to be a member of a majority that is about action and about a new direction.

□ 1845

When you look at this, January 31, 2007, that was just a month ago, we had to pass a concurrent resolution or a continuing resolution because the work was not done from the 109th Congress that should have been done prior to this time. We had to come in and clean it up. But guess what, in the cleanup we found some waste and special interest, giveaways, and we came up with \$3.6 billion in health care funding to replace some of the cuts that the Republican majority made in the last Congress. I almost feel like an attorney in a closing argument. I can rest my case on that.

Now, Members can come down here and spend hours upon hours upon hours talking about I love the veterans, oh, I love the troops, oh, my goodness, I get teary-eyed every time I see a veteran or pass a post. But \$3.6 billion is action, and I want to make sure the Members who voted against that continuing resolution know that you missed out on an opportunity to do something great, \$3.6 billion for veterans health care.

Now, guess what, Member, if we didn’t put that \$3.6 billion and had an opportunity to do something about what did not happen in the past on behalf of veterans, could I speak here on the floor of the House of Representatives representing to the Members of this House of Representatives that we did the right thing back on January 31 of this year?

Sometimes we know of the glory but we have to tell the story, and the story is having the will and having courage, willing to do something on behalf of those who have sent us here, in this case, since we are talking about the veterans tonight, those that have allowed us to be in the Capitol, saluting one flag and secure, those that allow my children to live in a free society, those that have had friends that have paid the ultimate sacrifice, those that it takes longer than 2 hours in the morning for them to get out the door because of the price they paid.

Members, this has to be bipartisan, and so when we look at what has happened under a partisan venue, we have to be excited about \$3.6 billion and counting in the future. We have to be excited about the oversight hearings that I have talked about that Mr. MURTHA is going to have as chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee on Appropriations. We talked about the Armed Services Committee, oversight committee, going and having hearings.

We talked about the Budget Committee that has already had a hearing. We are talking about the Senate doing the same thing on that side. We are talking about deployment of staff into veterans hospitals finding out the damage, what has happened because of the lack of funding that has been cut off over the years. That is substantial; that is substantial.

I would urge the Members on both sides of the aisle to go home and tell your constituents that we are on the job, that we are going to make it happen on behalf of their uncle, on behalf of their aunt, on behalf of their mother that may be deployed right now. But when she gets back, we are going to have her back. That is what is important, not lip service, but action.

Now, as a Member of Congress it gives me no pride to talk about the failures of the Bush administration or the past Congress, or even this Congress. We are not even 3 months into a new Congress. We have had 52 hearings dealing with Iraq plus, and I have to make sure that staff gives me the new numbers when we get back here next week, and counting, to give the American people the accountability that they deserve, those that are in harm's way, that they deserve.

You let some tell you here in the House of Representatives, oh, Democrats are weak on defense. We are for the veterans, don't you know?

Well, you know something, the thing about the story is the fact that it has bumps in it. The thing about the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD is the fact that it tells the truth, and the truth will set you free like we have heard so many times in places of worship. But it will set you free when it comes down to the track record.

We have the Republican side that says the tax-and-spend Democrats. Okay, what does the record reflect? The record reflects great accountability.

Guess what, the only party in the history of this country that has ever balanced the budget was the Democratic Congress without one Republican vote, the only party.

They talk about budget reduction and all that, but the bottom line is you can't hold, you can't have one arm on special interest and another arm on responsibility and make sure it all gets out because you know what, in past Congresses, special interest has always won. So as we start to look at this issue, we learn more about what is going on in our outpatient services, and we learn more about the lack of service that our veterans are receiving, not just the new ones, but the ones that have been there and suffered for years, and have suffered even more of the cuts of the Republican leadership in the White House and here in Congress.

The story, goodness, a Republican chairman of a committee of the Veterans' Affairs Committee did the right thing at one point and said, I am going to do this on behalf of veterans here in the United States of America; and those that are abroad at foreign bases and their families, we are going to do the right thing for him, and he was stripped of his chairmanship. I challenge any Member to come down here and challenge me on that fact. They won't, because it actually happened.

I guarantee you, the present chairman of our Veterans' Affairs right now will not be stripped for working on behalf of veterans. That will not happen. I say that with great confidence.

So I am excited. I mean, we just broke for the week. I am just glad to be here tonight to just witness, like we say in the Baptist Church, a change in a new direction.

I am so glad that the RECORD will reflect, not just American people but Democrats, that when the American people voted for a new direction, it actually happened. We are moving in a new direction.

Every time I see the votes on the board right above our heads here, we have bipartisan votes, it makes me feel even better about what we are doing, because that means that you are doing the right thing. This is a partisan arena here in Washington D.C. By the rules it is partisan. By the fact that you cannot even call a committee hearing, it is partisan. It has been that way for a very, very long time.

When you start to see Members breaking ranks with partisanship to say, I need to vote for this very good thing for my constituents, that is powerful, because it hasn't happened before; and I am not talking about procedural votes to the Members. We know Members are going to vote on the issues.

As we start to do good things on behalf of our veterans, we look forward to that bipartisan spirit. We look forward to it, and we know that there will be votes that we have to be bipartisan on. But I can tell you one thing: when it

comes down to our veterans, we have to be together on this. National security, we have to be together on this. We have to be together on a number of issues, health care, what have you, because the country is looking for us to be leaders.

I am so glad that we have a Speaker that is a leader. I am so glad that we have Members that are serving in leadership positions on oversight committees that are leaders and really don't mind being talked about and misunderstood from time to time, because the outcome measures will reflect, out of the appropriations committees, Ways and Means, you name it, the Budget Committee, the priority of American people.

They are not just Democratic ideas. These are ideas that are American and that are right. We can't point at another country and say, look, wow, they don't even have good uniforms, when we are not following, we are not doing, we are not leading by example, just put it that way.

So I wanted to point this out, and I am glad that I had this information handy here to be able to share with the Members and allow them to have a chance to reflect on some of the issues of the week and also issues that will be coming up next week.

The last point, and I think this is very, very important, at Walter Reed today a major general stepped down. But you know something, it goes higher than that; it goes higher than that. A two-star general stepped down today from Walter Reed, stepped down, resigned. It goes higher than that. This reminds me of other issues that because of a lack of oversight have taken place in our Federal Government, and the first person to go is the person almost to the bottom of the totem pole. This goes higher than that.

I am excited that the Secretary of Defense did go out there, but I am going to tell you something. As we start to peel back the issues on this issue of failing our wounded, because of a lack of funding, more and more individuals, more and more e-mails that will be uncovered of who knew what when, who did not act, and it may lead very well back to the White House, may very well lead back to the past Congress, it may very well lead back to a high-level bureaucrat that looked the other way, because it was okay to look the other way.

This is not a witch hunt; this is about making sure that our veterans understand that we are moving in a new direction. If the administration is not willing to be a part of that new direction and wants to hold on to their original thoughts, then we are just going to have to show them that direction; and that is going to take courage, it is going to take leadership, and I know that the majority Members of this House have that courage and leadership.

Again, before I close, I want to commend the workers at Walter Reed. I

want to commend those that came forward. I want to commend those individuals that have been working for 15, 20 years, taking care of our wounded, taking care of our men and women in said communities, and we look forward to continuing to support them in that effort, and help is on its way. As a matter of fact, help is already there.

You can e-mail us, Members, at 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, and our Web site is www.speaker.gov/30something.

I want to thank Mr. RYAN for being a part of this hour. I want to thank the Speaker and the Democratic leadership for allowing the 30-something Working Group to come to the floor one more time. It was an honor to address the House of Representatives.

EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT AND PEAK OIL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CARNEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, there is a question that often comes to my mind, as I sit here in these Chambers. I have spoken about it often, what made America great. I have been reminded of this question in my past speeches on this topic as the debate evolved regarding the inappropriately named Employee Free Choice Act, H.R. 800. We had a debate that I never thought would take place here in the Chambers of the House of Representatives of the United States, questioning the use of the secret ballot.

Now, I am asking myself again, what keeps America great? It is what our military is fighting for in Iraq, it is what they fought for in our American Revolution, our Civil War, World War I and World War II and every war great and small when our country has put our greatest treasure, the lives of soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen at risk.

What keeps America great is our commitment to the vigilant defense of the cause of freedom as expressed by the will of the people. Expressing their will by voting with secret ballots is integral to keeping America great.

Our Constitution guarantees us freedom of speech and of religion. These are precious freedoms that allow us to prosper, to learn, to own property, to start a business, to teach our moral and civic values and build a legacy of wealth and knowledge for the next generation.

But it is the greatest freedom for citizens to decide or to vote using a secret ballot that sets our Republican form of government apart. Secret ballots allow people to freely make decisions through our elected process, decisions made about not only who will represent them here in the Congress but also in their hometowns, decisions about what new amendments will be made to the Constitution, State or Federal.

□ 1900

There are codicils in the contracts we have with our government about how we want to be governed. Voting is a basic tool of a free society. Thomas Paine said in his dissertation on first principles of government that, and I quote, "the right of voting for representatives is the primary right which other rights are protected."

Voting is basic and natural to us. We have learned from an early age as school children voting for class presidents, and we expect it in adulthood as we elect representatives to our local, state and Federal elections.

It took a long time in this country to universally use secret ballot to make freedom's choices. But once in use, the secret ballot is not only the norm, but also the pinnacle tool which permits our countrymen to make these decisions, great and small, freely, without fear of intimidation or reprisal.

Mr. Speaker, we surely can't be serious when we pursue taking away from the rank and file worker the use of the secret ballot as the main vehicle for making decisions to unionize or remain an open shop. There may be problems with the unionizing process, but voting by secret ballot, I can assure you, is not one of them.

We here in the United States have acted as counselor to other governments and governing bodies on the requirements of a free and fair election. After all, we are the longest enduring republic in the history of the world.

I am going to reference such advice given on the U.S. Department of State Web site. If you search for principles of free and fair elections, you will find the requirements of an election. We here in Congress can benefit from relying upon this advice when considering the path to conducting union recognition process. And I quote, "universal suffrage for all eligible men and women to vote, democracies do not restrict this right for minorities, the disabled, or give it only to those who are literate or who own property." Obviously, we want all people affected by union decision to have a right to vote.

I am going to add a few words about American history's path to universal suffrage here, because it is useful to understand our painful evolution to reach a point where voting went from the select few to every adult.

It has only been in my lifetime that true universal suffrage has been realized in our great country. We fought a great civil war that only put us on the path toward universal suffrage. We still had many battles to come. From 1865 to 1870 the Constitution was amended three times to guarantee equal voting rights to black Americans, but still the struggle continued. There were setbacks as States and localities undermined this Federal guarantee.

At the turn of the last century, there were barriers to achieving universal suffrage. Poll taxes and literacy tests denied many black American men the ability to exercise their right to vote.

Jim Crow laws protected segregation. Not until the 1950s did our laws begin to change to put an end to segregation. The 1965 Voting Rights Act provided the means to the Federal Government to ensure the ability to vote by black citizens that is guaranteed under our Constitution.

Suffrage for women was long in coming. In 1776, Abigail Adams wrote, to her husband, John, who was attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, she asked that he and other men who were working on the Declaration of Independence remember the ladies. John responded with humor but got his point across; that the Declaration says that all men are created equal applied equally to women, he told her.

After the Civil War, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the American Equal Rights Association, an organization for white and black women and men dedicated to the goal of universal suffrage. Other organizations followed. Still, in 1868, 3 years after the end of the Civil War, the 14th amendment was ratified but only provided for male suffrage. It was not until 1920, after many struggles, and only 86 years ago, that the 19th amendment was ratified and women in this country achieved the right to vote.

Let me go back now to that Web site of the U.S. State Department. Principles of free and fair elections: And I quote again, "freedom to register a voter or to run for public office, these are the qualities, the characteristics that society must have if they want to have free people and fair elections.

"Freedom of speech for candidates and political parties: Democracies do not restrict candidates or political parties from criticizing the performance of the incumbent.

"Numerous opportunities for the electorate to receive objective information from a free press: Freedom to assemble for political rallies and campaigns.

"Rules that require party representatives to maintain a distance from polling places on election day: Election officials, volunteer poll workers and international monitors may assist voters with the voting process, but not the voting choice.

"An impartial or balanced system of conducting elections and verifying election results: Trained election officials must either be politically independent, or those overseeing elections should be representatives of the parties in the election."

And now, the next two points, especially the last, are points that we really should well remember. "Accessible polling places: Private voting space, secure ballot boxes and transparent ballot counting."

And then this one, Mr. Speaker. "Secret ballots."

This is our advice on our State Department Web site to those who would like to emulate us and establish a government as free and fair and great as ours.