

Gaelic Hurling"—study history and cultural significance of the Gaelic sport of hurling; learn to cut and carve hurley sticks using ash wood salvaged from central Indiana forests decimated by the emerald ash borer.

Martha Sando, "2007: To Russia with Love, From Moscow to St. Petersburg"—view art collections in St. Petersburg and Moscow; hone plein air landscape painting technique; create classroom lessons on painting techniques, history and culture of Russia.

MSD Wayne Township, McClelland Elementary School, Eric Webb (principal), "Bringing My Ancestors to Dinner"—investigate Clan McLeod, capture images, poetry, songs and stories of Scotland.

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

(Mr. DREIER 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 Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the 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.)

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 as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MEEK. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House here, the 30-Something Working Group. I am glad that we are here tonight to have an opportunity to really talk about the accomplishments under the 110th Congress, and also issues that we are going to be working on in the very near future.

But as you know, Mr. Speaker, day after day I have been coming to the floor sharing with the Members and the American people on the fact that we have really worked hard to make sure that we run a house in a way that all the Members can feel comfortable about voting on the public policy that comes to this floor, especially major public policy.

The Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act that passed this floor today is a piece of legislation that is going to assist not only the public knowing more about what happens here, but to make sure that we protect those that are trying to protect us.

As we start to head down the road of fiscal responsibility, as we start to

have oversight hearings and Federal employees and others that are involved in Federal action, and just average Americans will be able to come forward and to share with this Congress and other agencies of accountability and oversight about waste, they will be able to come and share concerns or speculation of corruption, they will be able to come forth with recommendations without receiving the repercussions that they would have received prior to the passing of this legislation today.

One other thing that I think is important when we start looking at this legislation, the fact that there were 102 Members on the other side of the aisle that voted in the affirmative. The vote on this floor just moments ago was 331–94. And I think that will go right in line with other pieces of legislation that have passed this House floor in a bipartisan way on a major bill. I think we have a chart here that I think will be helpful for the Members to take a look at.

Implementing the 9/11 Commission recommendations, H.R. 1, passed 299–128, with 68 Republicans voting with the Democrats.

Raising the minimum wage passed 315–116, with 82 Republicans voting along with Democrats.

The funding for enhanced stem cell research, H.R. 3, 253 Members of the House voted in the affirmative, only 147 voted against. But as you know, Republican votes, 37 joined Democrats on that vote.

Making prescription drugs more affordable for seniors, H.R. 4, passed 255–170, with 24 Republicans voting with Democrats.

Cutting student loan interest rates in half, H.R. 5, 356–71, with 124 Republicans voting for it with all Democrats.

Creating long-term energy initiatives, I think it is an important initiative, H.R. 6, 264–163, with 36 Republicans voting with Democrats.

□ 1845

Now, Mr. Speaker, why is this important? Why are we talking about bipartisanship so much when we come to the floor in the 30-Something Working Group? We are talking about it because this has not been the culture here in the House. Major pieces of legislation, from H.R. 1 to H.R. 6, and even today when we passed off of this floor the Whistleblower Act, H.R. 985, to see bipartisan votes on these major pieces of legislation goes to show you that we have been waiting; and when I say "we," Members of the House have been waiting for a very long time to have the opportunity to vote on common-sense legislation that is going to assist the American people in their everyday lives, will assist this Congress in bringing about the kind of accountability that the American people voted for and hoped that we would, hopefully, enact one day.

I think it is also important to look at three House bills to shed light on pub-

lic records. I think it is very important that the American people understand that we are going to open the Federal Government up to allow them to be able to receive public records in a timely manner. Of course, we are going to protect national security issues. Of course, documents that are not ready for public consumption will not be given to the public or anyone that may endanger Americans abroad or here in the United States. But there are so many documents by the White House that have been deemed secret when it wasn't necessary for them to be deemed secret. This piece of legislation and the three bills would deal with that issue, to be able to have a little more openness to the process so that we can do our jobs here on Capitol Hill.

I think it is important to continue to stick with the watchwords that we have been talking about here, the 30-Something Working Group, on accountability, oversight, new direction, and fiscal responsibility. I think it is important that we pay attention to what is happening right now, Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to Hurricane Katrina, Abu Ghraib, 9/11 Commission recommendations, which I must add that 10 Republicans and the Senate joined Democrats in passing the 9/11 Commission recommendations. All of these reports, as we look at good government, are taken from bipartisan commissions.

We are talking about governance here. We are talking about accountability here. Some may say, well, 9/11 Commission recommendations, that is a Democratic work product. No. That is just a Democratic leadership bill, that we said that we would fully implement the 9/11 recommendations even though the President has threatened to veto them. Even though it was a bipartisan commission, Mr. Speaker, chaired by a Republican Governor, former Governor, still the President and Republicans are saying that there is not a need to implement those recommendations.

I think, as we start to reflect, before I start talking about the supplemental appropriations bill that is being marked up in the Appropriations Committee this week, since Democrats have taken the majority, Mr. Speaker, Walter Reed, the misconduct was exposed by a newspaper here in the Washington area, The Washington Post. Democrats took action, making sure that we had hearings going immediately, not after, not 2 or 3 weeks later, saying we are waiting on the administration to see what they are going to do.

In kind, the administration started working very vigorously to take some action, and I commend the President on appointing two very outstanding Americans, Ms. Shalala and also Mr. Dole, to lead a commission to look at that.

The firing of U.S. District Attorneys became exposed recently, within the last 48 hours. Information that we received here in Congress was inaccurate.

And now Democrats, in control of the House and Senate, are immediately going into hearings dealing with the Justice Department, asking the tough questions because no longer are we going to allow politics to run public policy in this country.

And I think it is important for the Members to understand that we are here as board members of the largest corporation on the face of the Earth, if one wants to call it that. I am just using that as an example. We are the board of directors here in the U.S. House of Representatives. One of the Members of our caucus during a caucus meeting made this analogy, with the President's being the chairman of the board or President/CEO.

When you start looking at the President/CEO of any corporation and you start looking at the mismanagement and you start looking at the political overtones, it is important that the board respond to whom? The stockholders, in this case, the American people, because it is their tax dollar that we are appropriating. It is their tax dollar that we have oversight on. And they have sent us, made us members of the board of directors to watch out for their interests. And that is using, once again, the word of accountability, the oversight.

We talk about a new direction. We also talk about fiscal responsibility. But those are not just catchwords. They mean something, and I think it is important that we pay very close attention to that.

I pointed out in this whole issue at Walter Reed last week, Mr. Speaker, and I felt very proud as a Member of Congress and someone that voted for the continuing resolution because the Republicans did not do their work in passing all of the appropriations bills. We had to clean it up when we came into the 110th Congress by passing a continuing resolution.

All district projects that Members fought for in the appropriations bill were taken out, and we had to then take those dollars and we put \$3.6 billion into the veterans' health care system. And I am so glad we did that because when the Walter Reed story came out and the media started to focus on the lack of resources to take care of our veterans and take care of those that are still enlisted on the health care side, and this was actually the front cover here with the specialists of Newsweek, it gave the American people an opportunity to see leadership in action and also see a policy response to what has been unearthed by the media. And I think that is important because there has been a lot of foot-dragging around here and there has been a lack of the majority in the past of having the will and desire to do the right thing. And I am glad we did it in that case.

I am so glad to be joined by my very good friend, Mr. RYAN, from Niles, Ohio. They have a saying in Niles, Ohio, Mr. RYAN—well, in Ohio; I don't

if it is necessarily in Niles. But it goes something like this: Remember that the field mouse is fast but the owl sees at night.

I yield to Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's yielding and his comments about the field mouse and the owl. It is very important for us to remember that wisdom that he gives us.

And I appreciate your running over here, hustling over here. I actually wasn't going to come. I have got some meetings tonight that I have to get at, but I saw you over here out of breath, and I thought I would come over and sling-shot you in.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Reclaiming my time, when I came over, it wasn't like we can pause for a minute and let me catch my breath. I mean, I was actually anchoring this special order and sharing with the Members the great work that has been done.

I talked about the bipartisan vote that we took today on the whistleblower legislation. And, Mr. RYAN, I did go to the gym today to make sure that I am in the right shape to be a Member of this House and serve as an example of making sure that you take care of yourself, that you do the right thing, and you live a long time.

So, Mr. RYAN, thank you for being concerned about my health care needs and making sure that you came down and allowed me to catch my breath. But I am so happy to see you, sir, because as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I am honored just to be in the same Chamber with you, sir.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I appreciate that. And it is an honor for me to be in the Appropriations Committee, and my friend on the Ways and Means Committee provides the ways and the means for us to get the job done.

One of the issues that we have talked about today a little bit is what the Democrats have been doing in Congress since we got here a couple of months ago. And I think it is very important, as we see all of the news stories about Walter Reed, as we see the news stories about the Attorneys General, we see the news stories about what is going on in Iraq, a year ago or 2 years ago, those stories wouldn't have even been possible because the threat of oversight hearings that Speaker PELOSI and the Chairs of our various committees have been executing is the exact balance of power that we were talking about prior to the elections last year. And the American people, very wisely, thought it was time for there to be some oversight.

But I must say, Mr. MEEK and Mr. Speaker, that all of the thoughts that we had about what was going on in a lot of these various agencies we thought were bad, but we didn't know they were this bad. And I don't think anybody would have said the level of pressure, for example, in the Attorneys General situation, the level of incompetence and neglect at Walter Reed is

just absolutely shocking. And we knew about it with the war. We saw the lack of execution in the war. We saw it in Katrina. And now, because the Democrats are in power, we are now able to begin to fix these problems.

The whistleblower reform strengthens protections for Federal whistleblowers to prevent retaliation against those who report wrongdoing, waste, fraud, abuse. This is how we begin to reform government, by allowing those people who are in the institution of government to be able to speak freely and to be protected and not to be bullied or prevented from somehow improving the institution.

The Freedom of Information request, we had some provisions here. More timely disclosure of government documents, restoring the presumption of disclosure to FOIA, helping FOIA requesters obtain timely responses, improving transparency and agency compliance with FOIA, providing an alternative to litigation, and providing accountability for FOIA decisions, opening up government, transparency in the 21st century. It is an information-based society, an information-based economy; and the more we open it up and allow the information to flow, the more we are going to be able to improve things.

One of the great problems we had in China several years with the SARS issue is that nobody knew about it and you can't fix problems that you don't know about. And whether you are in a family or on a team or in a business or running a government, you need to make sure there is free and open access to information.

Now, granted, there are sensitive issues, national security issues that need to be protected and need to be kept in order to secure the long-term future of the country. No one debates that. But when we are talking about government documents and the execution of an administrative or executive branch department protecting whistleblowers who may have information in order to make the government improve, this isn't to punish anybody. This is to improve the government. And that means some difficult decisions need to be made.

And I think, under the leadership of this House, we are moving down that road, step by step, very methodically to improve the lives of people in this country and to reform the institution of government.

□ 1900

That is what we are all here to do. We have had several other things that we had.

But I want to talk for a minute, Mr. MEEK, if you don't mind, about oversight. I know you had mentioned oversight earlier in the evening, but what is going on and what has gone on already in this Chamber, as I mentioned, the Walter Reed thing came because of the threat of Democratic oversight and the committee oversight process that has already been going on.

For example, the war in Iraq, between the House and Senate, more than 97 oversight hearings have looked into the conduct of the Iraqi war. Ninety-seven. There is the big number hearings. And more are coming.

Tomorrow in the Appropriations Committee we are going to pass out the supplemental that is going to begin the exit of this war, begin the end of this war.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, I am glad, because you are a member of the Appropriations Committee. Let me just say this, Mr. RYAN. Putting everything to the side here that we have been talking about, again, I am glad, because you are here as a member of the Appropriations Committee.

We actually have some Members, Mr. RYAN, that are concerned about the kind of leadership that this Congress is putting forth on behalf of the men and women in uniform and the men and women that wore the uniform and their families.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. These are the same people, Mr. MEEK, these are the same people who were in charge several months ago, and for the previous 14 years, that led to the dismal display that we see at Walter Reed, the conduct of some of the people in the Veterans Administration. The same people that had oversight then are now upset and trying to point the finger.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. You know, Mr. RYAN, they say when you point your finger, you have like three or four fingers pointing back at you.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Shake and Bake. Right back at you.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. That is right. In full effect. You have here U.S. Troops Readiness, Veterans Healthcare, and Iraq Accountability Act. Expanding funding for veterans healthcare and hospitals. What is wrong with that? Nothing.

The Bush administration must meet military standards for troop readiness. Mr. RYAN, this is the DoD policy as it relates to troop readiness. The Congress had nothing to do with the policy. The Department of Defense came up with the policy.

So basically what we are saying, Mr. Speaker, through this act, follow your policy, because it is in the best interests of the American people and the troops that are in harm's way.

What is in that policy? Making sure troops have what they need when they are deployed. What else? Making sure we have a military that is ready to respond at a moment's notice when we need them. We will go deeper into that.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Armored Humvees. Up-armored Humvees. Kevlar vests. The proper amount of rest.

I want you, Mr. MEEK, to try to name me one person in this country that would dare send one of their own kids off to war without the proper equipment, that would not ride in a Humvee that was armored. And there are kids still getting killed in Iraq now because the Humvees are light armored and not

heavy armored. They don't have the proper equipment and everything else. We are still losing kids because of that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, losing kids? We are losing 47-year-old Reservists. We are losing granddads in some instances that are still serving our country, Mr. Speaker, in the Guard, in the Reserve, active duty.

When you look at this, again, the Iraq government must meet the Bush benchmarks for reform.

Mr. Speaker, once again, this is not what the Democratic Congress put benchmarks on the Iraqi government for. The President of the United States of America, the Commander in Chief, marched down this aisle, walked that way and went up there to that rostrum right under where you are standing, Mr. Speaker, and said if they don't meet the standards and do X, Y and Z, then we are not going to be there forever. What is wrong with following the leadership, especially when you talk about accountability?

What is different this time, Mr. Speaker, is when the President has made those statements in the past, he had a rubber stamp Congress willing to do anything that he wanted them to do. But now you have a Congress that put forth legislation that will allow Members of the minority party, the Republican Party, Mr. RYAN, to vote with Democrats, for accountability, there is that word again; oversight, there is another word we use all the time; and to head in a new direction as it relates to Iraq. We have said that 100 times.

I think that is important, making sure that strategic redeployment of U.S. troops in combat by 2008, and reforming military efforts on Afghanistan and the fight on terrorism. What is wrong with all of that?

If I can, Mr. RYAN, I want to just talk about how the American people are way ahead of the Bush administration on this issue and the reason why we had this big transition in leadership here in the Congress back in September.

Nearly six out of 10 Americans want U.S. troops to withdraw from Iraq by 2008 or sooner. That is a CNN poll of 3-13-07.

Fifty-two percent think the United States should set a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. That is a CBS-New York Times poll on 3-12-07.

Sixty-seven percent of those polled by NBC-Wall Street Journal disapprove of the way the President is handling the situation in Iraq. That is an NBC-Wall Street Journal poll, 3-9-07.

I can go on and on and on, Mr. RYAN, of how the American people are with us as it relates to making sure that we do the right thing.

When we are in Congress and we are here, we are not generals, we are not in a forward area, Mr. Speaker. We have Members that have never worn a uniform, not even in school when they were coming up. We are not in the Armed Forces. Some of us are. Some of us are Reservists. Some of us are

Guardsmen, Guardspeople, women, what have you.

But we have been elected to be Members of Congress to carry out the things that we talked about, oversight, accountability, being fiscally responsible, moving the country in a new direction, coming and voting on behalf of our constituents and the American people.

So, brave speeches on the floor about how Members support the troops. No, I support the troops more than you. No, I have a tattoo on my arm saying I support the troops. No, I have raised money back home.

That is fine. That is all good and dandy. Come to the floor and say what you want to say.

But when it comes down to it, where are the benchmarks as it relates to over \$500 billion that has been spent on the war and \$100 billion-plus that is going to be authorized sometime in the very near future? Where are the accountability measures? They are there to make sure you meet the benchmarks.

I know you can go further into that. But the 97 hearings to date, it is unprecedented in the past Congress and the Congress before that, Mr. RYAN. We have been here for the last two Congresses, and I can guarantee you that 97 hearings at this point in the Congress did not happen.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Not at all. We are starting to figure out what has been going on. Part of it, over the past few years, everyone kept saying 6 more months. Give them 6 more months. Six more months. Well, 6 more months, we are 4 years later 6 more months.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Going on 5, Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Going on 5. Sixty to 65 percent of Iraqis believe it is okay to kill Americans, to shoot at Americans. We are in the middle of a civil war and we need to get ourselves out of it, not get ourselves further into it. So these hearings are an important component of that, to try to pull ourselves out of this situation that President Bush has gotten us into.

I say that because—for several reasons. One is, some people say well, if you have an end date, then they are just going to sit back and wait until we leave. The problem with that theory is if we say we are going to stay forever, then they are never going to do their share, and the problem has been the Iraqi soldiers won't get trained, the problem is we can't get a political solution because everyone thinks we are just going to stay there and keep the situation intact.

They need a goal, and the goal is, in our supplemental bill, if you do not have improvement in some of the benchmarks we have in there, political and military, if you don't have improvement by July, we are getting out. If you are showing some progress, we will give you until the end of the year, until the fall. And if you haven't met the goals by then, then we are out.

You have got to meet your obligations. Believe me, I didn't support this

war from the get-go, and it kills me, it kills me, that we have got to spend \$100 billion to get us out of a situation. That kills me.

This last couple of weeks we have had hearings in the Labor, Health and Education Subcommittee on Appropriations, and you see the millions of dollars the Bush administration submitted that they cut from physical education programs, art programs. They flatlined TRIO, GEAR UP, Upward Bound. All flatlined, with thousands of more kids going into those. Head Start. Only 60 percent of the kids eligible for Head Start get covered. There is a \$100 million cut in Head Start, and we are going to go spend \$100 billion?

I am voting for the supplemental, because I will do anything to get us out of there, and I believe this supplemental is the best step for us to take to get us out of there.

But it is not only what is going on in Iraq, Mr. MEEK. I don't know if you had a chance to see this memo.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Before the gentleman goes to the memo, you said this thing is not just about Iraq.

Let me just say very quickly, again, you know here in the 30-something Working Group, we love, we don't like, we love third party validators. We love it, Mr. Speaker. We can't get enough of it. It fires us up. We just love it.

Here is the deal. Requiring the President to honor the standards of the Department of Defense set for troop readiness, training, equipment before sending troops into battle, 70 percent favor requiring U.S. troops returning from Iraq to have at least 1 year in the U.S. before being redeployed to Iraq. That is a Gallup Poll, USA Today, 3-6-07. It is not a poll we did. This is just a poll that these news organizations have held.

Holding Iraqi government to the same standards for progress that the President outlined in announcing the escalation of troops. Seventy-seven percent favored requiring U.S. troops to come home from Iraq if Iraqi leaders failed to meet the promises to reduce the violence there. That is the Gallup Poll-USA Today.

This is very, very, very important. Providing urgency needed to support addressing the military medical care crisis at Walter Reed and other hospitals, 76 percent of Americans do not think the Bush administration has done enough to be responsible to take care of the needs of our men and women that are in uniform.

Mr. RYAN, the bottom line is that this is not a political speech that we are on the floor giving. This is reality. This is governance. This is oversight and this is accountability.

And for Members, Mr. Speaker, who feel that we shouldn't be venturing off into the area of leadership, maybe they didn't pay attention to what took place last November. I would say to some of my friends on the Republican side, because if this was political, I would keep

it a secret. But you know, Mr. RYAN, we always talk about issues that may be detrimental to the Democratic forward progress of gaining more seats in the House.

If Republican Members want to vote on being with their, quote-unquote, leadership that has them in the minority right now, because they use catch words like well, you know, we don't need to make decisions because the President is making decisions and it is not our place to do it. Oh, we don't have to have accountability measures within the appropriations bill, within the emergency supplemental, because we need to leave the flexibility for Secretary Rumsfeld and unnamed individuals in the White House and unnamed folks over in the Pentagon to make these decisions.

I am going to tell you right now, that is the road leading to the minority, because it is a lack of oversight and a lack of leadership and a lack of accountability. And I am so happy, Mr. RYAN, I am very happy, it fires me up, Mr. Speaker, that we have a majority that is willing to do what we must do to give the American people, because we are responsible, they are our stockholders. They gave their tax dollars for us to have the opportunity to appropriate those dollars and have oversight over those dollars in an appropriate way.

□ 1915

And by reading these poll numbers and what you just shared, Mr. RYAN, is more than vindication, more than third-party validators; it is leadership, accountability, and being fiscally responsible on behalf of the taxpayer dollars. I can tell you that I don't know a Republican that would say, "I am against accountability." I don't know of a Democrat who would say, "I don't like being fiscally responsible; I like to be fiscally irresponsible."

I don't know an Independent who says, and Independents came out in record numbers this last election. They voted for a new direction, and I am so glad we are giving it to them.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I would just like to make a couple more points to support you before I take off.

I don't know if you have seen this. I am sure you have as a distinguished member of the Armed Services Committee in your fifth year already. The memo from the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ORTIZ) chairman of the Subcommittee on Readiness, and Mr. ABERCROMBIE, House Armed Services Committee, Air and Land Force Subcommittee, these are the folks in Congress on the ground. They submitted a couple of days ago for Members of Congress, editors, defense writers and other interested parties a memo on military readiness.

I want to say a couple of things that I think are very important on where this war has put our military readiness, an elective war in Iraq as opposed to a real threat to our national inter-

est, and the situation it has put us in. And our distinguished gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPUR) who sits on the Defense Committee could probably speak better than I can on this.

Short-term readiness in this memo addresses the needs of soldiers on the field today. Iraq and Afghanistan have been marked by a lack of adequate funding for equipment, from effective Kevlar vests and helmets to uparmored Humvees which are better able to protect our personnel from roadside bombs. Compounding the lack of equipment for both deployed and non-deployed units is the fact that if non-deployed units don't have the same equipment they will use in combat, their training is less than optimum.

So if you don't have a Kevlar vest to train in when you actually are in the field and have to wear one, it is a much different scenario, and you may not have the proper training you need.

Long-term readiness, military preparation for any challenges our Nation may face tomorrow, that encompasses everything from manpower training and equipment to preposition stores of military equipment strategically located around the world that, the Government Accountability Office reports, have been deeply ransacked for Iraqi operations.

Check this out. Roughly half of all of the ground equipment in the United States Army is in Iraq or Afghanistan, nearly half the ground equipment that the Army owns. Since the start of the war, the Army has lost nearly 2,000 wheeled vehicles and more than 100 armored vehicles. Harsh desert climate, mountain terrain, virtually continuous combat and the physical weight of extra armor is wearing out equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan at up to nine times the normal rate.

The Army GAO report details that the Army has not been keeping accurate track of what they have or what they need to reset the force, nor can they provide sufficient detail for Congress to provide effective oversight.

The National Guard, between 75,000 and 100,000 pieces of National Guard equipment worth nearly \$2 billion are now in Iraq and Afghanistan instead of National Guard armories around the U.S.; and National Guard units are left with about one-third of their equipment. These urgent equipment shortages hit especially hard on the military's ability to train Guard and active Army units, and they are forced to prepare and train for deployment with minimal equipment.

We have a real problem where the American Army is not ready should we have another incident around the world, or should someone, heaven forbid, attack the United States, or should we have another Katrina. For this President to talk, Mr. Speaker, about protecting the troops and saving the troops and being on the side of the troops, this is being on the side of the troops.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to yield to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR), the dean of the Ohio Democratic delegation.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) and also Congressman KENDRICK MEEK from Florida, two 30-somethings who are outstanding leaders in this Congress, bringing new energy and new vision. I thank them for yielding me this time.

We will have extensive debates on the budget concerning the supplemental request for the war in Iraq, the global war on terrorism, and other related measures tomorrow and later next week. But as we are debating this and looking at sending another \$100 billion across the oceans, halfway around the world, to support our troops and to try to reach resolution to that conflict, I want to bring to the attention of the American people a very serious issue here at home, one that is making headlines all over the United States.

This is USA Today's headline, "Record Foreclosures Reel Lenders," and "Subprime Troubles Send Stocks Into Swoon."

The issue of mortgages across this country going belly up by the thousands should be of concern to every Member of this Congress. The stock market this week has been roiled by concerns over the financial health of largely unregulated mortgage brokerage institutions that have been irresponsibly issuing mortgages in what is called the subprime market across this country and much of that market targets consumers with less than stellar credit ratings or who are at the margins of home ownership in this country.

They have been luring them into mortgages they can't afford, and as those mortgages adjust to higher interest rates in the third, fourth, fifth and subsequent years, they go belly up.

We saw yesterday the connection between the fast rate of foreclosures and the health of our economy when the Dow dropped 243 points as a reaction to the dramatic rise in these foreclosures. As USA Today recounts in the first paragraph, "The reason many mortgage lenders are in trouble became alarmingly clear Tuesday. The Mortgage Bankers Association said more than 2.1 million Americans with a home loan missed at least one payment at the end of last year, and the rate of new foreclosures hit a record."

Companies like New Century Financial, the Nation's second largest subprime lender, have quit making loans and are edging towards bankruptcy protection. There is a map in the article that shows certain States, and I am going to discuss my own now, that are far above the national average where we know thousands upon thousands of people are losing their homes.

Ohio was the number one State in the Union to date with these mortgage foreclosures, three times the national average. They are estimating that in

the next year and a half, over 250,000 more home mortgages will reset, and they are estimating that the financing gap in Ohio for this year and next year now totals somewhere between \$14 billion and \$21 billion. That is just Ohio. Add to it Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Indiana, Michigan, West Virginia. This is a problem of national proportion.

There is plenty of blame to go around, but there is no question it is a serious issue that should be given primacy in this Congress.

I want to compliment the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) for holding hearings yesterday on hedge funds, the unregulated part of the financial markets that is rather secretive. We don't know a lot about them, but we know many times they are involved with intertwining with these types of loans that have been going out into the marketplace.

We know our weak economy contributes to the situation, but also the failure of the past Congress as well as State legislatures to address predatory lending practices and to try to nip this problem in the bud before it became so much worse.

There is another side to this coin as well, and that is the large number of campaign contributions made by these hot-shot lending brokerage firms that have been making deals across this country; and that story, unfortunately, has to come out, too, and perhaps why some lawmakers have been unwilling to grapple with the magnitude of this problem and prevent the kind of foreclosures that are going on across the country.

Let me say that this USA Today article and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have a phone number that I urge citizens to call: 888-995-HOPE, 888-995-HOPE.

This line will connect those who are concerned about losing their homes to foreclosure with foreclosure prevention counselors nationwide. That is something we can do immediately. In the measure we will pass next week, we will make every effort possible to put in housing counseling money, and I would urge the Department of Housing and Urban Development to target those dollars to the areas that are just bleeding with foreclosure after foreclosure after foreclosure.

State and local governments could do a lot to help homeowners find help also, particularly in working out financing deals. I think Wall Street is going to have to take some losses. They ought to take them earlier rather than later. We ought to package some of this debt, and we ought to find a way to eat some of it and move some of those egregious profits they are making into filling the financing gap, because what good will it do for us to have millions of housing units across this country vacant? It is not going to help anybody.

We know in these subprime markets, they don't set aside escrow money for

property taxes, and we know this is going to have a major effect on local government as well.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say the President and his administration are focused on rebuilding Iraq, but somebody had better focus on rebuilding America and dealing with these rising foreclosure problems across the country. I will be the first in this Congress to put my shoulder to the wheel.

I want to thank Congressman MEEK for yielding me this time and thank him for his leadership in showing how much money we are spending in Iraq and how it is affecting our ability to address domestic needs here that coast to coast are so very serious.

[From USA Today]

(By Adam Shell)

SUBPRIME TROUBLES SEND STOCKS INTO SWOON

DEPTH OF DAMAGE IN MORTGAGE BUSINESS CONCERNS INVESTORS

The ripple effect of the "submerging" subprime mortgage market hit Wall Street hard Tuesday, with the Dow suffering a 243-point drop amid growing fears that home loan woes will infect other companies and hurt the broader U.S. economy. In another volatile day on Wall Street, stocks were battered by a slew of negative news in the home loan arena, prompting investors to wonder just how deep the damage in the mortgage business will turn out to be.

"The market fears that the submerging subprime lenders could drag down other companies with it," says Sam Stovall, chief strategist at Standard & Poor's. "Investors fear credit will dry up," which will make it harder for people to borrow money to buy homes and for companies to raise much-needed cash in a pinch.

Tuesday's biggest losers were financial companies that either lend money directly to homeowners or provide cash to the lenders themselves. Shares of subprime and commercial lenders, investment banks and brokers all finished deep in the red. The top two decliners in the Dow Jones industrial average, for example, were American Express, down 3.5%, and JPMorgan Chase, down 4.4%.

Pain in that sector is magnified by the fact that financial services is the biggest of the 10 industry groups in the Standard & Poor's 500 index, accounting for almost 22% of the index's total market value.

Still, the fallout was broad-based. The Dow fell 243 points, or 2.0%, to 12,076, its worst drop since Feb. 27, when it plunged 416 points. The S&P also dropped 2%, with 487 of its 500 components finishing lower. The three worst S&P industry groups were home building, specialized finance and investment banks/brokerages.

The bad news in mortgage land continued to pile up around subprime lenders as New Century Financial shares lost 49% and Accredited Home Lenders fell 65% on concerns their financial woes will worsen. The S&P's worst-performing stock: Bear Stearns, a big Wall Street brokerage with subprime exposure, fell 6.7%.

The big question now is whether Tuesday's sell-off, like the Feb. 27 plunge, is just air being let out of the speculative balloon, or whether more serious economic issues are at play, says Nicholas Sargen, chief investment officer at Fort Washington Investment Advisors. "Yeah, we are going to see a general tightening of credit standards and a crackdown on subprime lenders," Sargen says. "If you say it stops there, that is nothing new. But, and it's a big but, nobody knows for sure."

Investors will be watching what Lehman Bros. says about the health of the mortgage market and if the damage is isolated to subprime lenders when it reports earnings Thursday. Says S&P's Howard Silverblatt: "They will be looking to get more info as to how much exposure there is and who else is exposed."

[From USA Today, Mar. 14, 2007]

RECORD FORECLOSURES REEL LENDERS
(By Noelle Knox)

The reason many mortgage lenders are in trouble became alarmingly clear Tuesday. The Mortgage Bankers Association said more than 2.1 million Americans with a home loan missed at least one payment at the end of last year—and the rate of new foreclosures hit a record.

The problem is most severe for borrowers with scuffed credit and adjustable-rate mortgages. More than 14% of them were behind on their payments. And the worst is yet to come, the MBA said. At least \$300 billion in subprime ARMs will reset this year to higher interest rates. Those borrowers face higher payments and a harder time refinancing.

Blindsided by the number of loans that have already gone bad, more than two dozen lenders have gone out of business or been purchased. New Century Financial, the nation's second-largest subprime lender, has quit making loans and is edging toward bankruptcy protection.

"There's been a stunning erosion of mortgage quality," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Economy.com. "It's primarily in the subprime market, but the entire market is weakening . . . and that adds to problems in the housing market, and by extension the broader economy." Retailers are already feeling the effect, he said, because homeowners tend to spend less when they fear their homes are worth less.

To stem their losses, lenders are ending 100% financing plans, requiring better credit scores and demanding more proof of a borrower's income. The stricter rules are squeezing first-time buyers, as well as homeowners who want to refinance.

Sellers, meantime, must compete with a rising number of foreclosures at cut-rate prices. Lenders that seize control of a house are usually aggressive about selling it, to limit the cost of maintaining and marketing it.

It's like a one-two punch, Zandi says. "It means less demand because many potential borrowers will be locked out," just as foreclosures expand the supply of homes for sale.

Some economists, such as Patrick Newport of Global Insight, had been expecting the real estate market to rebound soon. Now, he says, "We probably won't see a recovery in the housing market until next year."

In fact, sales of new homes are expected to fall 10% this year, while sales of existing homes are likely to slip about 1%, the National Association of Realtors said Tuesday.

States with the most job losses are seeing the largest number of delinquencies. In Mississippi, Louisiana, West Virginia, Michigan, Alabama, Missouri and Tennessee, at least one in five subprime ARMs is in default.

In the final quarter of last year, 0.54% of homeowners with a mortgage began foreclosure proceedings—a record—up from 0.46% in the third quarter.

Calls from distressed homeowners to the Homeownership Preservation Foundation, a free credit counseling service (888-995-HOPE or 888-995-4673), have more than doubled from last summer.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio. I am so glad that she comes to the floor often to share with Members and the American

people on issues that need light. It is good when we are able to give good information out.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important as we go through this week of accountability in Washington, D.C. I think that is what people have been waiting on and counting on. The leadership is being provided to make that happen.

Earlier you heard me talk about the whistleblower legislation that was passed here today. When we start talking about ending waste in Federal contracting, we start looking at strengthening protections for Federal whistleblowers and moving to increase disclosure requirements for Presidential records, and also requiring disclosure of big donors to Presidential libraries. Providing long-term, overdue, constitutionally mandated oversight over veterans' health care crises and other Federal issues is very, very important. This is serious work, and there are some serious pieces of legislation that will cross this floor.

Tomorrow we will be dealing with the whole issue of accountability in contracting. That is so very, very important, not only with the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan, but many of the contracts that are being executed in Homeland Security and the Defense Department. As we start to look at future disasters, looking at future contracting in our Federal agencies, it is important.

Limited duration of no-bid contracts awarded in emergencies to 8 months; within the emergency, Mr. Speaker, if it is an emergency, it is an emergency, not an emergency over the next 4 years for no-bid contracts. And many of the bigger companies have taken advantage of the no-bid contracts and have been the headline of several news articles about the fact that we have not provided the kind of oversight needed.

Also, requiring large Federal agencies to develop and implement a plan to minimize the use of noncompetitive contracts in having no-bid contracts, and many of these Federal agencies have not only doubled, but tripled in some instances.

□ 1930

So overall within the Bush administration that has doubled under this administration.

Also, requiring large Federal agencies to implement a plan in minimizing the use of cost-plus contracting. Cost-plus contracting are the type of contracts that give contractors little or no incentive to control costs. This is so very, very important. This kind of contracting has grown by 75 percent under this present administration.

This legislation that we are passing or will pass tomorrow hopefully as we debate it on the floor is not for the Bush administration. It is for the future. It is from this point on of how we are going to deal with contracting, how we are going to cut out some of this waste that is taking place here in Washington, D.C., and throughout the Federal Government.

This is really tackling many of the issues that we have right here under our nose, Mr. Speaker. We do not have to go off into foreign lands and try to figure out how we can correct. We need to correct some things right here in Washington, D.C., on how we do business.

Also, requiring agencies to prepare a public letter explaining why they awarded a no-bid contract. Again, shedding light where we do not have light now. This is leadership and work. It takes work to uncover the fact that we must shed light on the issue of no-bid contracting.

Also, requiring that contractors that overcharge more than \$1 million, that it is disclosed to Congress. We want to bring about accountability. Disclose it. Right now, contractors that go over and overcharge, go over the billions of dollars. When I was on Homeland Security Committee last year, the oversight committee, seeing all of the contractors that overcharged and was paid by the Federal agencies and Homeland Security, you charge us, you sent us a bill, we will pay it, no accountability, no oversight. Those days are over. It is going to start here tomorrow here on this floor.

I urge all Members to vote for the legislation in the affirmative, and Mr. Speaker, maybe tomorrow when we come to the floor, the 30-something Working Group, maybe we will have a bipartisan vote on this legislation. It is kind of hard for anyone to go home and say I voted for the Accountability in Contracting Act. Just the word "accountability" I have been using that for the last 3, 4 weeks. We will see. I hope we have it.

Also, making sure that we close the revolving door and requiring that former Federal procurement officers wait 1 year before seeking employment at lobbying and contracting firms; require that the Federal procurement officer wait 1 year before involving themselves in contracts given by the former employer.

I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, once again, we had just here on this floor, we have had Members that have anchored bills, led it through Congress and announced retirement, in past Congresses they have done this, announced retirement and go into the private sector and make millions, but that happens under the lights of this Chamber.

But in some of these Federal agencies, you have some folks that will start a project and then have an end date of when they are going to end their Federal employment to do what? To go out and manage the project. Again, I do not know an Independent, Republican or Democrat that would endorse that kind of activity.

Why will the Accountability in Contracting Act be on the floor to tomorrow? Because the Democratic leadership has the will and the desire to clean up the waste in Washington, D.C., not just talking about it, not just

having boards behind us saying we believe in accountability, we hate waste, but actually doing something about it.

This should be good for the private sector, too, of making sure that their employees and individuals that work with them and subcontractors that work with them on Federal contracts are accountable and that they make sure that they pay very close attention to what they are doing with the taxpayer dollars.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, I look forward to coming to the floor tomorrow, talking about the victories of this week. I believe tomorrow will be our last day voting here this week, and I would like to just recap and also talk about what is coming up next week. The reason why we are going through this process is because not only has the leadership asked for inclusion of ideas, but to make sure that no one feels excluded of being a part of this process and having the opportunity to vote on legislation.

The bipartisan votes that I have mentioned earlier will continue to add on to that list, and soon I am pretty sure it will be in the high 30s and 40s because legislation that makes sense to the people back home are coming to the floor of the House of Representatives in a record number like it has never done before.

So I am happy that we are having these bipartisan votes. I am happy that we are working as though we were in the minority, hungry to provide leadership. I am glad that accountability is shining on to this floor and throughout the halls of Congress, and with that, Mr. Speaker, once again, it was an honor addressing the House.

REPUBLICAN STUDY COMMITTEE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PERLMUTTER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to come to the floor this evening and to talk about something that is of tremendous importance to the American people, and today, we have introduced an American Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

This is something that we have had talk. We have had a lot of conversation. We have heard from constituents around the country who have said, you know what, we do not like the size of government. We do not like how it has grown. We do not like how government seems to be out of control. We do not like how the Democrats always seem to support the government elitists. We know that we need to have somebody there fighting for the American taxpayer, fighting for the American family, so that when they sit down to work out their budget, when they sit down to look at the family finances, they can be assured that somebody is thinking

about them when they take the votes that are going to affect us, to affect the Federal Tax Code and to affect how the American family lives and works and hopes and dreams and plans, how they make their plans for college education, how they make their plans for small businesses, how they make their plans for building a nest egg and a retirement.

So we have the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights that was introduced today by the fiscally responsible Republican Study Committee, and this is something that we have brought on. Some of our colleagues are going to join us tonight and talk about this issue, talk about the legislation that we have brought forward, and that we will bring forward through the next several months and talk about the proposals and the principles that we have laid forth today.

Now, if my colleagues want to find out more about the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights, I would encourage them to go to the Web site which is house.gov/hensarling/rsc, and you can e-mail the Republican Study Committee at rsc@mail.house.gov. That is the way to stay in touch with us, and as we talk about the principles that are embodied in the taxpayer bill of rights, we want to hear not only from our colleagues that are here in the House but from our constituents all across America, from people who want to weigh in on making certain that this Nation stays focused on preserving freedom, on preserving free enterprise, that we stay focused on making certain that America is a prosperous Nation.

Now, our components, we have four simple principles that we have introduced into the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights, and I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that people that are listening to this say I think I have heard about a bill of rights in my State; I think I have heard this before. Many of our States have because many of our States know they need to be responsible with the taxpayers' money, and that is one of the first lessons.

The money that we have here in Congress is not government's money. It is not the money of the House of Representatives. It is the money of the taxpayers of this great Nation. They are the ones that have earned that money. They are the ones that have paid their taxes.

Most of my constituents in Tennessee will tell me regularly, Congress does not have a revenue problem; they have got lots of money and they are right. For the past 2 years, this government has brought in more tax revenue than ever in history. We have had more revenue come in. The problem is government has a spending problem. Government has such an appetite, it never gets enough of your money.

Now, my colleagues across the aisle like to talk about how there is all this waste and how there is all this fraud and how there is all this abuse, and you know what, they are right on that, be-

cause over the past 60 years there has been this huge, enormous bureaucracy that they have built. The bureaucracy of the Federal Government that exists in this town is pretty much a monument to the Democrats. They like it. They like bureaucracy.

They did not have control of this House for 2 days before they increased spending, and within 2 weeks they had increased taxes on the American middle class and American working families. Two days to increase the spending, so that they could feed this bureaucracy, so that they could grow this bureaucracy; and 2 weeks to increase taxes on the American middle class and the American family, men and women that are working and seeing their taxes go up. Last week, I think it was \$17.9 billion that they increased spending.

So their habits have not changed. They are going to continue to feed the bureaucracy, to see that bureaucracy waste money, to see that bureaucracy grow because that is the way they like it.

What we are going to do in the fiscally responsible Republican Study Committee is put the focus on the American family and on the American taxpayer and be certain that they know we are defending their rights.

One of those is to limit Federal spending to the growth of the American family budget. Now, this is a great idea that we have taken from many of our States.

In Tennessee when I was in the State Senate, when you look at our State Constitution, you cannot grow spending in that State more than the growth of the budget. You have got to be certain that you balance that out. So what we are saying is, if we have per capita income growth of 3 percent or 4 percent, then you cap your Federal growth spending at 3 percent or 4 percent. You cannot be growing it 8 or 9. You cannot keep up with that. There is no way to make those numbers work unless you go into deficit spending.

Our friends across the aisle love to rail about deficit spending. Well, how did we get there? They grew a government so big, with entitlements so wide, that every year they come here and it is always a little more and a little more. Let us spend a little bit more, and a little bit adds up to a lot, and a lot adds up to a deficit, and a deficit adds up to a debt.

So limit what the Federal Government is going to spend, get in behind some of these programs that have outlived their usefulness.

Every year we bring forward programs that have outlived their usefulness. Every year we talk about programs that need to be reduced. Every single year we talk about ways to find waste, fraud and abuse. It is time for this body to have the will and the energy to begin to reduce spending.

Mr. Speaker, for all the rhetoric that comes out from some of the liberal elites who want to pad and grow the