

know what we are filling out. So what we are doing here is not only citing the problem, but setting the road to recovery of that problem as well by coming up with a comprehensible system of paying our taxes.

While that is incomprehensible, how you fill out your taxes, what is not incomprehensible is the fact that we have been paying and spending far too much in the Federal Government for far too long. The American family realizes that they have to live within their means, that they have only so much of a paycheck each week and they have to make sure that that goes as far as their expenses, and they can't spend any more than that.

The Federal Government, as we know, does that every day, spends far more than they take in. That is what the American public doesn't understand. If the American public has to live within their means, why doesn't the Federal Government have to do so? The initiative that we are talking about here would say, balance our budget, be just like American families at home, and live within our means.

The final point is this: We have talked in the past, also on this floor, with regard to ethics, and I may be wrong but I think it was in an article in *The Washington Post* that said, why are we exceeding our spending and why do we have these ethical problems on K Street and the like? And one of the reasons they said, and this references the point that the gentleman from Iowa said before, is because we exceed our constitutional authority, as Mr. KING was pointing out; that we spend in areas that the Constitution never permitted us to do in the first place.

The *Washington Post* article made the same reference. If we live within our means, live within the constitutional boundaries, we would meet the objectives of the American family.

I see by the clock on the wall we are coming to the end of the time. And I appreciate the gentlewoman's work in this area.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey and I thank all of my colleagues for joining me.

The American Taxpayer Bill of Rights, this is something we are pushing forward to the forefront. Over the past 60 years an enormous bureaucracy has been built. Our Democrat friends continue to want to feed that bureaucracy. We say, it is time for the spending, it is time for the increased taxing, to stop. They had power for 2 days when they raised your spending. They had power for 2 weeks when they raised your taxes. The American taxpayer deserves a break.

House.gov/hensarling/rsc, the fiscally responsible Republican Study Committee has proposed the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PERLMUTTER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. SUTTON) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. SUTTON. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor to be here today with some of the other Members who were newly elected just a few months ago. And, boy, it was a few months ago, but we have been making strides. And we are here to report to the American people the steps that we have taken to increase the oversight and accountability of this government.

I am sure that, like many of my colleagues who were elected, one of the reasons I am here, I came to Congress to clean up the culture of corruption that had so flourished under the Republican leadership in previous Congresses. And to that end, on the very first day that I was here, it was my honor to proudly cast a vote to end an era of corruption in this Capitol and to begin to change the way this Congress is doing business. To make it such that this Congress begins to enact policies that benefit the American people rather than just the special interests and the privileged few.

We took aim at the corruption and the abuses because it was a necessary prerequisite to creating policies that benefit all Americans. And people were tired. People were tired back in Ohio.

I have the privilege to represent people who are the salt of the Earth. But we saw both at the State level and the Federal level scandal after scandal. Scandals of public officials being bought off by special interests, public officials abusing power, and Republican leadership and officials neglecting to provide oversight.

Democrats, in the very first hours of this new Congress, they severed the links between those who would buy influence on Capitol Hill and those who would, unfortunately, willingly sell it and create and facilitate this culture of corruption that the American people have had to suffer under. We acted to clean up that corruption that eroded the public trust and resulted in far too many policies, as I said, that just benefited the few at the expense of the many.

We have begun and we have continued to restore oversight and accountability since that first day in our government through hearings and greater transparency, through initiatives that we have enacted and we continue to enact. And this strong congressional oversight in the 110th Congress has dramatically reversed years of neglect of the constitutional role of the Congress in providing oversight of Federal activities.

The American people have had enough. They have suffered enough from the lack of oversight. And I am so happy to be here with my new colleagues in this role to clean it up.

Just to name a couple of things, and then I am going to pass it off to some

of my freshmen colleagues, but if we just go through a list and you can pick up on any of these subjects because, sadly, there are so many areas where the past Congress had been delinquent, and we have already had to move to act.

The war in Iraq, between the House and the Senate since we took the leadership in this body, since we became the majority under the leadership of Speaker NANCY PELOSI, there have been more than 97 oversight hearings that have looked into the conduct of the Iraq War. And certainly that was something that the American people made loud and clear, when they elected this new majority, that they desired.

And, sadly, in the wake of revelations of inadequate care and conditions for wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, both the House and the Senate have launched investigations and hearings into those matters.

We are also looking at the political ramifications of actions taken with U.S. attorneys and the linkage of improper phone calls from Republican Members of Congress and senior staff that forced resignations of those U.S. attorneys.

The Hurricane Katrina response, we heard a lot right after the hurricane, after we saw the tragedy, not just the natural tragedy, but the tragedy in the lack of response of this government; and we heard a lot about how we were going to take that seriously from the last Congress. And now, because they didn't do that, we have been called upon and we have answered and House committees are looking into the housing and health care crisis that persists after that bungled response to the gulf coast disaster.

And we are also looking at and addressing the many aspects of the climate crisis and our dependence on non-renewable fuels from foreign sources. Investigations, hearings, initiatives that are long overdue. And, of course, there are many, many upcoming hearings.

And at this point what I would like to do is, I would like to yield to my friend from Minnesota, Representative ELLISON, to hear what you think about some of these things that we have been doing in this new Congress.

Mr. ELLISON. Congresswoman SUTTON, it is a great honor to be here with you tonight together with our other colleagues in the freshman class who will be speaking in just a moment because I think it is important that the American people know that the freshman members of the Democratic Caucus came to this Congress, not to occupy space, not to warm a seat, but to create positive change for the American people, to project a vision, a vision of inclusion, of a generosity of fairness, a vision that says that this economy should be one where everybody can be successful.

This government should be one where everyone has access, not just lobbyists

and the privileged few, a system of government that people can feel proud of and not have to be worried that privileged individuals might be lining their pockets at the expense of the American people.

We came here on November 7. We were elected here by the American people because the American people, the finest people, have the right to feel good about their government, not cynical, not despondent, not despairing, but good and positive, who would say, Do you know what? I trust my government. I feel that my government is doing the right thing. We can do no less than to take up that charge.

We have to say the American people have a right to feel that their government is operating for the public good and in their best interests. And to that end, I am proud to be associated with this Democratic majority that from the very beginning began to signal change with the 100 hours program. The 100 hours program is not all that we are going to do, but, Mr. Speaker, we had to tell the American people that we are about business from the very beginning. We had to signal change from the very beginning.

We had to let them know that we care about the affordability of a college education by cutting student loan interest rates; we care about our seniors by making sure that we get a prescription drug benefit that actually helps our seniors by allowing Medicare to negotiate.

We did a 100 hours program that said, we are going to raise the minimum wage; we are going to stop the oil and gas subsidies and put the money into renewable energy. We had to signal change.

That is not all we are going to do. We are just getting started. But we had to do something soon, something quick, something early, in the very beginning, so that the American people will know that we are putting money on the table. This is an earnest commitment to the American people to do real government, real change that they can feel good about.

So what I want to talk about very briefly tonight is how important it is and how happy I am that the Democratic Congress has taken steps regarding this scandal about the U.S. attorneys. The United States attorneys are members of our government under the executive branch whose job it is to do good, to promote justice. They are ministers of justice. They are not just lawyers who are entitled to advocate for their clients. Their job is higher. Their job is to do the right thing. Neither fear nor favor should influence them. Neither concern about their job nor worry about who is not going to like it should influence their behavior. They should enforce the law and protect the American people.

So when it came to light that U.S. attorneys that had had good recommendations, eight of them, were summarily fired with no explanation,

and then when the explanations did come, their reputations were besmirched—they said that they were not good workers, that they were not good employees of the State, not carrying out an excellent mission for the people of the districts that they were charged to represent—I think people started getting a little nervous. Wait a minute. Why besmirch these people? Why put them down? What have they done that was wrong?

And what we began to find as the common thread between these U.S. attorneys is that these individuals, though Republican appointees, took their charge to promote respect for law and took their charge to protect the American people seriously. And some of them prosecuted corruption cases, and that brought them into disfavor with the administration.

□ 2045

As the facts just keep on leaking out, they don't look good. They don't look good. It appears, it appears that political decisions were brought to bear in this scandal with regard to the U.S. Attorneys. In fact, one of the U.S. Attorneys was one of the people who prosecuted Mr. Duke Cunningham, and somehow ended up getting fired. My goodness. Don't we want to get rid of corruption in government? Don't we want a clean government? Why would you bring the hammer on somebody who did that, unless you didn't necessarily want the even hand of the law to be applied, you wanted it to be tilted one way or another. Justice must be blind, Mr. Speaker.

Then what else did we see? One of the calls that was made from as high as the White House was that these folks are not going after immigration cases or going after voter fraud cases enough. Wait a minute. Doesn't the prosecutor make decisions? Isn't prosecutorial discretion a hallmark of our legal system? Wait a minute. These people are charged with protecting us from drug dealers, killers, bank robbers and people who commit acts of terrorism.

These people are charged with protecting us from defrauders, stealers, thieves, embezzlers, and yet somebody on a political basis is trying to force them to focus in one area or another? They have finite resources to prosecute the cases and protect the people. They have to make a determination as to what is most important to protect our seniors from identity thieves, to protect our neighborhoods from drug dealers and meth makers. And yet they were put under scrutiny and fired, it appears, and the evidence is still coming in, because they wouldn't play ball with people in the administration.

This is scary business. This is not a good thing. And it goes to the very heart of restoring accountability to Washington. It goes to the very soul of whether we have a fair justice system and whether justice is blind.

Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about that, and I want to urge the

American people to continue to insist that all the facts come out. We have to know. Justice must be served, and it must be served with these U.S. Attorneys, because if the people whose job it is, the ministers of justice, cannot be comfortable in doing their work, then what can the rest of us who need their services expect?

Let me just make one point, and this has to do with the questions around the prosecution of Mr. Scooter Libby. He was found guilty of four out of five counts just last week, and we hear there are linkages to the Vice President. We hear many people are calling him a "fall guy," signaling there may be more people involved.

I think that it is very important that if we are going to insist upon accountability in Washington, that there be no pardons. I am very concerned that there could be a pardon in this situation that would render him not willing to tell all that he knows.

We need to know how bad this thing is. In the U.S. Attorney issue we found out it was Harriet Miers, the very person the President wanted to be on the United States Supreme Court, who said fire them all.

It is very important we get to the bottom of this, because, as I started with, the American people have every right to know what their government is doing and to trust in and feel good about their government. It is not a question of public relations, it is a matter of substance.

So I will yield back to my colleague, Congresswoman BETTY SUTTON, who has been leading us in so many excellent ways, who has been doing such a fine job, and with whom I am so honored to be associated in this Congress. We have other excellent Members joining us tonight and they are going to tell the story. I just want to say I am proud to be associated with these majority makers, these difference makers, these people who believe that the American people have a right to believe in their government, and the only way to do it is to restore accountability to Washington.

Ms. SUTTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota, and I thank him for his service on the Judiciary Committee. I think it is with heartfelt appreciation, not only on behalf of myself, but on behalf of the people that I represent, that I am grateful that you sit on the Judiciary Committee, where you are going to provide the oversight and the accountability on the issues that you brought forward here tonight.

You are right, that there is nothing more important than restoring the trust of the people we represent in this government. And it is not the end in and of itself, but it is essential, to both the substance and the spirit of what we do. The corruption has hurt the American people in so many ways. So this oversight and accountability is sorely needed, long overdue.

With that, I would like to recognize another distinguished gentleman from

the State of Minnesota who we are honored to have join us this evening, a new Member of Congress, somebody who came here to change the direction of this country, to take us in a new and positive, honest direction, Mr. TIM WALZ. What do you think about all this?

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. First of all, I thank the gentlewoman. I thank you for your leadership. I thank you for your optimism. I thank you for your service to our country and all of our colleagues here.

Every time we come and stand on this floor, it is an overwhelming feeling. It is an overwhelming sense of the greatness of this Nation, as well as the responsibility that goes with standing here. Each and every one of us represents over 600,000 Americans. Their hopes and dreams rest on what we do in this building. This is the most serious task we can ever undertake.

As we talk about restoring accountability and restoring trust, nothing is more important. Nothing shapes this Nation more than what we do here. And as we reflect the great values that have made America the country that it is, we need to make sure that it is being done in the way that the Americans want it to be done. They don't care about the partisan ideology. What they care about is results.

I hear a lot of talk that actions are what matter. I watched for the last hour as our friends talked about a very important subject across the aisle before we came on. They talked about fiscal responsibility. They are absolutely right, that is something that must be restored. This Nation's hopes and dreams and the investments we make in our children and grandchildren are going to be largely determined by how we handle the fiscal responsibility put on us.

The only thing I find curious about the discussion is that our friends are so convinced that nothing works in here they seem to have forgotten to mention that they have been the majority party for 12 years. They seem to have forgotten to mention that they had the executive branch for the last 6 years and both branches of Congress.

During that time, we saw record surpluses turn into record deficits. We now have a \$9 trillion national debt. We have seen the largest growth in government in a generation. And we have seen services provided to the people shrink and fees increase.

So I guess, coming from a high school classroom, sometimes I said it is always very important, those actions matter. Everyone wants to do well and everybody wants to talk about it, but what happens in here truly matters.

We have seen the culture of corruption. What I call it is the permanent vacation that Congress was on. Most people realize that the past Congress worked the fewest number of days since the do-nothing Congress of 1948. While we were passing the 100-hour agenda and the things you heard from

our friend from Minnesota, all of the things that we accomplished, the previous Congress met for one day in January of 2006.

There is a stark contrast here. You are absolutely right. We were sent to this floor to do the people's bidding, not in a partisan manner but in a way that was open, accountable, transparent and actually got the results that we were looking for.

I wanted the opportunity tonight to come here and illustrate a couple of things how we are doing business differently, how things have changed in Congress and how these things are tangible, and I am going to bring a couple of these that are very near and dear to my heart.

One is about a project back in my district, if I could, Congresswoman, illustrate this just for the people. I will give a little background on it. Because this project had the potential to be the single largest taxpayer loan to a private entity in the history of this Nation, and most people, even in my district, until it was brought to light, knew almost nothing about it.

There was a railroad that came from outside the State of Minnesota that was planning on doing that was very important, building rail infrastructure. All of us agree in southern Minnesota that it is needed. We need to move our commodities to market, we have a burgeoning ethanol industry that needs to move our product, and we also have the need to move coal and other commodities on this railroad.

Well, this railroad tried for nearly a decade to try and secure private financing for this project. It failed to do so. Late in 2005, a program to give loans to railroads all of a sudden found an extra \$32 billion in this program. It was written in by a Senator in the middle of the night in conference committee with specific parameters that would only apply to this railroad to get this loan.

This was done in the dark of night. The finances were kept private and out of the public eye, and the decision was going to be made after that conference committee by a set of appointed officials at the Department of Transportation.

Now, that in itself is bad enough in the culture of corruption. But it gets worse. Nine months prior to that Senator writing that in there, that Senator was a paid lobbyist, and as hard as it is to believe, for that very railroad. He is elected to the Senate and he puts this in here.

No one is doubting that we need rail. What this situation did and what it illustrated perfectly was when government is done badly, no matter what the intention was, it starts a domino effect of distrust and bad decisions.

This railroad was going to increase rail traffic up to 36 coal trains a day possibly, one mile long, and it was going to run by the single largest private employer already in my district, 210 feet away. That private employer

was the world famous Mayo Clinic. Decisions were not allowed for mitigation, decisions were not allowed to make sure the impact and the safety of the thousands of patients that traveled were addressed. This was a case of special interest and their lobbying friends allowing something to happen that the people of the district had very little say in.

I was told all along, it is the railroad and it is the way it is. There is nothing you can do. They are going to be approved for the loan and they are going to start building.

My question was that I refused to believe that this body would allow that to happen. I refused to believe that the public's elected official for their district would not have the opportunity to see the financial situation of the railroad, as well as the safety, which, by the way, ranked 43 out of 44 in safety, with one being the best.

So upon coming to Congress in January, working bipartisanship across the aisle with our friends, I put forward a bill that would ask that this be evaluated for credit, that this be looked at and see what the finances were, and see if the American people's money was being put at risk.

To put this into context, when Chrysler needed to receive a government loan to stay afloat in the early 1980s, this loan was over twice as big than that. That loan for Chrysler was debated for 3 weeks on the floor openly before it was finally voted on and strict requirements for its payback put into place.

Well, I am happy to say that the Federal Railroad Administration and the Department of Transportation looked at those finances again and determined that this was not creditworthy and was not worthy of a risk to the American taxpayers.

Now, to ensure that this never happens again, we have taken it one step further and passed a bill that Congress must cosign. If we ever try and do this again with \$1 billion or more of taxpayer money on a Department of Transportation loan, it is going to come in front of this body and we are going to get a vote and we are going to ask the questions. Is there a need for public investment into our infrastructure? Absolutely. Is there a need for expanded rail travel? Absolutely. Is there a right of private business to come to the government looking for some help so that they can build that infrastructure and profit? Absolutely. But it must be done in the light of day. It must be done with the approval of the American people's elected representative so that they can have the ability to decide if it was right or if it was wrong, and they will decide that in the way they vote in 2 years.

So, within 2 months, this Congress is starting to take those responsibilities. They are starting to ask those questions and we are starting to see progress. I can absolutely assure you, and I may never be able to prove this,

but I had to think had there not been a change to Congress, had there not been a new focus on trust and accountability and a new way of doing business, we maybe would have never seen the light of day on this.

So the people are served well, we have the people's interests at heart, and now we can move forward with a much more responsible plan.

So I applaud the Congresswoman for bringing us together. I know we each have several more opportunities to illustrate these. But I hope this one shows the American people, this is not a partisan issue. This is common sense. This is right and wrong. And I applaud those Members on the other side of the aisle that came to us and said, you are absolutely right, this is the way it should be done.

I yield back to the gentlewoman.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the distinguished gentleman from Minnesota, and I thank you for your leadership, and for that example of how public policy can work for the people, that it doesn't have to be the way that it has been. You point out an important point.

□ 2100

In the first 100 hours, when we took steps to clean up some of the unfortunate practices that have happened in the past and to change some of the resulting policies or the failure to enact some good policies, when we actually brought those measures to the floor under this new Democratic leadership, we did enjoy broad bipartisan support for many of those measures.

This is not just a Democratic agenda, this is about the people's agenda. That is what this House is about. I am glad, with the leadership we have, we are now getting the people's agenda on this floor so that people from both parties have the chance to deliver the kind of public policy that will help the people they are sent here to serve.

At this point, I would like to yield to a new Member in this Congress, a tremendous leader, a woman who has shown unwavering dedication and commitment to the people she was sent here to serve, Representative SHEA-PORTER from the State of New Hampshire.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I was interested in hearing from Members on the other side speak about the money we needed to save and the debt we have, because it was the Republican administration that drove us into the greatest deficits in history. Indeed, they are the reason I am standing here today.

I am a social worker by profession, and for years I noticed things were getting worse and worse for the middle class. I kept saying the middle class is stumbling and the poor have fallen, because while the very wealthy were enjoying the tax breaks, thanks to this administration, the middle class was trying to figure out if they had enough money to go to the movies on Friday

night and have money for pizza. Indeed, this is the first time we have seen this great, great difference in the rich and the poor since the time of the Titanic. Wages have been flat for several years now.

The American public understands this. This is not a Republican issue, it is not a Democratic issue, it is an issue about protecting the middle class, building the middle class, and bringing the poor so we do not have a permanent underclass in this country. The way to do that is to make sure we have a fair tax system, and we have to have accountability and oversight to make sure that we do.

We know that the tax breaks have gone to the top 1 percent for too long. So this drove me to Congress, looking at this; and the final, final nail in the coffin was looking at what happened after Hurricane Katrina because even if the administration could not find it in their hearts to take care of the people of Katrina, where was the homeland security?

When you look at Louisiana, you realize there is a port there. Gas and oil are there. Our food, our grains come there. Seventy percent of the grain passes through there. Certainly that is a vulnerable area. We heard that we were spending all of this money for homeland security and for programs to protect the American people. But when Hurricane Katrina hit, the American Government was missing in action with the exception of our military, and I give them great credit for what they did.

I know this because I went there not once, but twice. It was very frightening to see that the Federal Government was missing in action. And then the extra insult of having to listen on television while they were praising each other for the good job they did. They didn't bring the resources to the American people. They didn't have the money to bring the resources to the American people.

Where is the money? That is why we are here in Washington, to find out where is the money for the programs that the American people need, that we must have to protect us.

I looked at Iraq. I went there a couple of weeks ago. I looked at the contractors there personally. There are more than 100,000 contractors in Iraq for 133,000 soldiers; some more now, we had over 100,000 contractors.

The American public knows this word so well, Halliburton. The American people understand what has happened to the money. Every child born today has a birth tax of about \$29,000. Think about that. We went from a budget surplus to the greatest deficit in history, borrowing money from Communist China along the way to pay our bills, which is a security risk that all Americans understand, and every child born today owes about \$29,000 before he or she draws their first breath. This is an outrage, and we need to turn this around.

Like the rest of my freshman class, this propelled me to run. I had never even run for office in elementary school or high school. I was a social worker. I taught politics. Yes, I got involved in politics, but never envisioned myself here. And it is a tremendous honor to be on the floor and to be able to protect and speak up for the American people.

But we have an obligation to, first of all, provide programs that lift the poor and the middle class, to make sure that the wealthy pay their fair share; and we have an obligation to be fiscally conservative, and we can do that by good fiscal oversight and accountability. That has been missing for many years.

We are having more hearings now looking at various aspects. I serve on the Armed Services Committee. It was a shock to me to find out that we did not have the equipment we need and that the soldiers were suffering so.

Again, we can talk about Walter Reed. We had a week last week about that. Who could leave a soldier in rooms that had mold? Who could leave soldiers unattended and untreated? If we are going to honor our soldiers, we need to honor our commitments to the soldiers, and it is not right to say if we can afford to. When we put them into battle, we make sure that our commitment will be to care for them. Once they say they are going to serve us, it is our obligation to serve them.

It is truly an honor to be here and to be able to be working for the people of my own State, New Hampshire, and the people of this country. It is an honor to be here with such wonderful colleagues who are driven by one motive, and that is service and patriotism.

We were campaigning over a year or 2 years. We heard the message loud and clear from the middle class that they needed protection. They needed protection from policies and this administration that protected the wealthy and harmed the middle class. They wanted their children to be able to afford college again because that changed. They wanted their children to have the opportunities that they had growing up.

Even rents have gotten so high and with wages so flat, adult children have to come home to live with their parents. This is not the American way. The American way is to be fiscally responsible and to make sure that opportunities are available for all.

I think we have a terrific class with wonderful leadership. Speaker PELOSI certainly understands the direction this country needs to go in. We will do the job that the American people sent us here to do.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the distinguished gentlewoman from New Hampshire, and I appreciate your service, as do the people I represent, and your leadership.

You bring up so many important points. The bad news is that so much has gone wrong in the past due to the failure of proper oversight and accountability. The good news is that, as

you point out, we heard the call of the American people for more. We know what the expectations are, and we know what our responsibility is. And every day I am honored to come here with you to serve, and knowing that that is why we are here in the people's House, to help make those course corrections that will take this country in a new direction.

It is so important to be here tonight to talk about that oversight and accountability because it is essential if we are to make those course corrections, whether it be one of the points you make about the growing income and inequality, which is at record levels. We are losing the middle class. There are many, many things that we can do and we have already done, and we have talked about some of them today in the opening hours of Congress when we increased the minimum wage, when we made college education more accessible and more affordable, when we expanded research and development into alternative fuels which will provide us not only with a way to deal with an environmental imperative, but also as a security issue we have to address that, and our dependence on foreign oil.

Also, it provides us with opportunity for jobs today and tomorrow for the people out there because one of the other ways that Congress can show its oversight and accountability commitment, and I expect that we will because we heard a lot about this on the campaign trail from the American people, is on the issue of trade because we are losing jobs and our trade policies are not working for the American people and American businesses in the way that they should.

So I am confident that one of the things that we are going to do is exercise our constitutional responsibility to deal with trade and make sure whatever trade model we have—and we are for trade, and I hope to get to the day in the early days of this coming Congress, or later on in this Congress, that we can vote for a trade policy that will truly lift up American workers as well as workers abroad, and that we will be able to vote for a trade policy that has environmental standards that benefit America and this world.

There are so many options that we can do. There are so many things that we can do. We can have a trade policy with enforceability to stop the unfair manipulation and unfair trade practices. These are all matters of accountability and oversight, and this Congress I know is committed to producing that.

Now I want to again yield to my good friend, the gentleman from Minnesota, because another point that the distinguished gentlewoman from New Hampshire brought up was the issue of our veterans and what we are doing and not doing to serve our veterans who have served us so nobly.

So I yield to Representative WALZ who has some charts that he is going to share with the American people.

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to illustrate to the American people exactly what we are talking about when accountability and oversight fail. There are ramifications. Some may go unnoticed; others are absolutely horrific.

In the past several weeks, we have seen one of those examples. And the sad part is most people were not surprised. Most people have looked at this issue.

I want to talk about accountability and oversight. This Congress and our leadership are making sure we get our job done here. They are working us 5 days a week most weeks. My constituents back home, they don't have a lot of sympathy when they hear we are working Monday through Friday in the Capitol. That is what we were elected to do. That is what we were hired to do in their name.

I hear my friends on the other side of the aisle talk about, what do we have to do the whole time we are here? We are not voting the whole time, and the answer is, do our job providing oversight and accountability. Keep in mind, the entire last Congress had 30 oversight hearings. In the first 8 weeks, we have had 100.

Getting the job done for the American people means acting as a coequal branch in the responsibility of being fiscally responsible with their money, putting policy forward that benefits everyone, and making sure that the follow through is done on that.

I want to mention something as it pertains to our veterans and let people understand where this starts exactly. Make no mistake about budgets, budgets are far more than accounting. We hear our friends on the other side of the aisle talk about accounting and putting money in Americans' pockets. They talk about they have never met anyone who did their own taxes.

Well, I came to this Congress straight from the public school classroom, never having run for elected office before. I was teaching high school geography a few months ago. I can tell them on a high school teacher's salary, I was doing my own taxes.

And when they talk about a budget in terms of only being what is left in the pocket, they forget that budgets are moral documents. They are a reflection of our national values. How we prioritize those values is an absolute reflection of what we believe is most important in this Nation.

Now, I also come to you not just as a teacher but as a 24-year veteran of our armed services and our Army National Guard. I think the highest distinction that I could ever claim—at this time, I am the highest ranking enlisted soldier or servicemember that has ever served in this exalted body; it is something that I am very proud of.

Those people who know something about the military, I retired as a command sergeant major. The command sergeant major has one responsibility: Take care of the troops. Nothing else.

That means feed them, clothe them, pay them, make sure their health is taken care of, and train them to complete their mission. That's what you need to do.

Well, I am now a member of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, and what has happened at Walter Reed and what is going to happen again is not an anomaly. It was a decision. It was a decision that resulted from a failure in leadership and a bigger failure in accountability and oversight. And the saddest part about this is, the saddest, most tragic part about this was, it was totally avoidable.

Our veterans' service organizations, from the DAV to the Paralyzed American Veterans, to the Blind Veterans of America, to the Legion, all of these organizations understood what was coming.

□ 2115

I would like to just talk a little bit about, and illustrate, how the budget impacted what happened and how the lack of leadership and the lack of accountability led to that.

The chart I have up here is showing this is the VA treating many more Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. Every soldier who serves in these wars will, one day, be a veteran. Now, it does not come as a surprise to most Americans, since 2003, when the war started in Iraq, we have seen a steady increase in the number of soldiers that are going to be treated. Seems pretty logical. Most people anticipated that was going to come.

The number of VA health care patients in general continued to rise. We have an aging generation from our World War II veterans to our Korean War veterans to our Vietnam veterans. They are continuing to rise at a steady rate. Every single veteran service organization predicted this. Every single person involved with this predicted this.

Now, we are finding out we have not had enough money. We have not correctly planned ahead to take care of the warrior after the war. When you choose to fight a war, and make no mistake about it, Iraq was a choice, you understand you accept full responsibility for those warriors, not for the time that they are there, not for the time they are treated in a facility like Walter Reed, but for the rest of their life.

In falling short on this, here is how we are going to make up for it. If you will look at our copy here, enrollment fees, pharmacy copayments and third party copayments. This says up here, the President's budget increases fees on veterans. Make no mistake about the language. This is the President's tax on warriors, period.

So we saw a situation, increasing number of veterans coming back, budgets that were grossly underestimating the number, that we would need to try and spend the money elsewhere or

maybe put the money back in somebody's pocket. When I go to my district, and I ask them the question, do you want a few more dollars in your pocket or do you want to make sure that warrior has a room that shows the dignity that this Nation should provide, and every single one of them will go with the veteran.

We must have an open debate in this Congress about accountability, where is this money going to go, where is this money going to come from, and I want Members who agree with this, that this is the way we should do it, to stand in front of the mother from Saginaw, Michigan, who was at the VA hospital in Minneapolis, treating her son with a traumatic brain injury, and tell her she better get the checkbook out and write it out and pay for this because that is exactly what has happened here.

When this Congress chose to not hold hearings, to not hold oversight, and to not ask the hard questions, they created the situation at Walter Reed. They created the coming situation on our VA system, and this new Congress has accepted the responsibility and I, as a command sergeant major, retired, stand here and say my responsibility was to take care of those soldiers in my unit. My responsibility now is to take care of all of them.

I have absolute confidence in my colleagues that they will provide exactly that. That is what accountability means. That is what oversight means. It is not a gimmick to get reelected. It is not cute words, and for those that say it is hogwash and pay-as-you-go does not matter, I tell them this is what matters. Decide how we take care of our veterans and let us do it the way this Nation knows it should.

I know we have a few more things to go over, but this illustration is one that impassions all of us. It is one that did not need to happen, but it is one that I am optimistic holds the silver lining of uniting this Nation over an issue we all care about and getting real results.

Ms. SUTTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentleman, and we thank you for your service both in the Congress and in our military.

At this point, I yield to another distinguished colleague who has joined us on the floor who is a fantastic new Member of the Congress, who has shown great leadership on many issues, Dr. STEVE KAGEN, a representative from Wisconsin.

Mr. KAGEN. Mr. Speaker, thank you and I thank as well TIM for being not just a classmate in this great class of 2006 but also for serving the country and speaking out so eloquently and forcefully. You do not have to work out later like I do. You just had your workout.

But you bring up something that is terribly important. These are not just words or phrases. The boards are accountability, responsibility. This is something that you know from living your life as you have that we must do

not just here in Congress but in our everyday lives as citizens.

I am sure you would much rather be home teaching and serving your country as you were, but you were called to a higher duty. You were called to come here, and it was meant to happen.

I would like to mention a few things about values. I believe that the President has put forward a budget that is a reflection of his values and his party's values. Where you spend your money is a reflection of your values, and the President sought to cut \$3.8 billion from veterans health care and veterans benefits. The President and this administration was asking our veterans who have already earned their benefits to pay for them again. Why pay for something you have already earned? This is something that I consider to be disrespectful to those who have served in harm's way.

We will be talking about Iraq in several days and several weeks here on floor. We will be talking about supporting our troops, not just before they go in with adequate training and preparation and all the armament they need, not just during the combat itself, but after they come home, they must receive the care that they deserve in a prompt and meaningful fashion.

I served our veterans for a number of years in VA hospitals in Wisconsin and Illinois, and I can tell you the VA hospitals are superior, much better today than they were in the 1970s and 1980s and early 1990s when I was working there. They are much better than what we saw in Walter Reed, much better, but what happened at Walter Reed was this infection, if you will, this malfeasance, this bad idea, that government cannot help people. It is called privatization.

We should not privatize the health care of our veterans unless you are going to offer every veteran who served in harm's way with a card and say, here you go, soldier, you served in harm's way, you covered our back, now we have got yours; go to any doctor, any pharmacy, any hospital of your choice, we have got you covered.

Well, we are not ready to do that yet, are we? This administration has to come to understand there is a better way. Our class of 2006 represents America's hope, hope for a positive change and new direction, not just in veterans health care but in health care for every citizen in this country. I believe that is what we have to offer.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the distinguished gentleman and both of you, the gentleman from Minnesota as well, who point out so eloquently the responsibility that we have when we put forth a budget.

I am honored as a freshman Member of this Congress to have the honor to serve on the Budget Committee, and while I am grateful to be there because we have the chance to realign the budget that came to us from the administration, I must say that when it came over, when it failed to provide

the resources that we need for veterans health care and asked our veterans to pay more for their health care, it was a great disappointment.

But the reality is, because we are in a fiscal mess, because of years of irresponsibility, failure to provide oversight and accountability, even though we have limited resources because of that, I know that this class and this Congress is committed to realigning the money that we do have to ensure that we do, Mr. Speaker, that we do provide our troops what they need when we send them into any mission on our behalf and that they have what they need after they return.

Our commitment to ensuring oversight and accountability is going to be an ongoing mission because it is an ongoing responsibility. It is, in fact, the very essence of what our congressional duty is, to be that check, to ensure that which we enact and that which is done from the administration comports with the needs of the American people, and we will do so in an honest and open way.

We have heard about some of the steps that we have already taken, the first step, to restore trust, openness and accountability in Washington. This week, we are going to take additional actions, and in fact, we have already taken some here on this floor today.

In this week, we have scheduled consideration or acted already on whistleblower reform. We are going to deal with that issue. We are strengthening the protection for Federal whistleblowers to prevent retaliation against those who report wrongdoing, waste, fraud and abuse. This is so essential to making sure that the safeguards that we need will result in the kind of a government and the policies and the contracting and the work of the people will be of such a caliber that we can be proud, and more importantly, the American people can be proud.

We are also providing for more timely disclosure of government documents, another good measure not only of good government but of accountability, that will pay huge dividends and allow us to ensure that we are acting wisely and responsibly.

We are also nullifying a 2001 presidential executive order and restoring public access to presidential records. The public has a right to know the public's business. This is another measure to ensure that.

As we talk about the need to fund veterans health care, how can we fail to mention at the same time we fail to meet that need, we have seen gross excesses of lack of oversight and accountability and money, literally being lost in Iraq due to a failure of proper oversight of those we contract with. Limits on how long Federal no-bid contracts can last will be enacted this week by this new Congress. We will minimize the use of no-bid contracts and direct agencies to justify any such contracts if they are awarded.

These are all important measures that we will take this week in order to

continue to fulfill our commitment to the American people to take this country into a new direction, one that will work for them and one that has their interests at heart.

As we come to the conclusion of our hour, I would just like to give my colleagues another opportunity to report what they would like to report in these closing moments to the American people. I yield to my good friend from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Ohio, and so eloquently put. It is a new opportunity in America. It is one of optimism. We have got a lot of work to do, but Americans always rise to the challenge in the time of the greatest challenge.

I think it is important to realize that this place we are standing, this sacred hall, this is the people's House. This is the first branch of government in the Constitution. This branch is coequal to the other two branches, and our duty of providing oversight and accountability is not something that we get to pick and choose on. It is our constitutional responsibility.

When I hear people entrust me, you will hear people in this very chamber start using the term "micromanage." It seems to me there is a place where they dream up these words that they just keep repeating and repeating. Well, I can tell you what, micromanage, call it what you may, could be oversight and accountability also, and I ask my constituents, would you like a little oversight and accountability at Walter Reed? Would you like a little accountability on the situation in Iraq? Would you like a little accountability on what you hear on some of the things that are happening? And the answer is yes.

Sunshine truly is the best antiseptic. This new Congress has been here for 2 months, and there is a new way of doing business. It is the way that this country was laid out under the Constitution. It is the one that has served us best for over 230 years, and it is the one that we will continue to use that will provide the American people with the best government possible.

□ 2130

I thank the gentlelady, I thank my good colleague from Wisconsin for the opportunity to be here with you, and I look forward to many more opportunities to do the Nation's bidding the way it should be.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the gentleman. At this time I would like to yield to my friend from Wisconsin (Mr. KAGEN).

Mr. KAGEN. I am very proud to be standing next to both of you and express a great deal of optimism. I was sent here from the great State of Wisconsin, some might call it Cheeseconsin. We are still the Dairy State. I was sent here because people felt they needed some honest leadership, leadership that wouldn't let them down, some straight talkers.

We are delivering that message here. We are delivering a message not just verbally, but in a work product. Take a look, if people around the hall here and at home across America will take a look at the work we have already produced, you will find we have been working hard, and the work is not done yet. I am absolutely convinced that by working together, we will build a better future for everyone in this country. Stay tuned to C-SPAN. We will be back and deliver a positive message again.

Ms. SUTTON. I thank the gentleman.

These issues that we have begun to talk about here, and we have begun to take action on, is part of our ongoing effort to restore accountability and trust in Washington. They are part of the mandate of the last election.

Together, we will build on this work throughout the 110th Congress, and as I wrap up here, I would just like to thank those people, those people that I have the honor to represent from the 13th District of Ohio from Lorain to Elyria to Akron to Barberton, I thank you for the privilege of serving you, and we shall be unyielding in our commitment to deliver on promises.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

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

Mr. BILBRAY. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to present our report to the American people on the status of the immigration issue tonight, and it is an honor to be able to welcome you to the Speaker's chair.

As a new freshman, or as one of your first times up there, I want to congratulate you on your advent to service of the people of America as the acting Speaker tonight.

Mr. Speaker, actually tonight we are talking about an issue that a lot of Americans have asked for a long time to be addressed, and that is the many different ways that we are encouraging illegal immigration. But actually tonight, we are to be talking about one of the items that originally was not intended to be one of immigration, it was one to be basically addressing national security and neighborhood security.

For good reasons, Congress in the past, both Democrats and Republicans, have said that the movement of capital funds, of bank accounts, was a major issue in fighting things like drug trafficking, of terrorist activities and of other illegal activities to where the United States' Congress, with this support and the consent of the people of the United States, said that before somebody opens a bank account, before they start getting involved in business transactions with a lending institution, they need to show and prove who they are so we know who is moving this cash back and forth. The identification issue became critical to make sure that drug cartels and criminal ele-

ments and terrorist elements were not able to use our institutions of lending, of finance, as part of their terrorist and illegal activity.

Sadly what has happened, though, is we passed a law that said everyone must be identified. There are lending institutions that have found ways to get around the law and say that if somebody is able to get a phony ID from a phony government document, we will look the other way and use that to be able to open bank accounts.

A lot of this discussion is specifically about illegal immigrants being able to get these documents, because you have countries such as Mexico that are willing to give documents, ID documents to individuals without any proof of who they are. Thus, the document such as the consulate card from the Republic of Mexico isn't worth the paper it is written on.

What has happened is these institutions, these American institutions, are actually participating in business transactions that they know violates the spirit of the law and accepts phony identification as a way to be able to engage in business that otherwise would be illegal for legal resident aliens and U.S. citizens to engage in, because the rest of us are required to show viable identification.

At this time I have the privilege to recognize the gentlelady from Tennessee. At this time I would like to yield whatever time she may consume to Mrs. BLACKBURN.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman from California, and I thank him for his insightfulness on the immigration issue.

He has done so much work in his service in this Congress addressing this issue and encouraging people to look at the issue, to learn about the issue and to realize it is more than just a surface issue.

I also have appreciated the fact that the gentleman has encouraged people to realize the compassionate thing to do in this is to make certain that we keep immigration legal and that we honor the men and women who have gone through the process legally.

That is important to do, and it is the right step. It is the compassionate step to make.

H.R. 1314 addresses the issue that Mr. BILBRAY mentioned and referenced as he opened his remarks about those that have entered the country illegally, getting access to our financial markets. Now, H.R. 1314 is the Photo Identification Security Act. This is a great piece of legislation. It is not a lengthy bill, it is one that I think everybody here in the House can pick up and read in 1 or 2 minutes. As you see, it is only about three pages.

What it does is something very big and very important, though, it closes a loophole that exists in the PATRIOT Act and the IRS regulations, and it is through that loophole that you could literally drive a truck. That is the