But we must not dwell, because in reflection we sometimes miss opportunity. The President is set to announce that he wants to see a ''surge'' force of approximately 20,000 extra soldiers to support the ongoing civil war in Iraq.

Madam Speaker, it does not take a rocket scientist to calculate the odds that more troops will mean more wounded, more fatalities, more losses to American families. Is the President ready for 20,000 more grieving families? Worse yet, has the President considered what this will do to the existing all volunteer force?

Retired Army Colonel Douglas McGregor has been quoted as saying, ''It will break the force, which in my estimation is broken already. It will leave you with no strategic reserves.'' Retired Army Colonel David Hunt has said, ''Everyone we met was on a second tour, at least, and many were on their fourth or fifth combat tour in either Iraq or Afghanistan. The soldiers are tired; the families are going nuts. It's not the solution.''

But then, Madam Speaker, the President has not shown that this is truly about the sacrifice of our men and women. If it were, all of the options presented to the President would be open for consideration, not just the ones that already fit into his ideological philosophy. The report from the Iraq Study Group would not have been as casually tossed aside as were the advisements of the Presidents own military leaders—career servicemen and women who have given their entire professional lives to protecting America.

Over 3,000 have already lost their lives, and that's only the Americans. One journalist in particular, is asking what if on his own. Keith Olbermann, host of Countdown with Keith Olbermann has asked:

''What if he had already sacrificed 3,003 of them—and was then to announce his intention to sacrifice hundreds, maybe thousands, more?

''This is where we stand tonight with the BBC report of President Bush's ''new Iraq strategy,'' and his impending speech to the nation, which, according to a quoted senior American official, will be about troop increases and ''sacrifice.''

''The president has delayed, dawdled and deferred for the month since the release of the Iraq Study Group.

''He has seemingly heard out everybody, and listened to none of them.

''If the BBC is right—and we can only pray it is not—he has settled on the only solution all the true experts agree cannot possibly work: more American personnel in Iraq, not as trainers for Iraqi troops, but as part of some flabby plan for ''sacrifice.'' (Countdown, MSNBC, 1/2/07)

Madam Speaker, the President's proposal reminds me of the ostrich who would rather stick his head in the sand, than face the reality that Americans want our soldiers home now. Not after another 20,000 have had to die for a strategy that is entirely wrong.

In Olbermann's words, ''The additional men and women you have sentenced to go there, sir, will serve only as targets.'' Which is exactly what they will be, bodies to absorb the surge in the number of insurgents which this senseless war has created. This senseless, endless war, as Mr. Olbermann states has succeeded in two ways:

''It has succeeded, Mr. Bush, in enabling you to deaden the collective mind of this country to the pointlessness of endless war, against the wrong people, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

It has gotten many of us used to the idea—the virtual ''white noise''—of conflict far away, of the deaths of young Americans, of vague ''sacrifice'' for some fluid cause, too complicated to be interpreted except in terms of the very important-sounding but ultimately meaningless phrase ''the war on terror.''

And the war's second accomplishment—your second accomplishment, sir—is to have taken money out of the pockets of every American, even out of the pockets of the dead soldiers on the battlefield, and their families, and to have given that money to the war profiteers.'' (Countdown, MSNBC, 1/2/07)

Which, Madam Speaker, brings me back to the question of what if? In light of all of the evidence to the contrary, what if we, as Congress, allow the President to send tens of thousands of more men and women to keep a peace that does not exist?

Madam Speaker, it is my hope that four years from now, I will not have to look back on this question of what if with the same heavy heart that I do for the past four years.

RECOGNIZING BRADLEY JOHNS FOR ACHIEVING THE RANK OF EAGLE SCOUT

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 5, 2007

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Bradley Johns, a very special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 393, and in earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Bradley has been very active with his troop, participating in many scout activities. Over the many years Bradley has been involved with scouting, he has not only earned numerous merit badges, but also the respect of his family, peers, and community.

Madam Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Bradley Johns for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout. I am honored to represent Bradley in the United States House of Representatives.

INTRODUCTION OF THE UNIVERSAL RIGHT TO VOTE BY MAIL ACT

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 5, 2007

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act of 2007—a bill to allow any eligible voter to vote by mail in a federal election if he or she chooses to do so.

In my home state of California, voters already have this right. California is one of the twenty-eight states that already provide this convenient alternative to voters.

While I love the ritual of going to the polls to vote, I know that getting to the polls on Election Day is often difficult. For some, it's impossible.

That is why I have introduced a bill that builds upon the growing trend of states to bring the polls to the voters. I believe we should try to meet our constituents halfway by increasing access to the electoral process.

What I am proposing is not new or even untested. States ranging from my home state of California, to Wisconsin, to North Carolina, to Maine have already adopted this voter-friendly policy.

With mail voting, citizens can vote from the convenience of their own homes. They will have more time to mull over their choices and make informed decisions, and they will be able to do so on their own terms.

Not surprisingly, studies have shown that some of the biggest supporters of voting by mail are parents, who must schedule time to go to the polls around so many other obligations.

Studies have also indicated that adding the option to vote by mail does not create a partisan advantage for one political party over the other.

Republicans and Democrats both benefit from similar increases in voter turnout when voters are given the choice to mail in their ballots.

In fact, overwhelming support for voting by mail is consistent across nearly every demographic—including age, income level, race, education, employment status and ideology. It is a win-win for all Americans.

After adopting a universal right to vote by mail system in 1978, California saw a thirty percent increase in the use of mail-in ballots.

In my district of San Diego, over 40 percent of voters opted to mail in their votes during the 2006 election.

Other States that have implemented this policy have seen the same degree of support from voters, which is why it is hardly surprising that States offering the option of mail-in ballots often experience greater voter participation.

There is also an extremely low incidence of fraud with voting by mail when compared to other methods of voting.

As the former President of the League of Women Voters of San Diego, I care deeply about the integrity of our electoral system.

Twenty-eight States have already proven this option works, and it is safe. It is time to give voters in the remaining States this convenient, secure and affordable alternative.

While I am proud to be from a State where citizens already have this right, I believe democracy works best when all citizens have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard.

Right now, an uneven playing field exists between States that already offer the option of mail-in ballots and States that do not.

When the same election is more accessible to voters in California than it is to voters in Michigan, the system is unfair.

States that fail to offer this choice stand to compromise their leverage in Federal elections by curbing the greatest level of voter participation.

We should follow the lead of over half of our Nation's States and ensure a uniformity of rights for all voters.

I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in supporting this effort to strengthen the democratic process and give American voters the choices they deserve.