

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 gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MORAN of Kansas 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 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 Michigan (Mr. MCCOTTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MCCOTTER addressed the House. His 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 of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House once again. As you know, the 30-Something Working Group comes to the floor every week to discuss issues that are at the forefront of what is going on in the country, and there are a lot of good things that are happening here under the Capitol dome on behalf of the American people.

As you know, many times we focus on the issue of Iraq, and just to continue to keep the Congress focused on that very issue, and also to keep the American people tuned in on what is happening, as of March 4, 2008, total deaths in Iraq, U.S. casualties, are 3,973; total number of wounded in action and returned to duty is 16,211; and the total number of wounded in action when not returning to duty is 13,109.

As we look at these issues and continue to focus on trying to get out of Iraq more sooner than later, I definitely want the Members to continue to focus on the sacrifice that many of our men and women are carrying out on a daily basis, and their families, I must add.

Just a case in point, Mr. Speaker, just yesterday I returned. I went to the opening of the Florida legislature. Be-

cause of bad weather, I ended up finding myself traveling through Atlanta, and I ended up getting here late yesterday evening. There was a soldier on the plane with us, and I noticed him sitting a couple of seats up ahead of me. I didn't have the opportunity to have a discussion with him. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I always enjoy talking to our men and women in uniform.

He was ahead of me. When he came out of the gate there at the Delta terminal, there were about 30 of his family members there that were just happy to see him. Tears and prayers being answered for this young man coming back home. I understand he is from Virginia.

I did have the opportunity, I had one of my congressional coins in my computer bag, and I had the opportunity to shake his hand after 5 minutes of celebration from his family. Many of them were thanking God for his return. This kind of love is really, if one was to use biblical terms, almost close to agape love, the fact that family members had an opportunity to see their son, nephew and father and husband return back.

I think we should have the resolve every day, even on weekends, to figure out how we can bring our men and women home. I personally don't have a close relative or family member that is in theater right now, be it in Iraq or Afghanistan, but I want the Members to keep the conscience of those that do have individuals that are in harm's way.

There are a number of families on military bases, a number of families that are in subdivisions and communities. There are young people that their fathers and mothers were members of the Army Reserve and members of the National Guard that have their family or their father that is serving in Iraq.

Even though we see more peaceful days in Iraq and we don't see the political achievement that the Iraqi Government was supposed to make, I still want to share with the Members of how long can we keep that peace, and at what cost, not only in life but in U.S. taxpayer dollars.

As we talk about infrastructure issues here in this country, as we talk about the economy in this country, in Iraq we are financing new infrastructure for the Iraqi people. Here, in the United States, we still have crumbling bridges, projects that are still on the drawing board to be carried out, and they are not being carried out.

So as we get into this big discussion with the White House over the budget, as we have the debates in committees, I just want every Member, Democrat and Republican, to think about those that are living in the real world that are looking forward to a celebration that I witnessed last night.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about rebuilding our

economy and the economic forum on Wednesday that the House Democratic leaders hosted, our second economic forum, the forum which convened national experts on economic and financial issues. It will address the state of America's economy. I think as we look at this whole New Direction Congress, it's important that we look at that we have already passed a bipartisan stimulus package that wasn't all that it should have been or all that it could have been, if I can say that, but it was something. I know that we are going to be working very hard to do even more. It will help create 500,000 American jobs. The plan was targeted as a temporary fix to allow rebates for those families that are most at risk in this bad economy, in this bad economic turnaround. I think later this spring, the recovery rebates put hundreds of dollars, up to \$600 per individual and \$1,200 per married couple, plus a \$300 tax credit in the hands of more than 30 million Americans. That is a bipartisan piece of legislation, and I think that it's very, very important that we continue to march in that direction.

I also think that it's important that when we look at these record oil prices and we look at some of the things that we are pushing for here on the House floor, and as we work on the Senate side, I think it's important that the Bush administration works with us as we continue to rebuild this economy. Many of the Presidential candidates are out there talking about different proposals, different packages. But I can tell you right now, there's a lot of work to be done, Mr. Speaker and Members, until that actually takes place.

I know that the American people are building a lot of hope and enthusiasm around this very issue of the economy, and there are many States that are voting now that are looking at this as a primary action that they would like to see take place.

As we also start looking at the economy, we have to also pay attention to what some U.S. families are going through these days. For many of them, it used to be an unaccepted practice to even purchase a car if you couldn't pay for it in cash. It was almost an unaccepted practice to use your credit card to pay your light bill or to buy food at the grocery store. We are having more Americans that are doing that now.

More credit card companies are sending many of our constituents credit cards at very, very low interest rates at the beginning, and then 6 months later, kicking in a number of penalties that they are going to have to pay. I think it's important that we keep our eyes on this very issue.

This bipartisan feeling and structure that we have here on the floor that we built with the economic stimulus package will also help us offer a new long-

term vision to not only lower fuel prices but to lower health care costs and increase health care quality. That is something that we tried to do, Mr. Speaker, before the closing of the first session of the 110th Congress, and something that we are going to continue to work on.

We have made several attempts to be able to lower energy prices and create thousands of new green jobs, providing incentives for clean and renewable energy. I think that it's very, very important that we do that because OPEC knows that we are forever more dependent on them. I encourage those cities and counties and States that are moving more towards clean burning fuel and flex vehicles and hybrids.

I was recently in New York and I was very excited to see many of the taxicabs are now transferring over to hybrid vehicles made by Ford. I personally purchased a Ford Escape, and it's a hybrid. Things have gotten better in the Meek family. I think that it's important that we all embrace this concept because it is a national security issue, Mr. Speaker. I think it's also important that we empower American ingenuity and also business tools to win in this global economy.

Also, I talked a little earlier about the issues of Iraq getting a big part of the dollars. But the dollars are not necessarily coming to our country and not coming to benefit U.S. families. Just to paint a picture so folks don't feel that I am just talking about energy or talking about it just for the sake of talking about it, Americans are paying more than double for gas than they did when President Bush first took office.

You look at January 22, 2001, it was \$1.47. I remember those days when I used to fill up the tank. Now, on average, a price of a gallon today is \$3.13, and some of my constituents would say, That is a low number, Congressman. I am paying a lot more than that.

I think it's important we pay attention. This information is from the Energy Information Administration. Again, these are not charts that someone made up in the back room and said, This looks good, let's put it on the floor. As it relates to gas and oil and home heating costs, they have skyrocketed, and so have oil companies' profits. When you look at the price of gas here, like I pointed out in 2001, at \$1.47, you look at 113 percent as relates to the profit line. You look at the oil companies, what they have done over the years goes all the way over to 2008 and the 310 percent profit, in the billions. I think it's important that everyone understand what is happening here as it relates to who's paying and who's benefiting. Profits are not a bad word. But greed is.

Mr. Speaker, I don't blame the oil companies, I blame the Republican minority that was once the majority, and also I blame the White House for giving these oil companies an unfair advantage over the U.S. taxpayer. As we start to balance the playing field in a

bipartisan way, I am encouraging my colleagues, especially on the Republican side, to think about the price that their constituents are paying at the pleasure of many of these oil companies that are celebrating not only record-breaking profits in the billions, but it is really sad for what is happening, especially right now in the economy.

This data was compiled by the Center for American Progress. I think that it's important that we look at and also note that there was a meeting that I had in my folder, and I need to pull that information out, in 2001, with Vice President CHENEY and many of the oil executives there at the White House, which is the best public housing in the United States of America and has the most famous office on the face of the Earth, that there was a meeting, and that happened in 2001.

□ 2045

Well, I can tell you, it must have been a great meeting, because there was an energy bill that was passed shortly thereafter that gave many of our oil companies an unfair advantage over the U.S. taxpayer and what they pay at the pumps.

These are the facts here: \$30 billion in 2002 as it relates to profits. If a small business saw this kind of jump, it would no longer be a small business. I don't know of a small business outside of probably a dot.com company or some sort of search engine that picked up a niche and ended up really shooting through the roof as it relates to profits. But they are few and far between. But it seems like all of the oil companies hit the jackpot after this meeting and the endorsement of the Republican Congress.

In 2002, \$30 billion in profits; 2003, \$59 billion in profits; 2004, \$82 billion in profits. Meanwhile, we are paying more at the tank, and it is inching up. In 2005, \$109 billion in profits; 2006, \$118 billion in profits; and 2007, \$123.3 billion in profits that many of these oil companies have earned.

So when we start talking about turning green, when we start talking about making sure that the U.S. taxpayer gets their fair share and has a balanced playing field, then we have to talk about investing in the Midwest versus the Middle East. We have to talk about creating more green opportunities through biofuels and clean burning fuel here in the United States that will put people to work here in the United States and will maybe turn these companies into investing in the U.S. versus the Middle East. I think it is safer. I think it will get us more out of the conflicts that we find ourselves in in the Middle East, and I believe that it will help our economy beyond what we have seen thus far.

The economy right now is based on how much you can borrow. As you can see, the Fed has cut interest rates by half a percentage point, and then they cut it again by half a percentage point.

So it really has been built on how much you can borrow, or how much can you take out of the home, which is your financial security.

Many U.S. taxpayers and many U.S. citizens have found themselves in the situation where they have to rob Peter to pay Paul and not have those dollars to be able to assist their families in receiving a higher education, or being able to assist their families or young people in their family, assisting them in starting a new business.

I think that, Mr. Speaker, when we look at that, we have to look at the way that we are digging ourselves out of this hole. Unless we get out of Iraq more sooner than later, we will find ourselves continuing to see the image of the United States of America financially deteriorate in international markets. I think it is important that every American pays attention to this.

I hope I can get my chart that talks about the deficit, because I think that it is important that we focus on that, because even when we look at the economic stimulus package, it was based on borrowed money. It wasn't money because of good financial controls. It wasn't because the President and the Office of Budget and Management have done such a great job. It is not because we had discipline with the Republican Congress that was the Congress before this Congress as it relates to fiscal discipline. We now owe foreign nations more than we have ever owed them in the history of the Republic.

I would couch it this way: You have a neighbor that comes over to you and knocks on your door and says, can I borrow \$40? And you say, well, this is my neighbor, I believe he is pretty good for it. I will give him the \$40. Well, every time you see that neighbor, you are going to think about that \$40. I don't care if it is the next day. And when they are talking to you and they don't necessarily mention anything about the \$40 that they owe you, now you become a little bitter. Now you don't even want to listen to what that person has to say, unless they are saying they are going to give you your money back.

That is the position we are in now in the United States of America. We owe China money. We owe them. We owe OPEC countries money. We owe them. We owe Iran money. Even though folks run around here talking about Iran is a threat, Iran, we owe them money. So when we start to think about these issues, we have to think about them as it relates to making sure that we move in a way that is fiscally sound, and I think that it is important that every Member of Congress pays very close attention to that.

When you look at this war, because it is the 800 pound gorilla that is in the room, you have to look at it from the standpoint of saying the money that we are spending there, and I have been there three times in Iraq, the money we are spending there, what is the return? They say, well, who is winning?

Well, I know that my district is not winning, because I am not able to even bring the dollars home I need.

We have Members running around here on the floor on the Republican side saying, oh, we need earmark reform, or we need Member project reform, when Republicans ran rampant when they were in charge with all kind of projects, bridges-to-nowhere and all kind of meaningless projects that are out there.

Meanwhile, I have a community back in South Florida, they are concerned about road money. They are concerned about mass transit. They are concerned about health care. They are concerned about education. And they want the Federal dollar to be able to make it down there so that we can educate the next generation. Not only in what you may call a pre-K through 12th grade experience, but also higher education. They are concerned about that.

Meanwhile, here in Washington, D.C. there is a spending spree on how much money can we send to Iraq? The last \$70 billion I voted against going into Iraq. It didn't have any strings attached, it didn't have any accountability measures attached to it.

I remember when I first got here about 6 years ago, there was a discussion about we are doing this on the backs of future generations. Now the discussion is we are doing it on our own backs right now. We are weighing ourselves down and our chin is hitting the ground because we have so much weight on it. How much weight? Let me just point it out here. Hopefully the chart will make it here before I finish this segment of what I have to say.

When you look at it, and I have a smaller chart right here, hopefully we will have the bigger one, 224 years, 1776 up until 2000, 42 presidents, 42 presidents were only able to borrow \$1.01 trillion from foreign nations. That is \$1.01 trillion from foreign nations.

In 7 years, 6 years of a Republican Congress that was rubber-stamping everything that the President brought to this Chamber, President Bush and that Republican Congress were able to run up \$1.33 trillion. That is in 7 years, versus what U.S. presidents in 224 years were able to accomplish.

Why do I point that out? I point that out to shed light on this deficit issue. When you pass tax cuts that you can't afford for the very super-wealthy when they are not asking for it, you have two wars going on and you really don't have a plan to take yourself out of the first war in Iraq, I think former President Bill Clinton says it best when you talk about Iraq. I will go back to the neighbor scenario, Mr. Speaker.

If there is a fire and your neighbor's house burns, it is the neighborly thing to do for you to accept that individual into your home, and probably their family. All of us would do it. We are all people of goodwill. You will probably let them stay. If you didn't have an extra room, you would let them stay in the living room on the couch, pull the

sleeper couch out and let them stay there. Maybe a month will pass and they will still be there. Maybe some will even allow them to stay 6 months. Maybe even a really nice person would let them stay a year-and-a-half. But 5 years later, it is no longer about the fire.

So I think it is important that we look at this issue of getting out of Iraq more sooner than later, because it is no longer about the fire, it is about something else.

So when we look at this, as I just pointed this out and I want to make sure Members can see it, \$1.01 trillion, \$1.33 trillion. Seven years, this is what happened under not only the leadership of the Bush administration, but also the Republican Congress. Where did this come from? The U.S. Department of Treasury, which the Secretary of the Treasury is appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate. I think it is important that people understand that I am not on the floor sharing fiction, that I am actually sharing fact.

As we look to make these hard decisions, I think it is important that Americans understand that we are paying more on the debt service on the money that we owe these foreign nations and that we owe overall on the debt, we are paying more on that than we are putting into homeland security. So when you have folks coming here waiving arms and carrying on saying that, well, you know, we have got to protect America. I am more standing for protecting America. Oh, I am with the troops. No, I am with the troops. I got a tattoo on my chest saying I am with the troops. When they come here and make these bold statements and giving these great floor statements, I think folks really need to understand what is really going on.

Here is a picture, Mr. Speaker. You talk about the 110th Congress and the boldness of Democrats when we came here. With some few Republicans voting with us, we voted to stop the President on the surge. When you look at the surge, it is costing the U.S. taxpayers billions and billions and billions of dollars that, again, from the first chart, that we borrowed.

This is the President and some of our Republican colleagues on the other side, as a matter of fact, a supermajority of them that were there saying, Mr. President, we are going to be with you. We are 40-plus. They cannot override you, because we are going to stand with you in harmony.

Here is a picture to make that point, to make it visual for you, because I just want to make sure that Members don't feel that there is anything that is being shared here that is not true.

This is the chart, again, talking about the dollars. Look at Japan. This is actually in the billions of dollars, \$644.3 billion that we owe Japan. China has a double margin here. They are up there at \$349.6 billion. I think it is important that everyone understands

what is happening there. Then it goes on to the U.K., \$239.1 billion. These numbers are actually higher now. But these are the numbers that I just wanted to make sure going across.

You see this other red bar here that talks about OPEC nations? Those are nations that are oil producing nations. They sit in a room and talk about what a barrel of oil will cost, and it will affect our neighborhoods and heating oil prices and all.

So when we start talking about the management of the country and start talking about how we are going to move in the right direction, I think it is important that everyone pays attention to who is getting what they want and who is not getting what they need.

Here is another example. The President proposed deep cuts in key priorities, in the COPS Program, which is Community Oriented Policing. I used to be a state trooper. I can tell you that many of my colleagues in law enforcement, there are a number of sheriffs, the National Association of Sheriffs, the National Association of Chiefs, they all fight for this Community Oriented Policing.

What does it do? Well, it actually makes communities safer, and it allows them to be able to put bike patrols and foot patrols in neighborhoods where usually you will have crime. It allows them also, Mr. Speaker, to be able to go and create after-school programs for young people that are at risk. But that has received a 100 percent cut.

Talk about weatherization assistance. When we look at the whole issue of heating oil prices and what it costs to heat a home right now, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for everyone to understand that those individuals that are financially challenged, especially those receiving Social Security benefits, are not able to receive any assistance whatsoever. A 100 percent cut in that program.

When we look at the Department of Homeland Security, First Responder Grants, they took a 78 percent cut. What does that mean back in the hometown or the parish or what have you? It means that 78 percent of what the Federal Government would have given to your local government to protect the homeland has now been cut, and those dollars are hard to find.

When you look at EPA Clean Water Grants, that has been cut by 21 percent. When you look at Community Development Block Grants, that has been cut by 20 percent. When you look at the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, that has been cut by 17 percent.

I give those examples and I am making those points, Mr. Speaker, to say that when you look at \$70 billion in Iraq and you look at no-strings-attached, they seem to be able to get away with what U.S. taxpayers and U.S. cities and U.S. mayors and governors cannot get away with.

□ 2100

This past Tuesday, and I mentioned earlier at the top of this hour, I had

the opportunity to go to the opening session of the Florida legislature. I heard the House Speaker talk about the deficit in the State of Florida, some 4 billion plus dollars that they have to be able to fill the gap, because they are not like those of us that are here that can be able to take out a high interest credit card and say, let's put it on that card, whatever it costs. We will worry about it later, but we just need to do it now whatever we feel like doing.

In the States, they actually have to balance. Constitutionally, they have to balance their budget. So that means something has to be taken from someone else to fill that gap. And so when you start filling that gap, I want to make sure that everyone in America understands that you are talking about cutting assistance to seniors, you are talking about higher tuition rates in colleges. Even though we cut student loan rates here on the Federal end as relates to interest rates, they are going to end up seeing higher tuition because they have got to make ends meet. You are going to end up seeing many of our youth programs cut. You are going to end up seeing many assistance for small businesses at the State level cut. They are going to have to find that \$4 billion in Florida from somewhere.

So I think it is very, very important, we started looking at this whole issue of Iraq and accountability and all of the things that we talk about here on the floor. You have got to think about how these decisions trickle down to local government. When you start looking at the Bush tax cuts for those that are the connected and the wealthy, we start looking at that as devolution of taxation. We've cut your taxes up here in Washington, blah, blah, blah. You look at the previous Republican Congress, oh, this is what we've done. Apparently the American people caught on to it and that's why the Democrats are in the majority now. It's devolution of taxation.

What does devolution of taxation mean? It means once you cut something here, you're going to have to balance in the local government area. So the State government has to cut what it gives to local governments and school boards and parishes. And then, when it gets to the local government, they're going to have to make cuts to be able to fill the gaps, the obligation that the State is not making.

So when you look at those gaps being filled, I can guarantee you that many of my constituents and many of us who know what it means to punch in and punch out and have a 15-minute break in the morning and a solid half-hour for lunch and if you get a 15-minute break in the afternoon. But those individuals that know what that means, then they know that they're going to end up getting the short end of the stick, or the messy end of the stick as we may say down in Florida.

I think it is important that people understand what is happening here and

what is not happening here. What is not happening here is that the President is not moving in a responsible way to get us out of Iraq. There is great debate as it relates to the Presidential candidates. The picture that I showed you of a number of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who stood with the President and said that they will not allow him to be overridden and there they are there standing in the picture, are standing in the schoolhouse door as it relates to the kind of reform that should be happening.

What is happening here, to give you a report on that, is that there is a great attempt to be able to try to bring ourselves back into fiscal control as it relates to the budget and start working on knocking down this deficit. We are paying more on the debt service than we pay on Homeland Security. That is a problem. If the debt service is in competition with what we invest in education, that is a problem.

So when you look at these issues and you look at 2010 and the sunset of these Bush tax cuts, when you look at what first responders are not getting, 100 percent cut as relates to the COPS program, community-oriented policing program that many law enforcement officials called for and endorse 110 percent; when you look at these issues and you say that there is no money, when you have crumbling bridges here in the U.S. and you have bridges that are being built in Iraq by U.S. contractors and Middle Eastern contractors, you can't help but question who is doing the right thing and who is doing the wrong thing. Because, I am going to tell you right now, it is not happening. In all of the Congressional districts that you look around, I don't see any Congressional district saying, Oh, we're happy with what we have. We don't need anything else. We don't care about infrastructure and making and creating U.S. jobs. We don't care about investment and green collar jobs to where if we wanted to put sod on the top of the Capitol building, that won't be an overseas job. If someone dropped out of high school, they have an opportunity to take part in that. If someone went on to college, if someone went on to post-education and became an architect and they would have a part in that. Will it build our economy? Truck drivers will make money. You will have individuals in the agriculture field that will make money and will be able to stimulate our economy for real jobs. We would no longer have the discussion that took place in Ohio just last night as relates to the Presidential primary on who is shipping jobs overseas and who is creating jobs on land here in the United States.

So as we look at that, Mr. Speaker, I think that we should look at it from the standpoint that we have to win. The U.S. taxpayer must win. We are here to represent that individual. I didn't come to represent anybody else on another continent; I came here to represent, not only my constituents,

but by them voting for me to be here, Mr. Speaker, they federalized me to be able to deal with the issues of the United States of America and be a part of board of directors of the greatest country on the face of the Earth. We want that to continue to be the case.

What we don't want is what we are seeing, the downward spiral, irresponsible spending, and the cuts that the Bush White House has said that has to be made to be able to carry out a mission in Iraq that has no end in sight as far as they are concerned. I think that the American people will rise up once again in the upcoming election in saying that we are willing to put in the people who are going to put an end to this practice.

I beg my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to please join us, those of us on the Democratic side that are trying to find a way to not only bring about accountability in Iraq, but bring our men and women home so that they can be reunited with their families; so that they can actually go to some of the programs that I go to of my kids. I get an opportunity to see them. I had an opportunity to have dinner with my family this afternoon earlier. I just want them to have that opportunity. I want the men and women that serve in uniform to have that opportunity. I want that State Department worker that has had to volunteer to go to Iraq to have that opportunity. I want that church or that synagogue or that mosque to be able to spend that spare time in trying to build families versus trying to comfort families of what is going on with their loved ones in harm's way. I want that kind of America that we are used to seeing.

Like I said earlier, it is no longer about the fire, it is about something else. And I think that it is important that the Members, their number one priority should be every day that they hit this floor is how they can reunite these families and to be able at the same time save the U.S. taxpayer money or their investment. If we can come to the floor and put \$70 billion like that, and that is without my vote, over into Iraq to continue what the President would like to see carried out in Iraq, then we should be able to do the same in stimulating our economy here domestically and making U.S. families stronger and making Americans stronger.

With that, Mr. Speaker, as usual, the 30-Something Working Group, we do want to hear from the Members. I want to make sure that the Members share information with us and staff share information with us. You can e-mail us at

the  
30SomethingDems@mail.house.gov.  
That is

30SomethingDems@mail.house.gov.  
Also, we encourage the Members, and all of the charts that we have here are also on [www.speaker.gov/30something](http://www.speaker.gov/30something).

I think it is also important to note, Mr. Speaker, that we look forward to the coming days as we start to tackle

these issues every month of this year, I think, leading up until maybe about 4 or 5 more months, the Members will have an opportunity to go back to their districts for a week and have these district work weeks. I encourage all of our constituents to engage us on these issues and to continue to keep the pressure on so that we make the right decisions here in Washington, DC.

Mr. Speaker, it was an honor to address the House once again. I yield back the balance of my time.

#### PROTECT AMERICA ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Protect America Act, and I urge the Democratic leadership in the House to bring to the floor the bipartisan bill that was passed in the Senate overwhelmingly which brought this act to permanency.

Unfortunately, last month what we saw was, on February 15, this act did not come to the floor; rather, it expired. The Democratic leadership failed to bring that to the House floor. And with the expiration of the Protect America Act, our intelligence communities went dark in many parts of the world.

This is a game of dangerous politics. It is putting the American people at great risk as every day passes. I urge again the Democratic leadership to bring the bipartisan Senate bill to the floor so that democracy can operate, because the American people support this bipartisan legislation that the Senate passed and we need to pass it now to protect American lives. If I can just step back and give this some context.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act actually passed in 1978, during the Cold War. It was a time, again, during the Cold War, not the threat that we face today, a very different threat. The FISA Act, because the technology now has outdated the law, needs to be modernized. And that is exactly what the Protect America Act does.

The Director of National Intelligence came to the Congress last year to tell us that we needed this modernization because there are dangerous loopholes and intelligence gaps in our collection capability, and that needed to be fixed. Many of us here in the House listened to that warning, answered that call, and voted in a very bipartisan way last August for the Protect America Act. Unfortunately, as I stated, last month, on February 15, the Democratic leadership allowed that act to expire, again placing Americans in grave jeopardy.

And what did we hear from the Democratic leadership at that time? Majority Leader STENY HOYER said, there really is no urgency here; the in-

telligence agencies have all the tools that they need. Chairman SILVESTRE REYES at the time said, Things will be just fine. Things will be just fine.

But things aren't fine. And all you have to do is look at a letter that we received in the Congress from the Director of National Intelligence and the Attorney General pointing out the grave risk that this expiration is giving to the American people. They said: The expiration of the authorities in the Protect America Act would plunge critical intelligence programs into a state of uncertainty, which could cause us to delay the gathering of, or simply miss, critical foreign intelligence information. And then, they say, that is exactly what has happened since the Protect America Act expired days ago without the enactment of the bipartisan Senate bill.

This is the Director of National Intelligence, a man who served under Democrats and Republicans. This is the Attorney General of the United States. They said we have lost intelligence information this past week as a direct result of the uncertainty created by Congress' failure to act. I submit that this is not only a failure to act; it is a dereliction of duty to the American people. We have the most solemn obligation first and foremost to protect the American people. Mr. Speaker, we are failing in that obligation in the House today.

Intelligence is the best weapon we have in the war on terror. Intelligence is the first line of defense in the war on terror. And, if I could step back to 1993 and tell a story.

I used to work in the Justice Department. I worked on FISAs. In 1993, an individual named Ramzi Yousef came in the country with a fake Iraqi passport, and he plotted to bring down the World Trade Center. Fortunately, he wasn't successful that day, although he did kill people. Innocent lives were lost, and he caused great damage to these buildings. He fled, ended up eventually in Islamabad in Pakistan, where he met up with his uncle, Khalid Shaikh Mohammad. Khalid Shaikh Mohammad of course is the mastermind of September 11. There, they talked about the idea of flying airplanes into buildings.

Eventually, Ramzi Yousef was caught in Islamabad and brought back to justice. But the intelligence that we missed back then because some of the flaws in the system, the 9/11 Commission studied this and they made several recommendations. And, of course, at the time they analyzed what we passed in the PATRIOT Act to fix this problem, that being the fact that a wall separated the criminal division from the foreign counterintelligence. The left hand literally didn't know what the right hand was doing. This caused great consternation within the Justice Department and within the intelligence community. I remember working before the PATRIOT Act passed and I remember some of these frustrations myself.

There is a great quote from an FBI agent who was frustrated with this. He said: You know, someday someone will die and, wall or not, the public will not understand why we were not more effective at throwing every resource we had at certain problems. Let's hope the national security law unit will stand behind their decisions then, especially since the biggest threat to us now, Osama bin Laden, is getting the most protection.

I draw this analogy because the same principle applies to the FISA modernization, and that is that if we fail to pass this act, someday someone will die.

□ 2115

The biggest threat to us is Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda; and they are, unfortunately, now getting great protections. They are getting constitutional protections that they don't deserve. We are required to go to this FISA Court any time we want to listen to overseas intelligence. Foreign communications from a foreign terrorist to a foreign terrorist, we are required to go to a court in the United States with a showing of probable cause, giving a terrorist constitutional protections they do not deserve and putting not only Americans in the United States at great risk, but the war fighter abroad at great risk.

There is a great example last year. Three American soldiers were kidnapped. Because of the FISA restrictions, we had to get lawyered up, go to the FISA Court, apply for a warrant, and show probable cause for an emergency FISA warrant. Many hours expired. In the meantime, one of those soldiers was killed, and two we haven't heard from since. This is a tragic outcome. Again, this is putting Americans at great risk.

We talk a lot in the 9/11 Commission about connecting the dots. And the fact of the matter is, if we can't gather and collect those dots, there is no way we can connect the dots. And the gentlelady from New Mexico has stated so eloquently so many times that very point. I want to yield to her. The gentlewoman from New Mexico (Mrs. WILSON) has been the leader in the House on this issue. She was the one who really brought this issue to the attention of the Congress, and I believe America owes her a great deal of gratitude, so we can fix this intelligence gap we currently have in the law and ultimately save lives.

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. I thank my colleague from Texas, and I also thank him for his leadership on this issue. It has been a tremendous help to this body to have people who have actually worked and tried to enact and implement the provisions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act to come and be able to explain why it doesn't work in the way it is intended to work in a time of terror.

I think it is important for people to understand, what is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and why do we