

The Republican budget has no tax increase. It will help the family paycheck. It will help create small businesses. It has spending control and will lead to a brighter future for our children and future generations and provide them with greater freedom and greater opportunity. That is the tale of two budgets and how the American people's money is spent.

So I thank the gentlewoman from Tennessee for this wonderful program on the budget. I thank her for her leadership within the Republican Study Committee, the Conservative Caucus in Congress.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I thank the gentleman from Texas for the leadership that he provides every day on these issues.

And at this point, Mr. Speaker, I want to yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT), who has such a wonderful understanding of the budget.

And as I mentioned earlier, we have our Constitution and our Declaration of Independence, a little tiny document. Then we've talked about the appendix of the budget, this big volume right here. And what you're going to find there with some of the line items, as our colleague from Georgia was talking about, is the ag program. That's where you find that information. Then there is analytical and historical data that we look at and what we actually find with our trust fund and with our debt.

And to provide some insight into this, I yield to the gentleman from Maryland for his insight into the budget and the budget structure.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it might be instructive for the last couple of minutes of this hour to kind of put what we've been talking about in perspective.

When you say "budget," "you have to know which budget we're talking about because we have two budgets in Washington. We have the one we talk about publicly, and then we have the official budget that we have to deal with, and they're different. You will understand in a couple of moments why they're different.

When we generally talk about public, you'll hear what we call the unified budget. Now, the unified budget is all the money that comes into Washington and all the money that we spend. But about 10 percent of the money that comes into Washington shouldn't be Washington's money to spend because it's moneys that they've taken from you, like Social Security, Medicare, railroad retirement, and about 50 others, presumably to be put in trust for you. But they do not put those moneys in trust for you. What they do with them in Washington is immediately convert them to a nonnegotiable U.S. security and spend them.

When we talk about debt, there's the national debt and the public debt, and

I will bet you, Mr. Speaker, that not one person in fifty out there knows the difference between the national debt and the public debt.

Our time's going to run out in just a couple of minutes, and I would like to come back to the floor to talk again. But there never was a moment in time during those years during the Clinton presidency when we said we were paying down the debt that, in fact, the national debt went down. Because what we were doing with the lockbox money, which was surplus money from Social Security and Medicare, we were taking that money and paying down the public debt. The public debt did go down, but for every dollar the public debt went down, the trust fund debt went up another dollar. So there was no change in the total debt, or the national debt. But there were some trust fund moneys that were not lockbox moneys. In fact, only two of them were lockbox, Social Security and Medicare; so we happily took that additional money and spent that, and so the national debt did go up. As a matter of fact, there was not a moment in time during those years when we said we had a budget surplus when, in fact, the national debt went down.

There's a lot of duplicity in Washington. It probably shouldn't surprise you to learn that you shouldn't believe everything that comes out of Washington. I have the numbers here for that debt, and a half hour ago when I came to the floor, the public debt was over \$5.3 trillion. They call this the intergovernmental holdings debt, which was just a little over \$4 trillion. I have \$4 trillion here, \$5 trillion here, and the total national debt was \$9.46 trillion.

I would very much appreciate coming back to the floor at another time to expand on this because I think it's very instructive for people to know, as your budget school says up there, who have the right to know how Washington spends your money.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I think individuals can see how instructive and how exciting our next session will be because we're going to talk a little bit about this budget, and I thank the gentleman for his insight.

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's an honor to come before the House once again.

As you know, in the 30-Something Working Group, we work very hard to put forth the agenda of the American people. We have been consistent over a number of years in doing this. And I think that it's important for the forward progress of not only the House of

Representatives but also for the American people.

The good thing about coming to the floor and sharing what's happening here in the Capitol Dome, or what's not happening, is its importance in strengthening our democracy and also strengthening our economy and strengthening the faith in government by the American people. And I think that some of the information, especially as it comes in a bipartisan fashion, that it allows our friends on the Republican side of the aisle to be able to take part in legislation that the American people support wholeheartedly.

Case in point: increasing the minimum wage, adopting all the 9/11 recommendations, and also looking at the issue of the greening of America, putting forth incentives of saving our Earth as we move forth, fighting for community police officers for local law enforcement agencies, State law enforcement agencies, and also the Federal outlook of being able to deter crime in this country; also assisting children and getting a level of health care that they deserve in a universal sense as it relates to S-CHIP, or what we call CHAMP here on the floor; and to also have hearings, to open up this government to the American people, of transparency.

As we started talking about Member projects, Mr. Speaker, in the appropriations process, we brought about the transparency that the American people have been looking for, disclosure, to make sure that these projects are worthy projects, and also having what we call reform, and we have shown that.

□ 1800

I want to just talk about a few things, Mr. Speaker, if I can, before the rest of the 30-Something Group is recognized, of what is happening now, not only in America, but overseas. We know that a number of officials from the Bush administration have been asked to come to Capitol Hill to testify before various committees, be they House or Senate. Today's news is the economy. When we start looking at testimony that took place here today, where it was first mentioned, not that we were trying to make history, a Bush administration official saying that the country is in a small recession and that recovery will be soon, and very soon, well, it reminds me of the debate when we talked about what was going on in Darfur, in Africa, if we want to call it genocide or not. We already knew it was genocide so we didn't necessarily have to wait for the President or the Bush administration to say it was genocide. But it did help when they said that it was.

Well, since now the Bush administration has come around to find out that their policies of tax breaks for billionaires and millionaires did not help the economy, and now has testified that we are in a recession, or a small recession, using the R word, maybe we can start

dealing with the solution as a unified government.

One example of how we have worked together in unity has been what was shown when we passed the small stimulus bill that was passed, and I know that the Speaker and Democratic leaders are looking, and also hopefully Republican leaders, are working towards a stimulus package that will create jobs, U.S. jobs here, and would allow those from the GED education to the post-graduate education, doctoral, those that have gone beyond in their education to be able to take part in new job creation here in the United States. So we have these forward leaning initiatives that we are ready and willing to work on.

The second point, I think it's also important as we look at the housing crisis that we are in right now. Mr. Speaker, I am actually in the next couple of weeks holding a "save your home" or recovery effort in my district. I am asking my constituents to come forth, those that are trying to make their mortgages, and bringing lenders together, along with credit counselors, to be able to assist them to save the only thing that they have, and that is their home.

I think it's so very, very important that we continue to work very hard. I know that Chairman FRANK, the Financial Services Committee, will be having a hearing in response to what has been happening in the housing crisis. I know that the Senate is working very hard to have some product come before this House soon, and very soon, to deal with this.

I think it's important that those of us in Congress not only support the public efforts that are going on, but also encourage the banking community and the lending community to step forward and try to assist as much as they can in saving the piece of the pie of the American dream. With so many Americans, that dream is now turning into a nightmare. It's our job to be able to stand up for those individuals.

I think that it's also important to know the chair of the Federal Reserve is continuing to warn us of a possible recession. I think that it's important for us to look at it as a reality where it is now.

Now for individuals that have substance abuse problems, or whatever the case may be, first you have to admit that you have a problem for us to get to the recovery, or to recover from that problem, to be able to receive the kind of treatment that is needed. As it relates to the decision makers in Washington and in the lending community, admitting that there is a problem is important. Many of us have, but we still have some holdouts for the sake of holding out. I think that as we move on, that we press on in a bipartisan way to make that happen. There will be efforts to make that happen. I ask my Republican friends on the other side of the aisle to be a part of the solution and not just the argument.

I think that when we also, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to share some of these thoughts because we have had 2 weeks off and I have had an opportunity to focus on some of the things that I wanted to share with the House of not only the observations, my personal observations, but what I have read of what others have written of their concerns about the lack of leadership on recovering or bringing about the kind of recovery we need on this economy. That there are certain things that have to be in place.

I know the first stimulus package we did gives some relief to homeowners through Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and FHA loans and raising that ceiling so they can be able to assist individuals to save their homes. But we have got to go further than that. We have to be able to create the jobs that individuals need to be able to save their homes.

The second point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, that I think is vital, General Petraeus is going to be here on the Hill within a week. We know that we are starting to see violence again in Iraq. We know that we have put a large investment on the ground in Iraq, not only in our men and women that are over 140,000, that are there, but also we put a major cash investment on the streets of Iraq in hiring a number of Iraqis with U.S. dollars, cash dollars that they are paid in to help keep the peace in certain neighborhoods that have been a part of the uprising and the insurgency.

If I had the dollars that we have on the ground in Iraq in my district, there would be no crime. We would be able to hire those individuals that some may say are unemployable, that are out doing things that we don't necessarily agree with. Some justify their actions on the lack of being able to be employed, some justify their acts on the fact that they are not able to, even if they are employable, there are no jobs for them to get to be a productive member of society. Of course, there is a lack of job training dollars in our States and in our communities. There is a lack of bridge dollars to be able to introduce these individuals back into society, especially those that have made youthful indiscretions.

But as we start looking at General Petraeus' testimony when we come back before Congress, we have to look at it from the standpoint of where are we going from this point. I think that the American people are ready for the Iraq experience to be over as it relates to street-to-street, neighborhood-to-neighborhood protection of the Iraqi people. I think that it's time for our government to be able at the highest levels, and I know many Members of the House, including myself, have personal editorials on this issue. But we are looking forward to General Petraeus' report. We are also looking forward to Ambassador Crocker's report.

We are also looking forward to hearing not only from other experts that

are in the area of Iraq, and I know the Armed Services Committee is going to be dealing with that, but I ask the Members in a bipartisan way to look at it not with a partisan eye, but look at it from a standpoint of what is best for the United States of America. So when we deal with the economy and we deal with Iraq, I mean there are two major issues that are going on in the country. For those that write books and for those that are historians, they are paying very, very close attention to what is going on.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be joined by my colleagues. I am just going to do it in order of seniority and order of people that are next to me. Even though I am going to recognize Mr. ALTMIRE, since he made it here first, we have Mr. RYAN from the great State of Ohio, and represents Niles, Ohio, Youngstown, and has been doing great work here when we first started the 30-Something Working Group. We do have what I mentioned at the beginning of my comments, Mr. Speaker, is what we look for is consistency and accuracy on what we share with the Members and also the American people.

I have my good friend Ms. CLARKE, YVETTE CLARKE from the great State of New York, and representing Brooklyn in a very proud way. I have been to her district and seen her work, and she has worked on the local government level and brings a flavor to this body that all Members should appreciate, and I know that will continue to be a force here in Congress. And Mr. JASON ALTMIRE, he and Mr. RYAN speak of very fondly, in the same television market, media market. Mr. RYAN actually participated in Mr. ALTMIRE's election. I am glad that Mr. ALTMIRE is here. He is a great voice here in Congress and has passed bills on this floor that are substantial to the very fiber of our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, with that, just these opening comments that I have made, I know that with us being off 2 weeks, many of these Members have a lot to share. But as we look at the next couple of weeks and beyond, there is going to be a lot going on here in the Capitol dome, and the American people are going to be paying very careful attention to it, and we need bipartisan support in making that happen.

Mr. Altmire.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman from Florida, and I look forward to continuing the discussion tonight on all these issues the gentleman has brought up.

The gentleman closed with Iraq. We are going to have General Petraeus and we are going to have Ambassador Crocker come before Congress again next week and give their status report on what they see on the ground in Iraq. As the gentleman from Florida knows, he and I traveled to Iraq together last year. One of the things that you would see over there is that the military situation, without question, our brave men and women are doing incredible work

over there. It's amazing to see firsthand the men and women in action and seeing the great things that they have been able to do with the situation that they have been presented with in Iraq.

But I cannot say the same thing about the politicians in Baghdad, the Iraqi politicians. We have had for several months now, if not more than a year, a situation in Baghdad where the politicians have just refused to step up and make the necessary political accommodations to administer their own government and run their own affairs. This situation in Iraq can only be resolved by the Iraqis themselves. It is their country. Our brave men and women in the military have provided a bubble of security around Baghdad to give the decisionmakers, the Iraqis in Baghdad the opportunity to make the tough political accommodations that are necessary, and they have refused to do it.

What we have seen in recent weeks, unfortunately, is the situation in Iraq regress. We will hold judgment on that until I hear from General Petraeus next week and Ambassador Crocker and hear what they have to say. But it does not appear that the situation in Iraq over the past several weeks has gotten any more stable. I hope that General Petraeus has good news.

But nobody can argue that our brave men and women in the military, the best and brightest this country has to offer, have done everything they can possibly do to give the Iraqis the opportunity to take the reins of power and control their own affairs and manage their own destiny. Unfortunately, it appears that they have refused to do so, the politicians in Baghdad. So we will certainly talk more about that.

I also wanted to touch on the economic downturn that we are in. There's a lot of debate on what you call it; is it a recession, are we in a recession, or are we not. I really don't care what we call it, what I know about is when I go back to my district in western Pennsylvania and I talk with people who are struggling in this economy, I can see firsthand what has happened and what the impact of this economic downturn has had on my constituents in southwestern Pennsylvania. We hear stories from all around the country of families going through the same trouble and turmoil as my constituents are in western Pennsylvania.

One of the things I hear over and over again is, well, these are just people who bought too much house. They got in over their heads and they bought more house than they can afford. You know what, they are getting what is coming to them.

That is not what happened. What we have had is people all across this country that have a mortgage, but they also have health care costs.

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They have kids in school, where they are paying college tuition that is going up three and four and five times the

rate of inflation. They have perhaps businesses to run. They have costs with fuel and gas prices and everything that that affects, with food prices going up.

Perhaps they took out a second mortgage, and maybe then they got overextended because they couldn't afford their daily household expenses because of everything else happening in the economy. This wave came on, and we had over 1 million foreclosures last year. We are on schedule this year to perhaps double that in 2008.

And I don't think anyone can argue that the economy is certainly in trouble right now. It is in a downward spiral, and we are hoping to prevent a recession, if we are not in one already. But I think to have an argument, as we have had on this floor many times with people on the other side who want to deny that this is a recession or not, that is missing the boat. I don't care what you call it. What I want to do is get out there and make a difference for the American people in a way that is going to make their life better and help them pay their daily household expenses and avoid bankruptcy and avoid defaulting on their mortgage. And that helps everybody.

Perhaps you do say, well, these are people who bought too much house and they got what they deserve. Even that is not the case. If those people live in your neighborhood and they default on their mortgage and their house is foreclosed, guess what? That is going to hurt your property values. That is going to have a direct impact on you, and maybe at that point you might take a second look at it. I don't want it to get to that point. I want to take proactive action.

The President this week, when he talked about what his economic plan was he was moving forward, it sounded a lot like Herbert Hoover and what his plan was in the 1930s. And if you sit on your hands and you do nothing, I can promise you, this is not going to correct itself. This problem is going to continue to get worse.

So I am grateful that we have come here tonight to talk about these important issues and to take action on these issues as a Congress, because working together we can take a giant step in solving these problems for the American people, hopefully avoiding a recession, if we are not in one, but in the long term making policy decisions that are going to directly improve the lives of our constituents all across the country.

With that, I would now yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. CLARKE).

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. ALTMIRE, and to my colleague the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and to my colleague the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), it is great to be here with you once again. I just wanted to come and have a conversation with you folks out there and, of course, my colleagues here.

I was in my office when I heard the wrap-up of the last Republican hour,

and I thought I heard one of my colleagues state that we are in this economic crisis currently due to the last 13 months of Democratic control. I couldn't believe what I heard, because I thought to myself, what a joke. Who does he think he is fooling with this type of baseless rhetoric?

Americans know exactly who and what caused this economic downturn. Pointing the finger right now does not help us to put milk in the refrigerators of our neighbors and our constituents, and it certainly doesn't fill the gas tank, and it certainly does not enable people to stop fretting about whether they can make next month's mortgage payment.

One of the things that we can all be grateful for is that this Democratic-controlled Congress saw fit to rise to the occasion to forecast what we see as a real economic downturn by putting forth in a bipartisan way an economic stimulus package that we hope will bring at least a moment of respite, a moment where folks can catch their breath and catch their bearings as we present to them the opportunities to refinance their homes and the opportunities to just sort of take a look at the landscape and be able to catch up.

Right now, everyone is sort of running after themselves and trying to catch up with the mounting costs of just living today. And it is really just not a time for us to be pointing fingers. It is a time for us to put our shoulders to the wheel with real solutions for all Americans.

Certainly this "New Direction" Congress has enacted an economic stimulus package that brings relief to our families and provides recovery rebates starting next month, that raises loan limits for mortgages backed by the FHA, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and allows our families to get mortgages with better terms. That is the type of language that Americans want to hear today. That is what the families of my district need to know is coming from us today.

When you think about the fact that we are going to be putting hundreds of dollars in the hands of more than 130 million American families who will spend it immediately to invigorate the economy, then you know that we are concerned, that we are not just saying that you got yourself into this, now get yourself out.

I noticed that no one said to Bear Stearns, you got yourself into this, now get yourself out. We decided as a nation that we had to make sure that the underpinning of our economic society was not withdrawn from under us. We need to do that for every single family here in America. We need to get that done.

Listening to our caucus and the conversations we are having as Democrats around phase two of our economic stimulus is quite heartening; knowing that we are examining what is needed to really get this economy going, which means really innovation, which

means bringing to the table the idea that we cannot continue to buy oil which is not an unlimited source, but that we have to look at renewable energies and the type of industry that will be developed in the years to come through that industry and looking at our infrastructure that has not been addressed, at least in my lifetime, that we know that we are going to need to get this done over the next decade or so.

So all of these things are on the table. These are things we are discussing as Democrats in terms of phase two, because we know that this stimulus is just the beginning of a multi-pronged strategy that we must take to ensure the future economic growth and strengthening of America.

So I want to just thank my colleagues for their continued focus, and not being distracted by those who would rhetorically joke about what is really a major concern to so many Americans right now as they sit at their kitchen tables, at their dining room tables, and they look at the energy bills that have come in from a very harsh winter and a very rough climate in many parts of the country, as they look at the fact that the cost of milk per gallon is now the same cost as gasoline per gallon, as they look at what it takes to travel from one part of this Nation to another, the cost, or from their homes to where they work each day, the cost. All of this is what we need to be focused on, and I am really excited that we are on our way.

We talked about the war in Iraq, and there is a direct correlation between what is happening with us economically and what we are able to do economically when we have got so much invested in a war in Iraq.

Just this last week, we have looked at 5 long years of war. I can't ever recall in my lifetime, and that is just to give you a sense, of us ever being at war this long. It says something to those who have given their lives and who are veterans of the wars of years gone by and those who would give their lives as our soldiers in the future that we can't be reckless about the call to arms in this country.

Some would say that what we have done with the war in Iraq has not been the best moment in our history. So as we look at the fact that over 29,000 Americans have been injured and more than 31,300 have been treated for non-combat injury and illness, I hope that we will also focus on the redeployment that will ultimately have to take place once the Iraqi government stands up. It is in the capacity to do so, and we are hoping that these things will happen simultaneously, quite frankly. But that we also pay attention to these families in our communities, of the walking-wounded warriors who will need our support and will need our help as they readjust to coming back to an America that has a faltering economy, that is struggling to keep its own people in their homes.

We need to pay very close attention to what is happening with our veterans, and this Democratic Caucus, this Democratic Congress, has been in the forefront of veterans' rights, of veterans' benefits, in a way that no other part of this government has paid attention to it.

So when I hear my colleagues in the last Republican hour focus on trying to cast aspersions at what the Democratic Congress has done, I really hope that they will join us in the bipartisan effort to focus on what is real. What is real are the veterans that are coming home to our communities and the struggles of their families and the distress that their families have been under in just trying to make ends meet on veterans' salaries. It is the struggle that everyone in our communities is facing, whether it is personally or it is a neighbor, in seeing those for-sale signs going up throughout the neighborhood. These are the issues that we are concerned about.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. If the gentleman will yield for a second, I want to share something with the Members and also with those of us here on the floor.

During the break, I took the privilege of going out to Camp Pendleton in California. As you go through the gate off of I-5, there is a billboard that is there, like you would see out in front of a drugstore or something, but it is an electronic billboard and it talks about if you need counseling. They have folks coming back every 4 months or so, some folks who have gone on their third and fourth tour.

Think about it. You have families that live on that base. You have individuals the age of 18 or 19 years old, just single, that are living there.

I had an opportunity to go through a simulator there at Camp Pendleton like you are in an Iraqi village or in a city, in Baghdad, in Fallujah. I have walked the streets of Fallujah. Mr. ALTMIRE and I have done it. Mr. RYAN and I have been to Iraq on another trip. The ground, the structure, the folks dressed as though you are in Baghdad, it is a true simulation, and they have gunfire and IEDs and all of these things kind of going off in this simulator.

Just walking through that was an experience for me, and that was just an enactment of what could happen or what should happen and giving our troops, our Marines, units going through there, a real flavor of what is going on.

I can imagine being in the situation. I knew that I could walk out, the sun will be shining, it will be California weather. But when you are in that kind of situation, some folks feel that this is just some sort of made-for-television kind of thing.

I love the troops. Mr. RYAN and I, we have been hearing this since we have been in Congress, because when we first got here, the war just started. We weren't here for the vote to go or not

to go, but we got here right as soon as the war actually started. Some of the statements that are littered throughout the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD are, you know, "our troops, we'll show 'em," and carrying on.

We do have the best and the greatest and the most able military on the face of the Earth, by far. But when you start dealing with the real human issues of our men and women that are in combat, they go through a lot and their families go through a lot.

What you said, Ms. CLARKE, about we should take under consideration what happens to those individuals, it's not a game.

□ 1830

Mr. RYAN OF Ohio. Just to share a little bit, Mr. Speaker. We were up at Walter Reed on Monday. And you want to talk about the issue of war smacking you right in the face, when you see someone just a few years younger than we are without legs, traumatic brain injury. You hear stories from parents who say, "I got a call from Iraq, and my son or daughter, all they told me was he had a brain injury, and hung up the phone," and they don't hear back for 4 days.

I mean, when you put all these stories together, that one particular mom waiting there 4 days not knowing, the unknown of whether or not your kid is going to live or die; or you hear the stories about the soldier we had in Batavia, Ohio, where you didn't know; the body was missing, you couldn't find it, and then you find it.

When you add all of this stress up and you put it into our families and you put it into the soldiers that are there, and you talk about the long-term health care costs of this war, not to mention what is happening there day-to-day there now, but the long-term effects when at some point this is all settled hopefully, one way or the other, at least our portion of it is and our troops are back home for the most part, the effects are still going to be left with us. And I don't know if any of you have had the opportunity to see, Phil Donahue has this new documentary out called Body of War, and it is all about the actual physical injuries that these families are going through. And I think it is important for us to remember that. And when you hear and read in the paper that 10 or 15 civilians or four troops, those are real people. And those kind of situations, when you have all these civilian deaths in Iraq, from a very practical standpoint, one is they are civilians and that is a whole other issue, but from a very practical standpoint it makes it very difficult for us to solve the political problems over there when everyone who is a part of the government are losing brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles who are getting killed by these bombs that are going off over in Iraq. It makes it very difficult.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman from Ohio. I wanted to think

about this in the terms of what this Congress has done to resolve some of the issues that we are talking about right now for our brave service men and women and their families. Because anyone listening to this debate would say, well, that is great that you are talking about what the problems are; but what have you done to solve the problems? And I want to tell anyone who is willing to listen that we have a tremendous record of accomplishment in supporting our troops. Not just saying the words, but supporting the troops with our actions, not just our words. And we are in the sixth year of the war in Iraq right now, and here are some things that this new Congress has done, bills that have been signed into law to address the issues that we are talking about.

The gentleman from Ohio talks about traumatic brain injury and the incredible impact that has had. TBI is the signature injury of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, because people who would have been killed in previous wars, thanks to better medical technology and better armor and equipment, thankfully they survive; but, unfortunately, in many cases they are horrifically injured, the type of injuries the gentleman witnessed at Walter Reed. I took a trip to Walter Reed, myself, and I saw the same types of injuries, the lost limbs, the spinal cord injuries and the traumatic brain injuries.

But what happens is, when these men and women come back and they are still in the Defense health care system, they are treated for the apparent physical injuries that you can see in front of you. And because they are moving so quickly, they don't think to screen them for TBI if it is not a severe case of TBI. They move them over to the VA. The VA has no record of them having had a head injury, so it doesn't become part of their medical record and we have symptoms that go undiagnosed the rest of the time they are in the VA health care facility.

So what this Congress did is said that every VA facility in this country has to have somebody on staff who is equipped and trained to treat traumatic brain injury, and we created a national data base for all of those cases where we establish treatment protocols to make sure that those brave men and women who suffered from TBI get the highest quality care anywhere in the country. That is something that is going to directly impact people's lives.

Because of that law that we passed in this House and that has been signed into law, every veteran who enters a VA health care facility is going to be screened for traumatic brain injury, so never again will it go undiagnosed.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I was also watching our friends who were here before, and they were saying things like: We have been so unproductive in this Congress. We haven't really done anything; and the things we have done, they are all bad. And I wrote the quote down. They are all bad.

Is this bad? Is this piece of legislation that we passed to make sure that our soldiers get at least looked at for traumatic brain injury, is that bad? We can give the gentleman an opportunity to come back here and maybe correct his statement, because I am sure he didn't mean it.

But to inject the kind of politics that some folks have on this floor over the course of the past few years into this debate has really poisoned it; and these are things that have been successful.

The largest increase in veterans spending in the history of the VA. Was that bad? Increasing the minimum wage. Was that bad? The education funding, more funding and more expansive, and the most investment this country has made since the GI bill and the education. Was that bad? Cutting student loans. Was that bad? I don't think so.

So we are trying to have these debates here very civilized in a bipartisan way and talk about how we can improve the situation for our soldiers.

I didn't mean to interrupt.

Mr. ALTMIRE. I thank the gentleman for that clarification, because that is instructive when we do hear from the other side, the unproductivity alleged of this Congress.

How about this. The gentleman from Florida talked about the tremendous strain, as did the gentlewoman from New York, the tremendous strain our families of our men and women who are in the Guard and Reserve that are being deployed not once, not twice, but multiple redeployments, four, even five times now as we head into the sixth year of the war in Iraq, and we have been in Afghanistan since before that. So these families are left behind, and they have to struggle just to make ends meet.

What has this Congress done about it? We are being told on the other side we haven't done anything, we don't have any record. Well, let me tell you what this Congress has done about it. This has been signed into law.

We expanded the Family and Medical Leave Act for the first time to cover the families of our military Guard and Reserve, people who are putting their lives on the line for us with multiple redeployment overseas. And now, because of the action in this Congress, you can use Family and Medical Leave Act time to care for a wounded service man or woman when they come back, to use time to reassimilate as a family, to get to know your kids again and get to know your spouse again after being away for 15 months. And while they are gone, the spouse can use that time to attend these deployment briefings that happen often during the workday and they can't get time off of work, they can use it for child care, they can use it to get their economic house in order and deal with the household finances, things that weren't covered before.

That is a law that is going to directly impact people's lives. It is going to make it a little bit easier for the fami-

lies of our military Guard and Reserve, and that is something that we did in this Congress after the previous Congresses had done nothing to address the issue.

So, I do take offense to the comment that the gentleman from Ohio relayed that had been made about how we had done nothing.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. ALTMIRE, I can tell you, it is a breath of fresh air. I want to differ with you all just for a minute.

I don't mind our colleagues on the Republican side giving misinformation. I don't mind it, because American people have a lack of trust in what they say and very little understanding of what they do.

We speak here in the 30-Something Working Group, Ms. CLARKE, about fact, not fiction. We spend a lot of time working with the Speaker's staff, working with our personal staffs to make sure we are accurate when we come to the floor, because it does mean something when you come to this floor and share with your colleagues about what we should be doing, how we should be doing it, and what we have done. And I am glad you focused on what we have done.

When I was in the State legislature, there was a gentleman by the name of Alzo Reddick that represented Orlando, Florida; I represented Miami, Florida. And I will never forget, I was like in my second year of public service or something and all of this debate is going on in the legislature; it was a great melting pot of opinions.

We were going back and forth, and folks were spending a lot of time describing the problem. And he got up and he said, "I just want to remind the members that we were not only elected to describe the problem, but mainly to do something about it. Okay? And now we are trying to do something about it with this bill." And he went on from there.

And it was very profound, because I have a lot of folks in my district who spend a lot of time describing problems, and a lot of them I run into when I am at the grocery store or what have you, and there are a lot of folks who are on the sideline who don't want to get in the game. This is a contact sport in many ways in this legislative body. And when we were in the minority, we talked about what we would do if we had the opportunity. Remember that, Mr. RYAN? And I know that you all remember it because you were watching and a part of it and running for office at the time. So you were out there echoing "what I would do once I get there." And I am glad you talk about that, because there was a laundry list. And, Mr. Speaker, you know prior in this hour we talked and I talked about some of the accomplishments we have made. And we have done it, Ms. CLARKE, in a bipartisan way.

We don't stand up here and dance in the end zone and say where are Democrats only passed this piece of legislation. There has been some legislation

that Republicans have not seen eye to eye and it has become law. And we don't want to dance in the end zone on that, because the American people want to win.

So I say all of that to say this. I very seldom make reference to what my colleagues say on the other side, because as far as I am concerned, I don't want to echo inaccurate information. But we do need to clarify it so that folks don't get concerned and start saying, "Oh, my gosh. Do you mean to tell me that's true? Is it really true?" So we're trying to build faith, because right now Congress is not where it should be as it relates in the minds of the American people that they feel good and warm and fuzzy. Polls have shown that they do feel more comfortable with Democratic leadership in Congress than Republican leadership in Congress. But as an institution and as a government, I guarantee you that Suzy whoever and Johnny whoever would like to see a government that works in a cohesive way toward the common good.

The gentlewoman, YVETTE CLARKE, came to the floor with a purpose today. She came to the floor with the purpose of talking about the realities of life. And you know that we have Members here thinking that our commitment and our loyalty to the military comes in the form of smart bombs, guns, and some sort of grenade. But, guess what, it also comes in the form of thinking about their families.

We just can't use and abuse and just say, well, we don't want to deal with that part that is after the fact; that is dealing after. Because when I was at Camp Pendleton, I stayed on base, as I do when I went to MacDill Air Force Base, as I do when I go to any location. I have been down to Norfolk, Virginia and big Navy. I stay on base so we can hear the stories from these families of what they are going through. And they say, well, we understood a Member of Congress is on base, and you bump into them: Sir, I just want to let you know how I feel as an individual. And that is important. And we have taken that, because we have had hearings in the Armed Services Committee, we have taken that into consideration in the Appropriations Committee. Mr. MURTHA has done an excellent job by making sure that we pump dollars in on the family side and doing some of the things in our MILCON appropriations trying to do things to help those kids deal with the shock and the trauma of dad or mom coming home screaming in the middle of the night and they don't understand what is going on.

So when we look at these issues, I am glad that we are addressing those issues, but we have to look at retooling this whole Iraq debate and how we got into this in the first place, because we are going to have Ambassador Crocker here, we are going to have General Petraeus that we have met with, we have met with all of these individuals before in the past. We want the real deal from them. But, as Members of

Congress, we have got to stand up on behalf of the American people, be they Democrat, Republican, or Independent.

Ms. CLARKE. The gentleman from Florida really has emphasized what we know is a challenge for America right now. And we are making the marriage here in our conversation, the marriage between the fact that we have to disengage from Iraq, that we realize that our policies have failed there, that it is now a diplomatic mission more so than anything else. And, yes, there will be a cost to redeployment, but the cost to American families has been extensive. And as our brave men and women come back to the United States of America, come back to our respective communities and they face the economic challenges that we have all been facing over the past couple of months, couple of years in some communities, that just compounds the whole reintegration process that is going to be required, the health care, the ongoing health care that is going to be required. And I think that we have positioned ourselves as a Congress to really meet those issues. We know what the challenges are. We have heard firsthand.

And when you look at our first economic stimulus package that will provide child tax credits as a rebate to these families, when you look at that expansion of financing opportunities for those who may be in mortgage crisis; and, believe me that we can't separate the wounded warrior from the home they own in the community and the cost of gasoline to get back and forth to the VA hospital and the milk that they have to buy for their child.

□ 1845

This economic stimulus is going to be of support to those families as well. But they are going to face what we are facing as civilians in a very special way. And I know that the work we are doing here, Mr. ALTMIRE and Mr. RYAN, is making a difference in their lives. That is why it was important for me to talk about the baseless rhetoric that I heard coming from across the aisle because I don't want Americans to overlook the fact that we have raised the bar and set the standard for how we are going to treat one another as Americans, how we face our challenges head-on, and come up with the solutions that are most important.

Right now there is a crisis in health care. There is a crisis in affordable housing and mortgage financing, and there is a crisis called Iraq. There is a direct correlation if you put the equation together, the type of money that we have been spending on this war in Iraq, and let's not forget our soldiers who are also fighting in Afghanistan, but the primary cost, the overwhelming cost is going into the war.

And our hope is that we will down surge, redeploy, have a surge in diplomacy and get our economic house in order in the United States of America and treat our veterans and their fami-

lies as they ought to be treated, treat all Americans as they ought to be treated, and help them through this time of extreme pressure and extreme challenge.

I am proud to be a member of this Democratic caucus that has looked at the landscape in its entirety, that is dealing with it in a holistic way. We are not compartmentalizing these issues because one has a direct bearing on the other.

I see Mr. RYAN standing here in rare form, and I know he wants to chime in.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. You were mentioning the troops and how complicated things have gotten.

One of the things you mentioned was what was happening in Iraq, and Mr. MEEK mentioned how we got in. I think it is important to recognize, and there was a great article today in the Washington Post, what is happening with our troop strength, where we are getting to the point, we have all of these troops who go for 15 months and come back for a year. We are hearing from psychologists and psychiatrists at Walter Reed that they are not getting enough downtime. It is intense, urban warfare. They are not getting enough downtime, and that is contributing to a lot of the psychiatric problems that our troops are coming back with that need to be addressed.

What people are saying now in the military is that it has to be a year on or 15 months on, and 2 years off. Can you imagine if that is the recommendation. The recommendation is 15 months and then 2 years. Or it may even be 1 year. No, they are asking for 1 year on, 2 years off; and then if they have to go back, send them back. Can you imagine, that is the recommendation.

For them to now say you wonder what the issues are going to be when it is 15 months on, 1 year off and back again, the psychological effect on our soldiers and the cost long term to our VA health care. I think that is important.

I wanted to highlight this. This is General Richard Cody, Army's vice chief of staff who was testifying yesterday, and was talking about basically troop strength. Mr. MEEK, you sit on the Armed Services Committee. You know how critical this is to where our country needs to be in case there is another conflict somewhere in the world that we have to react to.

Right now what the military leaders are saying is that we do not have the capability to react to that. Now can you imagine putting this country in that position, that we can't handle two separate fights going on at the same time when that has been the golden rule from the military for years. And what Cody said was that "I've never seen our lack of strategic depth be where it is today. The Nation needs an airborne brigade, a heavy brigade, and a striker brigade ready for 'full spectrum operations' and we don't have that today."

Now if anybody wants to make a judgment, it is not the Democrats

making a judgment against President Bush, this is the Army vice chief of staff who happens to be retiring in the next couple of months and maybe feels a little freer to say the kinds of things that need to be said, but if we don't recognize what position we are in, and then to have some folks saying we need to be there another hundred years, how are we going to possibly sustain this?

Ms. CLARKE. That's real, Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That's the real deal.

Another quote, "There has been little, if any, change of the stress or tempo of our forces," calling the current pace of operations "unsustainable." That's where we are.

To quote Cody again, "Where we need to be with this force is no more than 12 months on the ground and 24 months back."

It is critical that these soldiers get the kind of rest that they need. When you look at the cost now, saying the projection, when you factor in the health care, and we are close to a trillion dollars for this war, and the projections, when you factor in the health care costs over time, this war is going to cost us \$3 trillion.

And we have Members of this body who stand up and want to slash out an earmark for \$250,000 to help a local community that doesn't have any money put in an EPA-mandated sewer and ignore the 800-pound gorilla sitting in the middle of the room. It is a shame. It is a shame that the debate has gotten that messy.

If we stay focused on what we have been trying to accomplish in the past few years, focus on the veterans, focus on making sure that there is an assessment for their mental health, making sure that they have their money, which we put up, the highest investment in veterans' health care in the history of the VA, those are the kinds of things that we need to focus on as a country in a time of war.

I would just urge all of our colleagues to have this debate be civilized and not taken to the lowest recesses of political dialogue, which is sometimes I think where we end up.

Ms. CLARKE. Mr. RYAN, you've put your finger on the pulse of what we are trying to accomplish here. It is our responsibility to redirect those who would take the debate to its lowest common denominator and distract the American people from the realities of where we are today.

Where we are is a Democratic Congress that has risen to the occasion, that has filled in the gaps and is holding the line while others would seek to continue failed policies that are costing us more and more and more with each day. Basically mortgaging, you know, the lives of our children and our grandchildren in order to pay for it, while at the same time neglecting all that needs to be done to make sure that we can live a decent standard of living here in this country.

So we have fought this and we are still fighting. I yield.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think it is important for us to recognize as we have this debate in Congress, we recognize where we are at right now. And our friends are talking about their alternative budget, and I know my friend from Florida doesn't like me using quotes from the other side, and I understand that.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. You can do whatever you want to do. It's a free country.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is a free country, and I am an American so I am going to say what I want.

Our friends on the other side, this alternative budget, alternative this, alternative that, I think it is important for us to recognize if you want to know what the conservative, neoconservative, right-wing government looks like, all you have to do is open your eyes, read the paper, go to the gas station, pay your health care bill, pay your tuition bill, and you will know that philosophy implemented is the reality we are living in today. They deregulated the financial markets, deregulated the energy sector, gave billionaires tax cuts. You see this every day. Increased tuition, energy costs going up double the rate of inflation, milk going up 26 percent, eggs going up 40 percent. And \$3 trillion in war over the course. And you put all of this together and you say that's the alternative? That's what you want us to go back to?

We spent the whole year just trying to get back to ground zero, raising minimum wage, cutting student loan interest rates in half, investing in alternative energy, implementing the 9/11 report, making sure that our veterans are taken care of. We are still digging out of a hole. Can you imagine, these folks raised the debt limit five times to the tune of \$3 trillion, borrowing it from China, Japan, and OPEC.

And the mortgage crisis, the anxiety people feel, that is the conservative Republican agenda implemented. We don't have to look anywhere; we are living it now. Now. So we don't have to look too far.

The other day the President said if the Democrats repeal the \$18 billion in corporate welfare for the oil companies, I will veto any bill that has that in it. Now can you imagine how screwed up the situation is. Consumer protection, toys, pet food, food coming over, medicine coming over from China without the proper folks checking the stuff out, mine safety has gone down so we have mining accidents because there wasn't the proper oversight. We know what happened with Hurricane Katrina and FEMA because we put political hacks in jobs. All of this happened under the conservative Republican agenda.

So I just would like to say we are working very hard to balance the budget, make investments in education and our vets, take care of the environment, and make these investments in alter-

native energy so we can have green collar jobs replacing the blue collar jobs we have been losing.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. RYAN and Ms. CLARKE. I am glad you both are in Congress.

IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about Iraq tonight in the context in which historical incidents have created this most pressing and urgent situation, Iraq and the Middle East, to give the American people, Mr. Speaker, a frame of reference upon which to judge the way forward in this conflict. Are there solutions to this conflict? Is there something in our history or the history of the relationship of the international community that can resolve the present crisis that we are now experiencing?

So what I would like to do is during this next hour that I have is to break this topic down into a number of different areas, take a look at the United States and the Cold War, especially through the 1950s and the 1960s, take a look at what was happening in the Middle East during that same period of time during the Cold War, what was going on in the Middle East, and then look at the present crisis that we are now experiencing in Iraq and Afghanistan with a focus on Iraq. And then what are the solutions? Is there a way forward? Can we judge from past precedents, past crises, what we can do now to resolve this conflict. And I think there is a way forward.

□ 1900

So, to frame this discussion tonight, I would like to start off with a quote by a man named Norman Cousins, who was the editor of the Saturday Evening Post and wrote an extraordinary book, I believe it was about 1980, called "Human Options." Whenever there is a crisis, there are always options. There are always things that we, as human beings, with initiative, ingenuity, intellect and courage can figure out. Here are the two quotes: "Knowledge is the solvent for danger." "Knowledge is the solvent for danger." If you're faced with a crisis, the more information you have, the more likely it is that you will make competent decisions.

The second quote is, "History is a vast early warning system." There have been a number of crises in America's past where people said you have to wait 20 years to figure out what went wrong. People will always say, well, 20 years later we have hindsight that we didn't have during the incident or the crisis or the conflict or the war. Well, with this quote, knowing history, knowing where we were 10 years ago, 20 years ago, who lit the fuse that slowly