

it must suffer through terrorist attacks orchestrated by those who continue to deny its right to exist.

And yet Israel endures and it flourishes. It has made its part of the desert bloom. It is a model of democracy that the rest of that region would do well to emulate, and it has been a great partner to us in the war on terror, cooperating with us on homeland security matters so that we can be better prepared to counter the kinds of attacks that the Israelis have had to endure for three generations.

I've had the privilege of visiting Israel on two separate occasions, experiences that I will never forget.

And to Israel I say, "Le Chaim."

RECOGNIZING ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

(Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I too rise to recognize the 60th anniversary of the independence of the State of Israel, and to reaffirm the steadfast friendship between our two strong democratic nations.

Sixty years ago today, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel declared sovereignty and independence as a homeland for the Jewish people. With little resources and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Israel has become a thriving and prosperous democracy, and has made worldwide contributions in technology, medicine, agriculture and environmental innovation.

When we speak about Israel, too often we focus on Israel's troubles and not on her beauty and her spirit. But what I want to focus on today is her resolve. Since independence, Israel has continually overcome every conceivable roadblock. She has beaten back hostile neighbors during war, and now endures terrible emotional and economic hardship from terrorist cowards who perpetrate hideous violence against innocent victims.

As a critical partner in the fight against terror, and as the only democracy in the region, Israel's strength and security is paramount. Therefore, I encourage this House to continue to pass bipartisan bills in support of Israel and her ability to protect herself from antagonistic neighbors.

The blossoming of a nation that grew from desert sand into a thriving example of democracy, economic progress and cultural diversity is a magnificent achievement for this strong and vibrant country.

I congratulate Israel on all she has achieved in just 60 years, and I look forward to a bright future for this extraordinary nation.

□ 1945

HALLIE ELIZABETH POE—NEW TEXAN

(Mr. POE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, as the sun came up this morning bringing a new spring day in America, a new Texan was born at 8:27 a.m. and took her first breath of life. Hallie Elizabeth Poe, a 7-pound, 19½-inch girl was born in The Woodlands, Texas.

Hallie's parents, Kurt and Suzy, are happy with boastful pride, but they can't be prouder than I am because I'm the grandfather!

The miracle of birth is the Good Lord's gift to the people of the world and renews a spirit of hope and freshness. A baby girl is one of the most amazing miracles of life, one of the great joys of life, and one of the reasons why there is a little extra sunshine, laughter, and happiness in life.

Little girls are special. They bring a delight and innocence into the world of ours. I know that Hallie will have the forcefulness of Margaret Thatcher and the southern grace of Lady Bird Johnson.

Mr. Speaker, we pause for this moment in time for this most happy of all events, the birth of a new baby girl.

So there's a new yellow rose in Texas tonight that will obviously bring more warmth and beauty to our world. After all, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing like a little girl.

And that's just the way it is.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

MERIDIA INITIATIVE

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, as a former prosecutor and long-time judge in Texas, I'm concerned about, of course, drugs and corruption, especially on the international border between the United States and Mexico. I have great sympathy and compassion for the Mexicans living just south of the border, especially those that have had the problem of dealing with the drug cartels. It's an epidemic that occurs on our southern border with Mexico.

According to the DEA, 500 people were murdered in Nuevo Laredo recently. Most of those cases were never solved, and many of those individuals were peace officers. There have been 400 kidnappings in Nuevo Laredo; 41 of them were Americans, and none of them, not one of those cases, have ever been solved. And we understand now that behind most of those crimes of violence of murder and kidnappings are the drug cartels. What you might be surprised, Mr. Speaker, to find out is that many of those people involved in the drug cartels are former individuals in the Mexican military that were trained in the United States.

The Department of Homeland Security has reported that in the last 10 years also, there have been 250 documented cases of incursions by suspected Mexican military units into the United States. Most of them in Texas, California, and Arizona. Recently, I have been in a place called Neely Pass in Hudspeth County where the Mexican military was photographed coming into the United States.

In order to gain control of access corridors into the United States, drug cartels are hiring hit men from the elite Mexican military force, and this group is known as the Zetas. The Zetas are military deserters that are trained in the United States at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, as an elite force of anti-drug commandos. But unfortunately, after they were trained by Americans, they went over to the dark side. They were sent by the Mexican government to the U.S.-Mexico border to combat drug trafficking, but they switched sides, deserted the Mexican military, and worked for the drug cartels. Officials suspect that there are more than 200 Zetas, including former Mexican police officers.

And the problem isn't just at the border, either. The Zetas operate in the United States. Authorities have believed that the drug cartels and the Zetas are responsible for murders in the United States.

And there's a second group. The second group is called the Kaibiles. The Kaibiles were a special operations force in the Guatemalan military. Like the Zetas, many of them received training in the United States in counter-insurgency operations. And like the Zetas, many of them deserted the special forces and began to help the drug cartels.

Mr. Speaker, I have here a photograph taken by sheriff's deputies on the Texas-Mexico border, and this is a group of the Kaibiles. You notice they are all in uniform; they all have hoods on them. You notice the first person in the front is carrying an AK-47, and they're bringing cocaine into the United States in backpacks, and this is what has happened to these individuals that were trained in the United States and switched sides.

Now, the reason I bring all of this up, Mr. Speaker, is there is an initiative called the Meridia Initiative where the United States government is proposing to send \$1.5 billion in training and equipment south of the American border into Mexico to help combat drug trafficking. While this may sound well and good, unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that we cannot trust the local officials on the Mexican side of the border because of the high rate of corruption because of these individuals that continue to switch sides. And it would be very unfortunate indeed if we sent equipment to the northern portion of Mexico, south of the American border, turned over this military equipment to the Mexican military to have it used against us as shown in this photograph.

It would be better money spent in training to send this \$1.5 billion to the southern border to the second front where there is a war going on but keep it on the American side. Let the local officials, the State officials, let the sheriffs along the border use this equipment. Many of them don't even have enough equipment. As one of them has told me, they're outmanned and they're outgunned by the drug cartels.

So keep that equipment, keep that training on the American side of the border. Support the American cause before we turn this equipment and turn this training capability to the other side. And it's a sad fact of life that we can't trust sending money, equipment, and training south of the United States border because of the corruption that occurs in northern Mexico.

So I would hope that Congress, when this initiative comes up, that we have lively debate about this \$1.5 billion; and before we send it all south of the border, that we rethink that and maybe spend part of that money, half of that money or most of that money, on the American side and let the border sheriffs of Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego use that equipment to fight the drug cartels, fight the crime on the American side of the border. I think that would be better money spent, American taxpayer money spent.

And that's just the way it is.

NORMALCY IS NOT RETURNING TO IRAQ

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the American people have begun to receive their recovery rebate checks. Families will use this assistance to deal with the rising cost of food, of gas, and for just hard times in general. So Congress did the right thing when we wrote those checks. But if we want to give our economy another boost, there is one check that we should not write, and that's the check we will soon be asked to write for the continued occupation of Iraq.

This occupation has already cost taxpayers over \$1 trillion in direct and indirect costs. And Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, has calculated that the cost could soar, could, probably will soar to \$3 trillion or more. Think what that money could do for our economy if we invested it wisely in job training, education, health care, child care, green technology, and so many other critically important domestic needs.

Some believe that the occupation of Iraq is more important than all of these other needs combined. They believe that the billions of dollars we're spending in Iraq are making things better. The President actually told us recently that normalcy is returning back to Iraq. But Iraq cannot be returning to normalcy when the fighting and dying continues without any letup.

Over 3,000 Iraqi civilians and 170 of our brave troops have been killed so far this year: 3,000; 170. Over 1,100 of our troops have been wounded. Mr. Speaker, does that sound like normalcy to anyone? It doesn't to me. I can't say it, actually.

Iraq cannot be returning to normalcy when over 5 million of its citizens remain refugees. That number equals more than 20 percent of the entire Iraqi population at the beginning of our invasion in the year 2003.

Iraq cannot be returning to normalcy when tens of thousands of armed military contractors roam its streets terrifying the people and accountable to no one.

Iraq can't be returning to normalcy when we're planning for a 50-year foreign occupation, and some voices, in fact, are even calling for a 100-year occupation.

And Iraq cannot be returning to normalcy when fear and destruction continue to grip its people. The International Herald Tribune described the Iraqi people's nightmare in an article published on April 23. It said, "A simple decision to run an errand or choose an alternate route to work takes on life-altering consequences as the car bombs, stray bullets, rockets, and mortars claim those who merely happen by."

So, Mr. Speaker, as the war carries into its 6th year, nearly every family is touched by the death of a member of a close friend.

Iraq can only become normal again when it gets its sovereignty back. It can only become normal when it has the chance to rebuild and heal in peace, and that can only happen when we responsibly redeploy our troops and then lead a regional and international effort to bring social, economic, and political reconciliation to that devastated country.

So when we review supplemental funding like we will tomorrow, let's insist on a bill that fully funds the safe withdrawal of our troops but does not include one more cent for an occupation that isn't making us or the Iraqi people any safer.

Mr. Speaker, recovery rebate checks are great, but blank checks for the occupation of Iraq must stop.

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the long American legacy of religious freedom and religious expression that we have inherited as a result of the wise foresight of our Nation's founders.

Throughout our history, we've been a Nation eager to rally to the cry of the motto, "In God We Trust," in times of peace and prosperity or in war and upheaval. This phrase, etched not only on our coins and here in this Chamber but

also on our hearts, has captured a truly American sentiment that our great historic experiment in democracy was founded on, and today, thrives in a robust sense of religious freedom.

Religious freedoms were specifically included in our Constitution as a reflection of the colonial experience of religious tolerance and free expression. Yet as religions' detractors would have it, the Constitution's enumeration of American religious freedoms is a paltry clause intended to merely protect us from the forced religion of a repressed central government.

This is a far cry from our Founders' full intentions. America's Founders were indeed careful to ensure that the government did not establish an official religion, but while they were at it, they crafted protection that would ensure our natural religious life would not falter under the machinations of those who would infringe on citizens' religious expression.

The first amendment is clear: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. This amendment does not establish the freedom from religion. Rather, it grants every American freedom of religion.

□ 2000

It is upon this freedom that our land was founded, and it is this freedom that undergirds our strength and national character today.

As founding father John Adams wrote in 1776 on the eve of our independence, "Statesmen . . . may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles, upon which Freedom can securely stand end."

By allowing for and encouraging the free exercise of religion, the Constitution set the stage for a vigorous national religious life. Most Americans are nothing if not a people of religion, committed to lives of quiet reverence to God, the practice of prayer and the exercise of their religion.

Our culture of religious life informs the way we raise families, conduct business and serve our neighbors. Throughout the centuries this culture also illuminated those who governed and served to temper our laws and governmental practices with the timely wisdom of Judeo-Christian ethics.

George Washington recognized that America would succeed if she adhered to the long legacy of religious values informing our public life and policy. In his first inaugural address, he said that "the foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality, and the preeminence of free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its citizens, and command the respect of the world."

George Washington knew what we know today. A healthy culture of free religious expression keeps our Nation on the right track and our government's policies rooted in the values