

have arrived at a consensus challenging the governing majority to join us in an earmark moratorium than they are interested in the response of the majority who hold the reins of power.

I mean, headlines attest to a vigorous debate among the minority and dead silence among the majority.

And I must tell you, it has to be frustrating, Mr. Speaker, to millions of Americans who long for a Congress that will put integrity and the restoration of public confidence in the Federal budget above partisan differences.

So I say to my colleagues on the other side, what is your response to our challenge for an immediate moratorium on all earmark spending? What will Speaker PELOSI and House Democrats decide at their conference retreat this week?

My hope is as our challenge sits now on the table and is met with stark silence from the Democrats, that as your party meets, Mr. Speaker, as you consider how we can restore public confidence, that Democrats will join Republicans in an immediate earmark moratorium so we can put our fiscal house in order and restore public confidence.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 48 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PASTOR) at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

All-powerful and ever-living God, direct Your love and highest inspirations within us.

Congress stands today between days of retreat for both Republican and Democrat Members of the House. May these days of reflection and planning be blessed with clarity of vision and unified resolve.

Filled with gratitude for the people and the many gifts bestowed upon this Nation, help them to be attuned not only to the problems and questions of Your people, but empower them to build upon their strengths and their hopes for the future.

You alone can lift Your servants above self-interest and fractured alliances to create a renewed solidarity that will bring this Nation to unity and peace.

Only by discerning such gifts within ourselves, Lord, can we bring the seed

of promise to others. For we place our trust not in money nor in munitions, but in the meaning You bring to Your people, now and forever.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CUELLAR) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. CUELLAR led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

SUPPORT ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

(Mr. CUELLAR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the bipartisan economic stimulus plan that will help strengthen our Nation's economy and help millions of American taxpayers and their families.

In my congressional district, the median household income is \$36,000, and those families face rising prices in utilities, food, and health insurance, which stretch their monthly budgets to nearly the breaking point.

Also, nearly 39 percent of these households are headed by single mothers living below the poverty level, who struggle to feed and clothe their children with limited budgets, as they are the sole earners.

The stimulus package will provide at least \$900 to single mothers and their families, which helps alleviate their burden.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to support the bipartisan economic stimulus plan, and I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us today in supporting this legislation.

THE CHINESE CROCODILE

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, the Chinese attack on the Christian faith continues. For 60 days, the Chinese Government has held Shi Weiham, a Christian bookstore owner, in secret detention for praying.

As China readies for the 2008 Summer Olympics, it is trying to convince crit-

ics that it embraces religious freedom. But China is secretly moving religious believers to the dark, damp, hidden hideaway of jail.

China restricts all religious practice to state-sanctioned churches and certain places of worship. So Chinese don't dare pray or worship anywhere else, or off to jail they go. That is what happened to Shi Weiham.

China's religious tolerance is a public relations campaign draped in hypocrisy. China arrests thousands of Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists each year.

As religion is being attacked across atheistic Communist China, we should recall Winston Churchill's words about communism: "A communist is like a crocodile, when it opens its mouth, you cannot tell whether it is trying to smile or preparing to eat you up." The Chinese crocodile is devouring religious freedom among its people.

And that's just the way it is.

PERMANENT FIX FOR FISA

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call on the Democrat majority to pass a permanent fix to our Nation's foreign surveillance law and give our intelligence community the tools they need to protect American families.

It has been 6 months since this body passed a temporary patch to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. If Congress fails to pass a permanent fix, our Nation's intelligence community will once again be limited in their ability to track terrorists and defeat their efforts to murder Americans.

In his State of the Union address last night, President Bush reiterated to Members of both parties that the time to act is now. On this most important of issues, we owe it to the American people not to put American families at risk.

We can all agree that the safety and well-being of our Nation's families is our utmost priority, so let's work together on an agreement that will ensure that we meet the challenge of defending our Nation for the long term. Our enemies will not hesitate to exploit our intelligence loopholes. It is imperative that we not give them that opportunity.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11th.

DEMOCRATS REFORM EARMARK PROCESS

(Mr. ARCURI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ARCURI. Mr. Speaker, 7 years into his Presidency, President Bush is finally urging reform of the earmark process. He is a little late.

Congressional Democrats have already begun reforming the earmark process. We realized reform was necessary after the number of earmarks in appropriations bills skyrocketed under the Republicans. You didn't hear the President complaining then. In fact, he signed every appropriations bill that came to his desk.

Democrats, in stark contrast, have led the way in bringing transparency and accountability to the earmark process. We instituted a 1-year moratorium on earmarks in 2007 until a reformed process could be put into place. We also adopted rules that provided for unprecedented transparency in earmarks and then significantly reduced the number of earmarks last year.

Mr. Speaker, House Democrats are pleased to hear that the President is interested in reforming the earmark process. The Bush White House requests and receives funding for hundreds of earmarks each year, and we look forward to working with the President to both limit and bring increased transparency to the Presidential and congressional earmarks.

HONORING ARMY SERGEANT JON M. SCHOOLCRAFT III

(Mr. JORDAN of Ohio asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. JORDAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and recognize the ultimate sacrifice of a brave Ohio soldier, Army Sergeant Jon Michael "Mike" Schoolcraft III.

Mike attended high school in Wapakoneta and went on to study auto body repair at the Apollo Career Center in Lima. Teachers, coaches, family members, and friends all described Mike as a remarkable, reliable, hard-working young man who excelled at every activity in which he was engaged.

In his time on this Earth, Mike had a positive impact on people in his life. When he decided to join the military shortly after the September 11 attacks, he touched the life of every American family that lived under the blanket of safety he helped provide.

Mike Schoolcraft died on Saturday, January 19, while serving America in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In recognition of his valorous service, he was posthumously promoted to sergeant.

Mike is survived by his new wife, Amber, who lives in Hawaii. Mike's mother, Cynthia, along with many friends and loving family members, lives near his boyhood home. His father, Jon, lives in Indiana.

Mike stood up and volunteered to serve this great country. He fought to promote freedom. He gave his life in defense of his family, his community, his State and his Nation.

For this, each and every American owes him and his family a great debt of gratitude.

EXTENDING PROTECT AMERICA ACT UNNECESSARY

(Mr. HOLT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, the House made a serious mistake last August when it passed the Protect America Act. I opposed the legislation at the time because it authorized a massive, unregulated electronic fishing expedition, an approach guaranteed to ensnare innocent Americans and a sloppy, inefficient way to collect intelligence. It lacks the basic standard of court review of the government's actions.

If we have learned anything, it is when officials must establish before an independent court that they know what they are doing when they collect communications, we get better intelligence than we do through indiscriminate collection and fishing expeditions.

Extending the PAA is unnecessary because existing orders issued under it will continue for a year and are broad enough in scope to deal with any contingencies that may arise.

In November we passed in this body a good bill to replace the PAA. Congress should never pass legislation under duress brought on by propaganda, misinformation, and fear-mongering. I urge my colleagues to remember this when we debate the topic today.

PASS ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

(Mr. ALTMIRE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ALTMIRE. Mr. Speaker, economists say the most important thing Congress can do to stimulate our struggling economy is to act quickly, and that is exactly what this House is going to do today.

House leaders from both parties worked with the President to craft the bipartisan agreement that is before us. We came together, and by acting quickly, we are hoping that our actions spark our economy.

The package is going to provide some relief to middle-income families who have been left behind in many ways over the last 7 years. This bill gives 117 million Americans a tax rebate so they can begin to breathe a little easier when paying their bills in the coming months.

Equally important, this economic package also gives tax breaks to small businesses to help spur investment and job creation.

Mr. Speaker, economists said we need to act fast, and that is what we did. Let's get to work and pass this economic stimulus package today.

PASS ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

(Mr. HALL of New York asked and was given permission to address the

House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HALL of New York. Mr. Speaker, times are rough right now. Signs of economic turmoil are multiplying, and we seem to be headed for, or already are in, a recession. Last week stock markets around the world dropped precipitously, and only an emergency rate change by the Federal Reserve prevented them from falling even farther.

The people I represent in the Hudson Valley have been particularly hard hit. Oil has passed the \$100-a-barrel mark, making it more expensive than ever for people to heat their homes and drive their cars. In suburban communities in the Northeast, like the area I represent, home heating bills are up by more than 30 percent over last year.

Expenses are rising; wages are stagnating. As a result, families struggle to pay their everyday costs. Our debts increase and investment in our future plummets.

Congress must act quickly. I am proud that this Congress will pass legislation today to stimulate the economy to help people and businesses, but especially the working families who need it most.

□ 1215

HEALTH CARE TAX DEDUCTION

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, last night while attending our President's final State of the Union, I was encouraged to hear him say: Ending the bias in the Tax Code against those who do not get their health insurance through their employer is one reform that would put private coverage within reach for millions, and I call on the Congress to pass this piece of legislation this year.

My colleagues, I'd like to draw your attention to the Health Care Tax Deduction Act of 2007, a bill which I have offered, and one that accomplishes this goal of insuring every American man, woman and child. This bill will allow individuals a tax deduction from gross income for health insurance premiums and unreimbursed prescription drug expenses for themselves and their family.

I urge you to cosponsor this bill and attack this problem with meaningful and responsible legislation. With this legislation, we can end the debate over inefficient government-run health care.

FISA

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, in August of last year, Congress passed the Protect America Act to close a dangerous loophole in our ability to collect intelligence information on foreign targets in foreign countries.