

(Mr. GOHMERT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, Congress is currently engaged in a very important debate on health care. It's complex, and Americans deserve an informed and transparent debate. Yet while this discussion continues, there is a country roughly 7,000 miles from here where nearly 35,000 American lives are on the line every day, and Congress has yet, given the changing circumstances there, to fully engage in a focused discussion with our military leaders on a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan.

Since I was elected in 2004 and like so many of our colleagues, I have attended the funerals for fallen Nebraska soldiers. I've stood next to widows, whose young children were not of age, to comprehend the magnitude of the family loss. And yet when the time came, I did make the difficult decision to support sending more troops to Iraq in what was called a "surge." It was the right call.

I have continually met with those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I recently met with those who are preparing to redeploy. Their dedication to service and their commitment to our country continues to inspire me and the families they leave behind. The solemn responsibility for their lives continues to weigh very heavily upon us all.

Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan is facing complex security and governance challenges, and the situation demands engagement by this legislative body now. Although the administration developed a strategy for Afghanistan in March of this year, there is still a lack of clarity, some seeming uncertainty and certainly a hesitation to fully engage Congress in order to move forward in a decisive manner.

Many Afghan people have braved threats of brutal violence in order to vote. Our troops are courageously fulfilling their duties, and there is concern that their resources are stretched to the limit. None of us wants our soldiers at risk nor the opportunity for stability in Afghanistan to slip away.

The administration's top field general and the national security adviser are reflecting differently on the security situation in Afghanistan. General Jones stated on October 4, "I don't foresee the return of the Taliban, and I want to be very clear that Afghanistan is not in danger, imminent danger, or falling."

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Yet our senior military commander, General Stanley McChrystal, assessed

that "the situation in Afghanistan is serious; neither success nor failure can be taken for granted. Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating."

We in Congress need to know, which is it? While we are responsible for funding and equipping the troops, the administration needs to define the next way forward, and this House needs to challenge the decision paralysis that threatens our mission in Afghanistan with each passing day. Until recently, the war in Afghanistan was the other war, the forgotten war, said by some to be the right war.

Mr. Speaker, as much as anyone, I would like to wait and to make sure that all is in order, but Afghanistan is slipping. According to General McChrystal, "Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near term (next 12 months)—while Africa's security capacity matures—risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible."

In his initial assessment of the security situation, General McChrystal requested up to 40,000 additional combat troops. This is going to be a very tough call for all of us. Clearly, General McChrystal's judgment is based on keen insight about what it will take to prevail.

The American people deserve to know the unvarnished truth about the situation in Afghanistan and the fundamental purpose for our being there. Military families deserve to know the truth about the challenges facing their loved ones. Americans need to know that the administration is committed to a plan for success that minimizes our casualties, stabilizes the country, and brings the main contingent of our troops home quickly.

Let me venture to say that this is not just an American problem. The situation in Afghanistan and, for that matter, in Pakistan poses an international security threat, one that demands a shared response from the members of the international community. Pakistan has exhibited a stronger will of late to engage in the ungoverned tribal regions bordering Afghanistan.

Yet we have witnessed a curious range of responses by other governments. Some who see the urgency join us, others sit back hoping that we will save the day, and yet others exploit international tensions for economic and geopolitical gains. While it may be difficult to engender the will to send combat troops, our partner nations must help provide resources to stabilize Afghanistan.

Just as General Petraeus returned from Iraq to testify about the impact of the surge, I believe it would be helpful for President Obama to instruct General McChrystal to forthrightly articulate before this House his views, concerns and professional judgment.

Eight soldiers, Mr. Speaker, were killed yesterday. We need to develop adequately informed conclusions about the resources needed, Afghan capabilities, and international will.

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

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. MCHENRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AFGHAN WAR

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

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I want to start by reading from the October 27 front page of the Washington Post: U.S. Official Resigns Over Afghan War.

"When Matthew Hoh joined the Foreign Service early this year, he was exactly the kind of smart civil-military hybrid the administration was looking for to help expand its development efforts in Afghanistan."

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to Captain Hoh, retired marine, thank you for having the courage to speak out and to speak out on what you believe is the right policy for this Nation in Afghanistan.

I want to read parts of a letter that he wrote to Ambassador Nancy Powell when he resigned his position:

"I have served 6 of the previous 10 years in service to our country overseas, to include deployment as a U.S. Marine officer and a Department of Defense civilian in the Euphrates and Tigris River valleys of Iraq in 2004–2005 and 2006–2007. I did not enter into this position lightly or with any undue expectations nor did I believe my assignment would be without sacrifice, hardship or difficulty. However, in the course of my 5 months of service in Afghanistan, in both Regional Commands East and South, I have lost understanding of and confidence in the strategic purposes of the United States' presence in Afghanistan. I have doubts and reservations about our current strategy and planned future strategy, but my resignation is based not upon how we are pursuing this war, but why and to what end. To put simply: I fail to see the value or the worth in continued U.S. casualties or expenditures of resources in support of the Afghan Government in what is, truly, a 35-year old civil war."

He further writes in the letter to Ambassador Powell, Mr. Speaker:

"This fall will mark the eighth year of U.S. combat, governance and development operations within Afghanistan."

Next fall, the United States' occupation will equal in length the Soviet Union's own physical involvement in Afghanistan. Like the Soviets, we continue to secure and bolster a failing state, while encouraging an ideology and system of government unknown and unwanted by its people."

Mr. Speaker, I want to again say to Captain Matthew Hoh, this took courage for you to speak out, as it took courage for you to fight for this country in Iraq. I hope that our colleagues here on the floor of the House will debate this issue, not only about tomorrow, what are we trying to accomplish in Afghanistan, but in the years ahead, what are we trying to accomplish?

Mr. Speaker, with that, before I close, as I always do, I will ask God to please bless our men and women in uniform; I ask God to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform; I ask God in His loving arms to hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq; I will ask God to please bless the House and Senate that we will do what is right in the eyes of God; and I will ask God to give wisdom, strength and courage to the President of the United States that he will do what is right. And three times, Mr. Speaker, I will ask God, please, God; please, God; please, God, continue to bless America.

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 addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

HONORING MAJOR TAD HERVAS

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

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise before the House today to remember an American hero, Major Tad Hervas of Coon Rapids, who died in Iraq on October 6.

It's so easy for us in the hustle and bustle of life to focus on our own challenges and our own concerns, and it's only natural for us to seek as much comfort and security as we can get in our own lives. But then something happens that comes to remind us that whatever success, security or hopes that we have depends on the sacrifice and the service of those who offer their lives in defense of our Nation.

Everything that we have as Americans was built on such a foundation over many generations. Every privilege that we will enjoy in the future will be bought with the heroic way our military performs its essential duty.

In the community of Coon Rapids, Minnesota, we continue to mourn the death of Major Hervas, who truly embodied the sacrifice that makes America what it is today.

Tad graduated from Coon Rapids High School in 1979. He went on to attend the University of Minnesota-Duluth, where he began a successful career in the military.

Major Hervas served in the Air Force in the very first Gulf War. After 9/11, he enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard, joining Minnesota's great 34th Red Bull Infantry Division. He was serving his second tour in Iraq when he lost his life in Basra just a few weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, I have never worn our country's uniform myself, but one of the greatest honors of this job is all the opportunities I have to spend with those who do so. Hollywood movies tend to glamorize military folks and portray them as super men or super women, but what I have found to be so truly amazing is that they are just regular people who achieve super things. What makes them special is their drive to answer to a higher calling and truly put service to country above everything else.

As the Scriptures affirm, there is no greater love that a person can show than to lay down their lives for their friends. Major Hervas, over a period of decades, laid aside his own comfort, security and personal plans for his family, friends and neighbors, including millions of people who never, ever knew him. We owe him a debt of gratitude that we can truly never repay.

We stand with his father, Ned, and his mother, Barb, and his whole family in grief, and we assure them that we will do everything we can to try to help ease their pain in his passing.

Basra, Iraq is a long way from Coon Rapids, Minnesota, in every conceivable way. I know that the inspiration for Major Hervas' service was a love for his country and a desire to see freedom grow around the world so that others can enjoy the same freedoms that we all do. By creating a safer place for freedom to grow, Major Hervas gave a gift to future generations of Iraqis who may be able to live better than their predecessors were able to do.

Mr. Speaker, as we get back to debating health care and other important issues here like the economy, I want to make sure, and I hope that we will all take a moment to remember Major Tad Hervas and his sacrifice for all of us. He and thousands like him make our freedom possible and our future bright. Let us do everything in our power to make this a Nation that is worthy of the ultimate sacrifice that he made.

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

(Mr. DEAL of Georgia 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. HUNTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HUNTER 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 Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. WESTMORELAND 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 6, 2009, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to join my colleagues on the floor this afternoon to talk about the final stages of our push to complete what has been a very long journey to bring health care to the millions of Americans that don't have it, to lower the cost of care for the millions of small businesses and families that can't afford it, and to start finally doing something about the great burden to taxpayers in this entire economy of the cost of a system that outpaces all of our competitive neighbors across the globe by a two-fold margin. We will hopefully be joined here on the floor by some other Members who are just as interested in reform this afternoon.

Let me start out by saying that this really should be a bipartisan issue. Health care reform, which touches individuals no matter whether they are a Republican or a Democrat, whether they are a liberal or a conservative, should be a bipartisan issue. We should be sitting here working together to try to pass reform. Because when it comes down to it, there is, I think, broad bipartisan agreement, both in this House and out in the public, about what the problems are out there.

We have too many people that are playing by the rules, doing everything we ask, getting the job, being employed, putting food on their table for their family and their kids but they can't get health care insurance. Five out of six of the uninsured in this country are part of a family that have at least one full-time worker.

We agree that it doesn't make sense that there are so many people who are doing everything we ask and simply can't afford to have health care insurance. We also agree that it doesn't make too much sense that doctors have seen a lot of the joy be taken out of the practice of medicine as they spend more and more of their time filling out paperwork, hiring claims managers and fighting with insurance companies.

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We need to get physicians back to the practice of medicine and get the