

THE COST OF WAR IN
AFGHANISTAN

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. Madam Speaker, I follow the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) and I do share his frustration as well. Mine is a little different, though. It is the cost of war in Afghanistan. My concern is, as the President has decided to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, I join my colleagues in both parties, and BARBARA LEE from California, in saying that we should debate this policy on the floor of the House.

I am one that is very upset that this Nation, since World War II, we never declare war anymore, we just pass resolutions on the floor and we give the President, whether it be a Republican or Democrat, the authority to make decisions to go ahead and send troops into certain areas.

I do agree with Mr. Obama, the war should have always been Afghanistan and we should not have gone into Iraq, but that is history now. The problem is we are 9 years after we went into Afghanistan and now we are trying to catch up for the 8 years we spent in Iraq.

Down in Camp Lejeune, which is in my district, the Third District of North Carolina, the day that Mr. Obama made the announcement that we would send 30,000 more troops to combat in Afghanistan, I want to read, Madam Speaker, just a few comments that were in the Jacksonville paper—again, that is the home paper for Jacksonville, North Carolina and, again, the home of Camp Lejeune Marine Base.

“With White House officials saying that President Obama will order about 30,000 more troops, including a brigade of marines from Camp Lejeune, into combat in Afghanistan, local military are reacting to the news with skepticism and concern.”

Further down in the article, it says: Marine Sergeant Doug Copeland, who is scheduled to deploy with his 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in October, said he approved of the troop surge as a means to assist troops already on the ground, but believed a date for leaving the country was coming too late. “We should have dealt with Afghanistan in the first place,” Copeland said. “We’ve already been in this war for 7 or 8 years. We’ve got to call it quits. Our country needs to focus on our country now.”

That is exactly what Mr. DEFAZIO was saying. This country is in bad financial shape, we are losing jobs every day, and what we need to do is concentrate on this country itself.

I will read just another comment, Madam Speaker:

“HM2 Cagney Noland, a corpsman currently with Combat Logistics Regiment 27, said he doubted the proposed timeline would see troops out of Afghanistan.”

Madam Speaker, the number of our troops with PTSD, with TBI, and with mental depression and anxiety is growing each and every day. Again, I have gotten to know many of the marines down at Camp Lejeune, from privates all the way up to generals. They will go and fight for this country, they want to do everything they can to defend this country and they will give their life, but we need to take into consideration the stress that we are putting on these troops.

There is another article I want to make brief reference to that was in the New York Times on December 3 by Nicholas Kristof. It’s called, “Johnson, Gorbachev, Obama.” It is about the Vietnam War, it is about the Russians involved in Afghanistan, and now Mr. Obama’s decision.

I am not trying to second-guess the President. He’s got a very difficult job, and I wish him well. In fact, I was one of the few Republicans that thanked him for taking his time before he decided what the solution should be or what the strategy should be for Afghanistan. But Madam Speaker, I think that we as a Congress should debate the policy.

I said this just a moment ago, and I would like to say it again, I joined BARBARA LEE in a letter to the Speaker of the House asking the Speaker of the House to please let us debate the policy of what we should be doing in Afghanistan before we pass any type of supplemental to financially support the troops. So, therefore, it is my hope that maybe in January or February of 2010 we will be granted a debate on the floor, whether it be for sending more troops to Afghanistan or fewer troops to Afghanistan, and we will come closer to meeting our constitutional responsibility than we have done, truthfully, since World War II.

Madam Speaker, I would like to close as I always do. I have signed over 8,000 letters to families and extended families in this country because I regret that I ever voted to give President Bush the authority to send troops to Iraq. That is my pain that I’ve lived with, and writing the letters and signing the letters to the families is my way of saying I’m sorry that I did not meet my constitutional responsibility and vote my conscience on the floor of this House.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to close these brief comments by asking God to please bless our men and women in uniform, ask God to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform, and ask God to please, in his loving arms, hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. I would like to ask God to please give the House and Senate strength to do what is right for the next generation. I would like to ask God to give strength and wisdom and courage to the President of the United States. And I close by asking three times, God please, God please, God please continue to bless America.

RETURN TO JOB GROWTH

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

Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia. Madam Speaker, in our ongoing efforts to stabilize the economy and ensure a return to prosperity, our focus must remain fixed on the saving and creation of American jobs. The actions of this administration and this Congress have shown progress. Job losses fell dramatically, and the unemployment rate dropped in November from 10.2 percent to 10 percent.

The recession began in 2007 and has been the worst since World War II. Unemployment hit a 26-year high, consumer confidence plummeted, the gross domestic product contracted at near unprecedented levels, the stock market plunged, home prices tumbled and foreclosures skyrocketed, and millions of Americans found themselves out of work.

Monthly job losses continued to worsen each month. In September of 2008, the monthly losses were more than 300,000. By December of 2008 and January of 2009, in the waning days of the Bush administration, job losses exceeded 700,000. And it wasn’t just 2008. Under the Clinton administration, from 1993 to 2000 the average monthly private job growth was 217,000, one of the most robust job growths in American history. During the Bush 8 years, that average monthly job creation was just 2,000.

□ 1700

As this Congress and the Obama administration took office in January, we were facing a job market in free fall. We immediately took action on a number of fronts.

The Recovery Act provided critically important investments, saving or creating 1.6 million jobs so far. States and localities faced with growing budget deficits would have been forced to lay off hundreds of thousands of teachers, police and fire fighters, but the Recovery Act saved those jobs, including, in my district, 404 teachers in Fairfax County and 304 in Prince William County. The Recovery Act created thousands of additional jobs in road construction, clean energy, and medical research. Businesses in my district received at least 205 contracts, grants, and loans, totaling almost \$200 million, thanks to the Recovery Act. They have had a noticeable impact.

The employment rate in my district began to fall in advance of the national rate, declining in October from 5.3 to 5.2 percent in Prince William County, and from 4.7 to 4.5 percent in Fairfax, half the national average.

The House of Representatives reauthorized the COPS program, which will add 50,000 police officers nationwide. The 21st Century Green Schools Act and the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act invested billions of more dollars to modernize public

schools and community college campuses, creating tens of thousands of new construction jobs. The American Clean Energy and Security Act creates incentives for new research and development, creating thousands of new job opportunities related to the production of advanced batteries, wind turbines, solar power, and other sustainable technologies. In addition, Madam Speaker, we passed a number of bills to spur small business job creation through tax incentives and employment opportunities for our veterans.

Ultimately, for sustainable job growth, the private sector must feel comfortable to return to hiring employees. Large companies will not expand while the value of their firm drops. Small companies will not expand while the owners' assets are disappearing. And those assets did drop. From its high of over 14,000 in October of 2007, the Dow Jones Industrial Average began a precipitous decline to just over 6,600 in March of this year. Since then, thanks to our actions, the market has recovered more than 50 percent.

Companies will not expand while consumer confidence declines, and it did decline to 25 points in February of this year, the lowest level since the conference board's inception in 1967. Since then, thanks again to our actions, consumer confidence has continued to improve, hitting 48.7 in October, almost doubling.

Companies will not expand, Madam Speaker, while the national economy is contracting, and it did indeed contract, starting in the third quarter of 2008. It declined an astounding 6.3 percent in the fourth quarter and 5.7 percent in the first quarter of 2009, but our actions have helped. GDP increased 2.8 percent in the third quarter of 2009 and continues to grow this quarter as well.

This February, the horrific pace of job losses began to ease. Job losses in May fell to 300,000. In August through October, they averaged 135,000 a month. In November, just 11,000 jobs, net, were lost in the American economy, continuing to contribute to the decline in the unemployment rate.

Madam Speaker, we're not out of the woods just yet. Millions of Americans are still out of work. But we've started to turn the economy around. We've begun to stabilize the stock market, the housing sector, and the GDP. Madam Speaker, we've begun to create conditions for job growth, and now we must partner with the private sector to ensure that millions of Americans can return to work.

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

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

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE REDMEN OF SMITH CENTER HIGH SCHOOL

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

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Madam Speaker, on the Kansas prairie, in a small town named Smith Center, an exceptional tradition has been built and maintained over the course of decades. The Redmen of Smith Center High School have achieved great things on the football field.

There are few, if any, high school football fans in Kansas who are unaware of Smith Center's reputation. The parents and boosters of Smith Center High School have watched with pride as their sons bested opponents on the gridiron in 79 consecutive contests. Coach Roger Barta and his Redmen football team have won over 300 games in the past 32 seasons. They've racked up eight State championships, five of them in a row.

Smith Center was on the longest active 11-man high school football winning streak in the Nation. The streak was snapped in the Kansas State 2-1A championship game 2 weeks ago. Every player on the Redman football squad, from freshman to senior, experienced their first high school defeat at the hands of the Centralia High School Panthers. It was a heartbreaking loss for an extraordinary group of boys.

I had the opportunity to participate in several pregame coin flips over the past few seasons, including this year's State title game. Each time I witnessed a very talented football team with a very spirited group of fans. Yet, all the success the team has enjoyed on the field has never been what makes them so remarkable. Football is just what attracts notoriety and our applause. It's the building of character and lifelong traits that matter in Smith Center. Following their first loss in 6 years, Coach Barta reminded his players, "We've never judged ourselves on wins and losses."

The truly exceptional work being done on the plains of Kansas is the development of character in the boys of the Smith Center football team and the students of Smith Center High School. It is the respect each athlete is taught by their coaches. It's the insistence of integrity insisted upon by their teachers. It's the values instilled in each son by their parents and community.

Joe Drape, a New York Times Sports writer, recently authored a book entitled, "Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen." In his book, Mr. Drape extols the virtues we, in rural America, hold dear. Humility, sacrifice, unwavering commitment, all are characteristics that are exemplified by the Redmen and their fans. Additionally, as I was told by one of the game officials after the State title game, this is the only team that year after year, every game, they gather on the field, hold hands,

and a prayer is offered by one of the coaches or one of the players on the team.

Redmen football is what received the attention, but behind the scenes is where the most impressive and longest lasting accomplishments are discovered. Football is simply a teaching tool used by the community. Coach Barta was quoted in the book as stating, "None of this is really about football. What we're doing is sending kids into life who know that every day means something."

This attitude exemplifies the teaching, coaching, and parenting philosophy of rural America. Our population may be dwindling and our communities aging, but our commitment to raising good children and preparing them for life after high school is something that will never diminish. School pride is important to a community, but it pales in comparison to the role a teacher, coach, or parent plays when he or she helps a child succeed. I'm thankful that Coach Barta and his staff understand this, and I'm thankful to come from a part of the country that understands this.

Congratulations to the Smith Center Redmen, their football team, for their remarkable success, and thanks to the team, the community, and the school that are such great ambassadors for our way of life on the plains of Kansas.

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

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

HONORING THE LIFE OF REAR ADMIRAL DAVID M. STONE, USN (RET.)

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

Mr. SESTAK. Madam Speaker, I rise to honor and mourn the loss of a great American. Rear Admiral David M. Stone, United States Navy (Retired) recently passed away, and as a result, we are a lesser Nation. He was a proud son of Illinois, not the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, my State, but I am compelled to see that the achievements of this remarkable man are forever captured in the record of our proceedings because Dave Stone was my shipmate.

We graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1974 and served together as fellow Surface Warfare Officers at sea and ashore for nearly three decades. In the course of those years, I witnessed Dave Stone consistently offer our Nation all of his enormous talent and energy. At the Academy, he led Navy's basketball team with an unmatched passion and competitive spirit.