

including the Heritage Foundation, the Brookings Institution, the Concord Coalition and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget also have embraced the SAFE Commission.

Make no mistake. This could well be the hardest economic issue our Nation will ever be faced with, but we cannot afford to wait.

I will end with a statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Lutheran pastor who stood up to the Nazis and was executed, hung in Flossenberg Prison when the artillery was coming, the western ally artillery was coming to liberate Germany. He was hung by the Nazis. Here's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, and I think he was exactly right when he said, "The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children."

Will this Congress, will this 111th Congress meet the Dietrich Bonhoeffer test? I don't know. But I'm going to do everything I can, offer amendments on the floor, amendments in committee, to see that this Congress is forced to deal with this issue so that we can honestly say to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we have tried and done whereby we, however, are a moral society, and we have left a good environment and society for our children.

[From the *The Washington Post*, Jan. 8, 2009]

YEARS TO COME

"FISCAL SPACE" is an economist's term for a country's capacity to borrow and spend its way out of recession without risking exorbitant interest rates and inflation later on. Generally speaking, the more public debt a country already has as a share of its economy, the less new debt it can take on.

As President-elect Barack Obama and Congress contemplate a fiscal stimulus package that could total hundreds of billions of dollars, they still have some fiscal space to work with. At \$6.3 trillion, the publicly held national debt is about 45 percent of the \$14 trillion economy—not much above the post-World War II average debt-to-GDP ratio of 43 percent. But the space is shrinking rapidly. According to new figures from the Congressional Budget Office, federal debt is rising at the fastest rate since World War II. It is estimated at \$1.2 trillion in fiscal 2009, or 8 percent of gross domestic product. This stunning number reflects both the direct effect of the recession on tax revenue and spending and the high cost of measures taken to combat the downturn, such as the financial sector bailout. And it is likely to be matched or exceeded when the Obama stimulus plan kicks in.

Mr. Obama was just leveling with the American people when he noted yesterday that the country faces "trillion-dollar deficits for years to come" unless policymakers "make a change in the way that Washington does business." The question, of course, is how to change. Though Mr. Obama's appointment of an efficiency-minded chief performance officer sent a useful signal, the real answers are legislative. The stimulus package must not bloat the government's permanent financial commitments. According to a recently published International Monetary Fund paper, appropriate measures include increased transfers or temporary tax cuts to consumers at the bottom and middle of the income scale; aid to state and local governments; and repairs and improvements (especially energy-saving ones) to existing infra-

structure. The IMF recommends against increasing the federal payroll, cutting corporate tax rates or letting companies deduct their recent losses against past years' profits. The stimulus plan should include a plan for offsetting spending cuts and revenue increases once the economy recovers.

Over the long run, investors will finance the U.S. government at reasonable rates only if it tackles its huge unfunded health-care and pension commitments. Unchecked, the cost of providing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid to 77 million retiring baby boomers could push the debt-to-GDP ratio up to nearly 300 percent by 2005, according to a December 2007 CBO report.

Ideally, Congress would make the necessary hard choices through the normal legislative process. Its repeated failure to do so, however, may necessitate a commission to recommend reforms for the House and Senate to accept or reject. Reps. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) and Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.) and Sens. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) have offered proposals for such a panel. Hard as it is, jumpstarting the U.S. economy will be easy compared with securing its financial future. But Mr. Obama and the Congress must do both.

HONORING THE SACRIFICE OF STAFF SERGEANT SOLOMON T. SAM

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor a young man beloved by his family, friends and his country, Staff Sergeant Solomon T. Sam of the United States Army, who was taken from us on December 4, 2008, in Mosul, Iraq.

Staff Sergeant Sam devoted nearly a decade to this country. He enlisted in the U.S. Armed Services in October 2000, and redeployed to Iraq in November of 2008, serving with the 523rd Engineer Company, 84th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

The commitment to this country is something we can all be proud of. Solomon will be remembered as a soldier, a son, a husband and a father. His three young children will grow up knowing their dad was a hero.

Madam Speaker, Staff Sergeant Sam is a true American hero who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. I ask my colleagues to keep his family and friends in their thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time.

THE FORGOTTEN WAR

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

Mr. KIRK. Madam Speaker, with a President to inaugurate and a troubled economy we can overlook the sacrifice of our troops in Afghanistan. This conflict, overshadowed by Iraq, is often called the Forgotten War.

Last month I became the first Member of the House to serve in an Immi-

grant Danger Area since 1942. Now, Members of this House have served in all of America's wars, from the Revolution through World War II. But the Defense Department's policy of 1943 blocked reservist Congressmen from serving in Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Kosovo or Iraq. Senator and Colonel LINDSAY GRAHAM broke through this barrier 2 years ago, and I became the first Member of this House to also serve since World War II.

While our country has moved from a draftee military to an all-volunteer force, I think it's still important for as many Americans as possible to share the burden of our troops. Our military is the strongest when it pulls into its ranks Americans from all races, creeds and colors and especially all walks of life. It is important for Members of this House, where the Constitution places the power to declare war, to also serve alongside our troops.

I voted for the deployment of troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and was honored then to be one of the first to join them in Afghanistan.

As a Naval Reserve Intelligence Officer, I deployed to Southern Afghanistan in support of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF at the headquarters of Regional Command South. I served in the command of a Dutch Major General, Mart de Kruif, and on the staff of his American Deputy for Stabilization, Brigadier General John Nicholson of the U.S. Army.

I can report to the House that the morale of our troops in Afghanistan is high. Americans that I joined feel that this is the right mission in the right place. Just because this effort is 10 times harder than we first thought, it remains the place where we can best support the safety of the American people.

Our headquarters was located at Kandahar Airfield, known as KAF. We located just a few miles from Tarnak Farms, where Osama bin Laden had trained many al Qaeda operatives. A few miles further down the road was the palace of Mullah Omar, the murderous former dictator of the Taliban.

We face some real challenges in Afghanistan. Our mission has now stretched for 7 years, and can wear thin with the Afghan people. As we look at Senator Barack Obama becoming our Commander-in-Chief, it's important that we review what we have accomplished in Afghanistan, its differences from the Iraq mission and what remains to be done.

First, it's important to note that Afghanistan is not Iraq, and almost every comparison between the two leads to people making errors with regard to our policy in Afghanistan. While both countries are predominantly Muslim, with over 25 million people, there is where the similarities end.

Iraq is a country that has always had a strong central government. Afghanistan has always had a certain amount of lawlessness, even during the Soviet dictatorship.

Iraq has an oil industry and a middle class. Afghanistan has neither.

Iraq was a mission carried out by America and Britain, nearly alone, with few allies helping. Afghanistan is home to a NATO mission where a very large majority of the troops come from outside America.

Finally, the insurgency in Iraq was sustained by dictatorships in Syria and Iran. In Afghanistan, the principal sustenance in income of the Taliban is now heroin, generating billions in profit.

Our troops have accomplished a great deal already in Afghanistan. We destroyed al Qaeda's training bases, and then deposed the Taliban dictatorship that protected them. We organized elections, and then protected a new democratically elected government under Hamid Karzai.

□ 1530

These missions were no small feat in a country that has proven to be the graveyard of the Soviet military and that has seen no elections for three generations.

Since 2006, the mission in Afghanistan has stalled as the Taliban has morphed into a new and deadly force. The tenets of Islam are generally antinarcotic. The Taliban first eradicated poppy and heroin production, but now has changed its practice. Once the Taliban no longer had easy access to bin Laden or to Saudi charity money, they went into the heroin business big time. Today, they are more accurately described as the narco-Taliban, backed by at least \$500 million in annual drug profits. Some of Afghanistan's wealthiest warlords are Taliban leaders who produce heroin to support jihad and terror against the elected Government of Afghanistan and of the nations of the West.

The narco-Taliban are not evenly distributed across Afghanistan. They are concentrated in the heroin heartland of the Helmand River valley and in the nearby city of Kandahar. There is a growing misperception that the war in Afghanistan is fiercest near Pakistan's border. While that may have been true last year, the key to fighting this year is along the heroin river of Helmand in southern Afghanistan. The Afghan Government and NATO are fighting pitched battles in the strategic rear of the Taliban are actually the greatest.

Our effort there has been expensive both in blood and in treasure. In my area, the U.S. has lost over 80 soldiers, but the Canadians have lost over 90 and the British over 110. I cannot emphasize enough the dedication and professionalism and commitment of our troops and especially of our NATO allies.

I, personally, served with British Royal Marine Commandos, with Canadian troops, with Dutch armor officers and enlisted, with Danish armor officers and enlisted, and with Romanian infantry. Along with our service men

and women from the Army, the Marines, the Air Force, and the Navy, I found these troops from the West to be young, idealistic and some of the most dedicated people I've ever served with. In short, I worked with heroes whom I admire a great deal.

When I deployed to Afghanistan, I thought I might serve as a Fobbit. A "Fobbit" is a person who works on a Forward Operating Base, or a FOB, who never leaves its border, who simply shuttles between the chow hall, the office, the gym, and the rack. Thanks to my command, I was not a Fobbit. I spent a great deal of my time outside the wire in Kandahar, in Geresk, in Lashkar Gah, and in Qalat. This experience gave me a much greater understanding of the opportunities that we share with NATO and with the Afghan Government.

With all of this effort, we should ask the question: What is at stake in Afghanistan? Should we pull out? Should we stay put or should we double down?

In my view, what is at stake is that the safety of American families is at risk especially if you live in the target cities of New York, Washington or Chicago. These are the cities most emphasized by al Qaeda and the Taliban. The dream of many Talib and foreign fighters is to depose the democratically elected government of Afghanistan and then move jihad back into the cities of Europe and the United States.

Most of the NATO troops whom I met remember not just 9/11, which they watched on TV, but also the Madrid Metro attack, the London bus bombings, and the murder of intellectuals in Amsterdam. They believe as I do, which is the best way to face the Talib is in Afghanistan with Afghan allies who know how to fight them best.

Should we keep the mission in Afghanistan as it is today?

If we do that, we risk a bloody stalemate that would definitely protect the capital of the Afghan Government in Kabul but would surrender much of the territory of the country to the Talib. The Talib is also wearing our allies thin, especially in Canada and in the Netherlands, and it would strain our alliance. The Taliban now attacks young girls, who dare to go to school, with acid in their faces, and it has assassinated Afghanistan's only female police officer because she was a woman. We know who they are. They are brutal dictators who want to set society back to the 13th century.

As Americans, we cannot go back to the 13th century. Our culture and our country don't even go back that far. Most Afghans support our values of reform, of rights for women, of the vote, and especially of modernity. But simply to protect their families, many in Afghanistan want to be with the winning side, and right now, many families in Afghanistan don't know who the winning side will be—the Afghan Government and NATO or the Taliban.

Should we double down?

NATO allies clearly believe that we should double down, but they are wait-

ing for a call from our new President. Our best allies—the U.K., Spain, France, and several other NATO countries—are already planning to add their troop commitment to Afghanistan. Other close allies of the United States, especially Canada and the Netherlands, need to be asked before making the painful decision for themselves to hang in there. Most expect that the U.S. will be part of a 60,000 troop commitment to Afghanistan, one-third being Americans, who will then move to attack the heroin production heartland that sustains the Taliban. If this happens, we can expect some tough days ahead. Hard fighting and casualties would ensue. The Taliban cannot survive without the heroin income that comes from this region. If we succeed, we will rip the financial engine out from the Taliban, securing a future for central Asia that does not include terror.

In the end, we should ask this key question: What is our exit strategy?

Currently, the Afghan police and army are much, much smaller than their counterparts in Iraq, a country that has an equal number of people. We need to double the size of Afghanistan's police and army so that they can take this mission from NATO and so that we can wind up our own effort. It will take at least 2 or 3 years to accomplish this objective, which is why our NATO mission is needed now.

I want to thank the men and women with whom I served. Our Dutch allies sent us General de Kruif, and our British allies sent us Brigadier General Hook of the Royal Marine Commandos, both of whom I served with closely.

I also want to thank the men with whom I most closely worked: Majors Will Daniel and Fred Tanner of the U.S. Army. I also want to thank them for their dedication. I think about them here from the floor each and every day.

I especially want to thank my boss, Brigadier General John Nicholson, of the U.S. Army. I count myself lucky that, at this later stage in my life, I have served briefly with such an inspirational leader.

To the mothers and fathers of this country, I would say that, if your sons or daughters serve in southern Afghanistan, they will work under one of the most able military leaders whom I have ever met.

As we leave Iraq, it is likely that Afghanistan will no longer be the forgotten war. Members of this House should take note that our troops have already accomplished a great deal there, but more remains to be done.

For my part, I am honored to have served there, and I will be on this House floor the voice of the troops, of the Americans whom we have stationed in the land far above the Khyber Pass.

I yield back the balance of my time.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to: