

(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 Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

THE FREEDOM TO . . .

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, there are more than a dozen countries in this world that restrict freedom of religion, including Iran and China. Imagine being told your religion was unacceptable and being carted off to jail for offering a Bible to someone. This is not an unusual occurrence in some countries with state-sponsored religions.

In this country, we have a few sacrosanct words known as "First Amendment to the Constitution" that guarantee no one will be punished for the religion that they choose to follow: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

When a person decides to burn the Koran, the Bible, or any other sacred document in this country, he has the freedom to do so even if the overwhelming majority of us vehemently disagree with his decision. It is difficult for the citizens of some other countries to understand or to tolerate this kind of freedom. Yet it is the bedrock of our democracy.

We have the right to disagree, to ignore, to protest against or to take the matter to court for a ruling, but we do not have the right to determine what another person is to believe. Unfortunately, that kind of freedom challenges other governments and cultures.

The freedoms we hold dear seem uncontrollable to those who would dictate what people wear, worship, and support. For example, some governments think that if their citizens are educated the next thing that will happen is that they will begin to think and ask questions, and that can't be tolerated by those in power. Or they believe that only one religion is true and, therefore, no others can be taught or people might stray from the religion and the religion might falter. In the United States, we have no such fear because our Constitution gives us the confidence and the courage to tolerate diversity.

September 17 is Constitution Day and a time that we should all take to be

grateful for the strength and breadth of our system of government. We should reflect on our freedoms and know that they are protected.

That date was chosen because on September 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention met for the last time in Philadelphia to sign the document before it was sent to the 13 States to be ratified. The Founding Fathers drew upon the wisdom of the ages to give us a gift that has endured for more than two centuries, the United States Constitution.

The blueprint for our government is not a long document. You can keep a copy in your shirt pocket. I happen to have one here, Mr. Speaker. The basic document is under 5,000 words, but it covers the building blocks for our three equal branches of government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial arms of government.

The first 10 amendments lay out the rights of every citizen. How many times have you heard the phrase, "I know my rights." Well, we know them because they have been delineated for us in the Bill of Rights.

Winston Churchill famously said in a speech in the House of Commons in 1947: "Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

Today I issue a challenge to the citizens to read their Constitution on September 17 each year. It will help your understanding of what and who you are in this country, and it will strengthen your values.

In a speech to the Senate in 1850, Henry Clay said: "The Constitution of the United States was made not merely for the generation that then existed, but for posterity, unlimited, undefined, endless, perpetual posterity."

He has been proven correct, Mr. Speaker, and let us all work to protect it and keep it that way.

□ 1510

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS

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, tomorrow we celebrate the 223rd anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution. As we do so, I think it is important to consider the humbling legacy bestowed by those who founded this country and the lawmakers who actually did come before us; because each day those of us who are currently holding office, we are so mired in the challenges and complexities of modern public policy, we scurry through these stately, ornate halls, often without so much as a glimpse at

or a thought of the profound history that is depicted around us.

For instance, just steps away, within the interior of the majestic Capitol Dome, is the Rotunda. I spent some time there recently, Mr. Speaker, reflecting on the moments in our Nation's history that gave rise to the gift of liberty we strive to safeguard each day in this body. Inside the Rotunda is a series of paintings that offer rich glimpses into some of these moments, starting with the Landing of Columbus in 1492, the Discovery of the Mississippi by DeSoto in 1541, as well as the Baptism of Pocahontas in 1613. They all depict the opening of a new, mysterious world full of promise and things yet to come.

The painting, the Embarkation of the Pilgrims in 1620, also speaks of opportunity, the anticipation of realizing a dream of freedom. The Declaration of Independence in 1776 follows. The Surrender of General Burgoyne in 1777, and the Surrender of Lord Cornwallis in 1781, as well as George Washington Resigning His Commission in 1783 are all celebrated pieces depicting the first moments of that new Republic.

Possibly the most famous of these paintings is John Trumbull's 12-by-18-foot-large Declaration of Independence. This historical piece of art depicts the presentation of the Declaration to the Second Continental Congress. Standing at the forefront of this painting are Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin, the authors of the profound document that gave way to the birth to our Nation.

Painstaking care was given to each word in the Declaration, none of which may be more memorable than these: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." You see, the Declaration built upon a theory of natural and universal rights, the consent of the governed, and a right of redress when government was in violation of those essential principles. After setting forth those standards, the Declaration continued with a litany of grievances against King George, which, Mr. Speaker, is a very interesting prospect to reread that part of the Declaration.

And then the Declaration finally concludes by saying, "We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States . . . And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Fifty-six individuals signed the Declaration, though it is possible that few knew the historical significance the document would ultimately bear. Historians suggest that the list of grievances against King George was of the highest importance to the signers, but today, like the revival of nationalism that did follow after the War of 1812, we perhaps find the greatest profundity and timeliness in the Preamble of the Declaration, and I think it bears repeating. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

These words inspire reflection on our personal independence as American citizens secured through times of tumult and uncertainty.

Not long after these words were handed down, another extraordinary document expressing our rights as American citizens was given unto the people. On September 17, 1787, 39 individuals signed the United States Constitution, a document that changed the history of our nation—and the world.

The Constitution holds special meaning for this body. We placed our hands on a Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. It is because of that deep abiding commitment to the Constitution that Congress prioritized celebration of the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution many years ago, and why we now celebrate "Citizenship and Constitution Day" each September 17. This 223rd Citizenship and Constitution Day, let us recall the extraordinary circumstances that gave rise to our great nation, and the words of our founding documents that endure as a call of conscience to a world crying out for meaning.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the Northern Mariana Islands (Mr. SABLAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SABLAN 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 Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. KENNEDY 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 Colorado (Mr. COFFMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado 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 Texas (Mr. CULBERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

COVENANT WITH AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. GINGREY of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I'm here to urge our Democratic leaders to listen to the Republican Party, to listen to the Republican Party's bipartisan plan for taking immediate action on our already ailing economy.

If we let the Bush tax cuts expire, those tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003, Americans nationwide will face the largest tax hike in United States history. Indeed, that tax hike will amount to \$3.8 trillion, and this at a time when unemployment hovers at around 10 percent and our national debt has hit an all-time high at \$13 trillion—yes, \$13 trillion with a "T," an unbelievable amount of debt.

We need to freeze Federal spending. We need to cut taxes across the board, for everyone at every marginal tax rate level across the board. The state of the economy today is that 16 million people are unemployed. That equates to a 10 percent unemployment rate. Indeed, it is probably close to 17 percent. Mr. Speaker, if you count people who have just given up, who have been looking over 6 months for a job, there are none to be found, and also the number of people who are employed, yes, but underemployed, it would be close to 17 percent. So, indeed, the Republican Party and our leader says we need to freeze Federal spending, indeed, roll it back to the level of 2008, and cut taxes across the board.

And if we don't do that, Mr. Speaker, many companies that might have been in a position to expand and, therefore, put people back to work will choose not to because of the uncertainties associated with these tax hikes as well as other disastrous Democratic policies like ObamaCare. We need to come together, and we need to pass legislation immediately that cuts spending and kills all of the pending tax increases.

Mr. Speaker, we just returned to Washington, did we not, after 6 weeks in our districts, all 435 of us? I had many opportunities during that 6-week period of time to meet with my constituents face to face, eyeball to eyeball at town hall meetings. We called them America Speaking Out meetings, wanting the American people to know that at least one party wanted to hear from them, wanted to hear from Main Street, and did not want to force-feed on the American people, on our constituents, some grandiose plan that Members of Congress come up with. God knows that plans that Members of Congress have come up with over the last 4 years have certainly not helped one iota.

So I used this opportunity, my colleagues, I used this opportunity to speak to my constituents, but mainly to listen to them and to find out and

write it down and bring it back to Washington to share it with my colleagues so we can make a pledge and make a commitment.

Indeed, one person, Mr. Speaker, suggested that why don't you call it this time, rather than a Contract with America that we remember from 1994, why don't you call it a Covenant with America, just like the covenant that God had with Moses and the Jewish people, something that is an absolute pledge of your sacred honor. Sacred honor, you heard my friend from Nebraska, Representative FORTENBERRY just moments ago on the floor, talk about the Constitution, sacred honor and our sacred documents.

And I think that is what the American people want. I don't think they will accept anything less. They are tired of the same old same old—excessive government spending and higher taxes that are making our country look a lot like Greece, Mr. Speaker.

So, I'm happy to have this opportunity, under the direction of my leadership, to take this time to talk to my colleagues about what we really need to do and what we really need to do in a bipartisan way.

No wonder, Mr. Speaker, that the approval ratings of Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle is 11 percent. People wanted to change 2 years ago.

□ 1520

People wanted a change 2 years ago. They made a change, but, indeed, it was not quite the change that they expected.

I want to refer my colleagues to this first poster, this first slide that I have here in the way of a cartoon, and hopefully all of you Members in the back of the Chamber can see this. It is a china shop, and it shows this depiction of our President going into the china shop talking to the clerk. And the caption is, as the President is speaking, "Now, give me one good reason why you're not hiring." And of course behind the President are all of these bulls, these bulls in a china shop. This bull of cap and trade, this bull of health care reform, breaking all of the china.

Mr. Speaker, to ask the question: Now, give me one good reason why you're not hiring. Well, the American people can give a lot of good reasons why they are not hiring if indeed they have any capital left with which to hire or to expand their business, to increase the square footage, to put in a new product line, and to bring in additional workers for their small business. It is not happening because of bad policy, bad policy coming from inside the Beltway, not bad policy on Main Street.

Mr. Speaker, again as I did these town hall meetings, and I guess we did six or eight of them across the 11th Congressional District of northwest Georgia, nine counties that I represent, a great district, and I guess I would not be unique among us to say I think I have the best district of all 435, but I