

photos. A lot of these were conducted through new media. It underscores the brutality of the Belarusian leadership and the dictator, Lukashenko. I would hope that the international community, especially the European Union and the United States, would place the Belarusian Government on record that they should not hope to be able to join in the opportunities afforded to free and democratic countries when they treat their citizens who are only asking for the right to have their voice heard and the right to choose the representatives of the people.

END HUNGER NOW

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Madam Speaker, as we near the end of 2010 and the 111th Congress, I want to take a few minutes to talk about an issue that is critically important to the health and the well-being of our country. It's also an issue that I care deeply about and it's an issue that's rarely discussed. And that issue, Madam Speaker, is hunger. I've said it over and over again, but it bears repeating. Hunger is a political condition. We know how to end hunger in America. We have the resources to do it. What we need is the political will to make it happen.

We've made some important progress over the last few years. We enacted historic improvements in the food stamp program, now called SNAP. WIC, the program that ensures that pregnant mothers and their newborns and infant children have access to nutritious food, has been fully funded. Food banks received the assistance they need to fill their shelves as they worked to put food in the hands of hungry families. We passed the Hunger-Free Communities Act, a law that provides localized grants to combat hunger around the country. The farm bill included historic improvements to antihunger programs—most importantly, indexing SNAP to inflation. The Recovery Act did even more by increasing emergency funds to SNAP beneficiaries, allowing them to buy more food at a time when their incomes were falling because of the economy. Finally, on December 13, President Obama signed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act into law. This will improve the quality of food served at schools to our Nation's children.

Madam Speaker, I have been honored to serve as the cochair of the House Hunger Caucus, and I want to thank my colleagues on that caucus, Democrat and Republican, for their commitment to this critical issue. I especially want to thank JO ANN EMERSON for her incredible work. But we have much more to do.

The USDA recently released their annual food insecurity, or hunger, statistics. The simple and unfortunate fact is this: Because of the economy, hunger is getting worse in America, not better.

In 2009, the number of hungry Americans increased by 1 million over the previous year. According to the latest data, over 50 million Americans, including 17.2 million children, went hungry at some point in 2009. Madam Speaker, these are the highest numbers ever collected by USDA. And if that weren't bad enough, future SNAP funds—money provided under the Recovery Act—have been raided for other critical programs.

Madam Speaker, I love this institution and I am honored to serve as a Member of Congress, but it is a peculiar place. None of my colleagues, Democrats or Republicans, will tell you that they are pro-hunger. You'll never see a Member of Congress take a bottle out of the mouth of a hungry baby or swipe a can of beans that has been donated to a local food bank, but that's precisely what we will be doing if we choose to balance the budget on the backs of the poor and the hungry in this country.

I want to tackle our deficit as badly as anyone else. And in order to dig ourselves out of this fiscal hole, then all of us will need to sacrifice—not just the poor and not just the middle class. It is simply unacceptable to provide billions in tax relief for millionaires and billionaires while at the same time cutting programs that literally put food in the mouths of hungry people.

Ending hunger is not just the right thing to do—it's also in the best interest of our Nation's future. It's a national security issue. It's an education issue. It's a jobs issue. It's a health care issue. It's a productivity issue. It's a fiscal health issue.

We have a lot of work to do, Madam Speaker. The President said he's committed to ending childhood hunger by 2015, but we're not doing enough to reach that goal. Budgets will be tight for the foreseeable future, and it's going to be difficult to fund these vital programs. I've repeatedly called on the White House to convene a conference on hunger and nutrition. Let's develop a comprehensive plan to tackle this terrible problem.

But, Madam Speaker, this issue is not going away. We must not ignore the needs of the hungry in America. We must continue to work with antihunger groups, nutrition groups, religious groups, and the administration and others to finally end hunger in America.

We can do this. We can end hunger in America if we have the political will to do it. I urge my colleagues in the 112th Congress to join in this effort.

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

(Mr. RANGEL 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 gen-

tleman from Illinois (Mr. JACKSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JACKSON of Illinois 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 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 Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO 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 (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

START TREATY

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

Mr. GOHMERT. Well, down the hall we have the Senate as they have been taking up the START Treaty to help limit our defense of ourselves with a country that is not the country we're most concerned about. We seem to keep ignoring the fact that Iran continues to move forward developing nuclear weapons, and once they have them, then that is the game changer. Of course, we know that even in this hemisphere that there's the potential for rockets that could reach the United States. It's nothing to fear if we act appropriately and don't stick our head in the sand, as the START Treaty apparently attempts to do.

For example, we've got people in the Senate that do not understand that the President has the power to negotiate treaties. The Senate's role is in advising and consenting, but they don't have the power to amend the treaty. That has to be done between the other country and our President. So they can make suggestions, but that language is not binding unless the other country agrees to it.

So all this frivolous stuff, all this discussion, it is meaningless unless Russia were to adopt it. And when you look at the preamble to this START Treaty, despite what the President says and despite what people in the Senate are saying about it not affecting missile defense, the preamble says: Recognizing the existence of the interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms,

that this interrelationship will become more important as strategic nuclear arms are reduced, and that current strategic defensive arms do not undermine the viability and effectiveness of the strategic offensive arms of the parties.

Now, maybe from the legal training and the judicial training it helps to read and understand that better, but the Russians make pretty clear they intend for this treaty to restrict a defense system. How do people down the hall not get that? It seems pretty clear. We have an obligation to support and defend this Constitution. We took an oath to do that.

□ 2010

We have never ratified a treaty in a lame duck session. Yet that is exactly what is being attempted down the hall right now. People who have been voted out of office because the majority in their States did not want them representing them anymore are down there cutting a deal with the Russians.

The election should have consequences, and people should have the decency to note that the majority of the people in their States have spoken, to go home and to not set a precedent of being the first lame duck session that people didn't want consenting to treaties providing consent to the treaty. It is so inappropriate what is going on down there, and then they stand there and tell us, Oh, no. This will have nothing to do with our missile defense shield.

We had a President back in the 1980s who, despite all the jokes, despite all the insults hurled at him, insisted that the thing that was maddest of all was the concept of mutually assured destruction, that insane was the idea of two countries saying, We'll both develop so much in the way of nuclear offensive capability that one won't attack the other because they will know the other will attack them, and they will both be wiped out.

So along came President Reagan, and he would not leave it alone.

We are going to defend ourselves. We took an oath to do as much, and if Russian, Iranian, Venezuelan, Cuban missiles—any kind of missiles—pose a threat to the United States, we have an obligation to defend ourselves.

But not according to this President.

According to this President, we are basically going to unilaterally mutually disarm, which is what happened with the Polish missile defense site. I understand it has now been revealed that the Russians had hopes, according to their early documentation, that eventually in the final document they would get the United States to agree to abandon their plans to put a missile defense shield in Poland. However, they didn't realize that they were negotiating with a new President of the United States, who promised hope and change and that the hope and change that he was bringing was a change unlike any negotiation in our past. We

were going to unilaterally lay down our best leverage, not ask for anything in return and think we'd somehow be better off.

Well, that's not the way negotiations work in the world among individuals. Especially for those of us who are Christian, you treat individuals with respect. You follow the admonitions and the teachings of Jesus. Yet, as the national leader, we have a different obligation—not to go into people's bank accounts, into their homes, to take their money against their will, and give it to our favorite charities. We were told they were supposed to do it with their own money. We were not to abuse the process of this body to go legalize stealing people's money to give to our favorite charities. Let the people do that. It is one of the things that made us great. The charitable, big-hearted people in America have helped make America great.

But as people who are elected to come to Washington help lead this country, we have a different obligation. We are supposed to defend this Nation. We are supposed to provide for the common defense so that people who live in America can have a Merry Christmas, can have a Happy Hanukkah, can have the enjoyment and the freedom of religion. Operating under a Judeo-Christian system, as this was formed, all people could worship as they chose, and people could be defended as they did so; but to do that, you cannot unilaterally lay down the arms of this Nation.

We—I say “we” cumulatively. This President just gave away, early on last year, our best card. That's not really looking out for the American people. It's looking out for the Iranians; it's looking out for the Russians; it's looking out for the North Koreans, the Venezuelans, the Cubans, and those who might at some point like to see us gone and who have said as much, but it's not looking out for America.

Now, this administration has never been a fan of missile defense just as many Democrats were not of the plan President Reagan proposed; but because the Russians—the Soviets at that time—couldn't keep up and were already spending too much money, the Soviet Union fell. Clearly, this treaty links offensive reductions with missile defense.

So these guys down the hall may think they're doing a wonderful thing for America, but they're not. They may think, Gee, the President has said this about the treaty, so maybe it's true.

My friend Andy McCarthy, Andrew C. McCarthy, had a posting today, on December 21, with National Review Online, and it bears particularly on this point, so I will read from Andy McCarthy's article because it is so well written. These are Andrew McCarthy's words.

“Patting himself and his fellow Senate Republicans on the back for selling out on President Obama's new START Treaty, BOB CORKER absurdly claims

that all is well because, despite treaty terms that patently disserve our national security, Senators have held debates, and because he and Senator RICHARD LUGAR have drafted a swell ‘resolution of ratification’ that purportedly addresses New START's serial flaws. Meantime, an unidentified JOHN MCCAIN admirer tells Rich the crafty ‘ol Maverick deserves kudos for pressuring Obama into writing a letter talking up missile defense.’”

Mr. MCCARTHY goes on.

“Whoopie! Don't you feel better about the GOP now? This is the most craven sort of nonsense.”

Mr. MCCARTHY goes on.

He writes, “These Senators are trying to rationalize their inexcusable approval of a bad treaty they lack the backbone to vote down. Holding debates? It's commonplace to mock the U.N. General Assembly as a ‘debating society’ because the term connotes how inconsequential its exertions are.

“As for the vaunted resolution of ratification, I defer to John Bolton and John Yoo. Writing in The New York Times last month, they explained that the Obama administration hoped to sell its ‘dangerous’ bargain by diverting attention from the treaty, itself. Attention would instead be focused on the ratification resolution, which they predicted would be loaded with ‘a package of paper promises’—variously called ‘conditions,’ ‘understandings’ and ‘declarations’—that would purport to address concerns about missile defense, the condition of our nuclear arsenal, treaty limitations on conventional weapons, et cetera. Ambassador Bolton and Professor Yoo continued.”

They said, “Senators cannot take these warranties seriously—they are not a part of the text of the treaty, itself.”

□ 2020

As Eugene Roskow, a former Under Secretary of State, put it, such reservations and understandings “have the same legal effect as a letter from my mother.” They are mere policy statements that attempt to influence future treaty interpretation. They do not have the force of law; they do not bind the President or future Congresses. The Constitution's supremacy clause makes the treaty's text the “law of the land.”

“Instead, Bolton and Yoo asserted, ‘To prevent New START from gravely impairing America's nuclear capacity, the Senate must ignore the resolution of ratification and demand changes to the treaty itself.’ This is exactly the duty from which Senate Republicans are abdicating. The ratification resolution is nothing. The Presidential letter Senator McCain is said to have extracted is less than nothing: it lacks even the patina of a legislative act and is about as enforceable as a Presidential commitment to close Gitmo or televise the government's health care deliberations on C-SPAN.

“The administration is wrong on national security policy and politically

weakened by the midterm thrashing. The treaty is awful, which is why there are so many things to address in resolutions and letters. If you can't get Republican Senators to do the right thing under these conditions, then when?

"One more related point." Mr. McCarthy says, "Based on my argument in yesterday's column that the Senate may not unilaterally rewrite treaties or enact amendments that alter treaty terms, a friend suggests there is daylight between my position and that of Bolton and Yoo. There is none. Yes, Bolton and Yoo recount Senate action that has resulted in treaties being altered, but here's what they say:

"When it approved the Jay Treaty in the 1790s, which resolved outstanding differences with Britain, the Senate consented only on condition that President George Washington delete a specific provision on trade. Washington and Britain agreed to the amendment, and the treaty entered into force. In 1978, the Senate demanded changes to the text of the Panama Canal treaty as the price of its consent."

MCCARTHY goes on and says, "This is no different from what I am saying. The Senate in these cases did not claim the power to change treaty terms or enact resolutions that pretended to fix deep problems without altering treaty terms. To the contrary, Senators told Presidents Washington and Carter that there would be no consent unless they went back to the countries in question and got the problematic terms changed.

"The Senate can pass amendments that amplify American understandings about a treaty; the Senate cannot unilaterally alter the core understandings in an agreement—that latter would render it no longer an agreement, and hence not a treaty. Thus, did Messrs. Bolton and Yoo conclude: 'While the Constitution gives the President the prime role in the treaty process, the Senate has the final say. If 34 Senators reject a treaty, no President can override them.'

"Voting to reject is the Senate's duty when confronted with a treaty that disserves the national interests. It is the current Senate's dereliction on New START—a fact no resolution or Presidential letter can paper over."

It does no good to pass resolutions saying we think it means this or that when the words clearly enunciate the fact that missile defense is tied and part of this. It is affected.

If the Senate were to come back and say, all right, as they did in the 1790s, we will only consent if the President and Great Britain change these terms—in this case, if the President and Russia agree to change these terms—then we give our consent, have a condition precedent. But that's not what's going on here. We're writing letters. We are putting resolutions, this is what we think. That doesn't make any difference at all. People need to under-

stand the role that they play in this government under our Constitution because, otherwise, they're doing a great deal of damage.

Now, it's just staggering. We have no business entering a treaty when we're still just leaving Iran hanging out there, trying to get the centrifuges going, developing nuclear weapons, cutting deals with other countries who also hate us. And we in America, what are we doing? We're paying billions of dollars to countries that would like to see us fall.

We're supporting a U.N. that thinks it's fine to treat women and children like property and allows the worst kinds of abuses to go on and, not only that, puts countries who have massive civil rights abuses in charge of their civil rights, the human rights. It's just incredible what's going on.

So I will continue in the next Congress to push my U.N. voting accountability bill. We mean no ill will to countries that hate our guts, but we don't have to pay them to hate us. So it just says any country that votes against our position in the U.N. more than half the time in 1 year will not get a dime of financial assistance of any kind from us the next year.

Those are the kinds of things you do when you're representing a country and your oath and your obligation require that you protect that country, not lay down your arms, not lay down your defenses and think that the wonderful good will of others will see how wonderful you are in unilaterally dropping your weapons. You don't do that. There are consequences.

Even going back to ancient Israel—and I realize there are people like Helen Thomas who don't realize there was an ancient Israel, but there was. And in fact, hundreds of years before there was Mohamed, there was an ancient Israel. But if you go to the days of Hezekiah, when the Babylonian leaders came over, and of course, we had the account in the Old Testament of Isaiah coming to Hezekiah. He knew what he had done. He said, What did you do? Oh, these wonderful leaders—this is, of course, Texas paraphrase—these wonderful leaders from Babylon came over. So we showed them all our treasure, and we showed them all of our defenses. In essence, Isaiah pointed out, you fool. Because you've done this, you will lose your country. You don't show your enemies your defenses without a severe cost. In the case of Israel, it cost them everything. You don't do that.

Individually, you can love and care and nurture. As a national part of a government, we have an oath and obligation to the people that live here to provide for the common defense, and that means you don't give away the defenses. You don't lay down your arms. You do what you can to protect America. In fact, I pointed out before, but I heard friends say today that, you know, people who consider themselves Christian, especially this time of year,

should be in favor of all kinds of bills of Federal money being given to wonderful charitable causes. Well, individually, that's correct.

But as a Nation, we get a good indication from the story of Zacharias, because after Zacharias met Jesus, he was so overwhelmed with guilt for how he had abused his taxing authority, that he gave back the money, in fact, gave a four to one rebate to those from whom he took too much money.

□ 2030

Now that would be an interesting thing to see. And I had advocated for a payroll tax holiday 2 years ago. According to Moody's, it would have increased the 1-year GDP more than any other proposal, including our official Republican proposal. I'm not for it now. We've squandered way too much money. And we're running up debt like nobody would have ever dreamed, \$3 trillion in 2 years? My word, my first year in 2005, I was hearing people across the aisle beating up on us because we had at one point \$160 billion deficit, and that was outrageous. And my Democratic friends were right, we shouldn't have been running \$100 billion, \$200 billion deficit. Who would have ever dreamed that 5 short years later, they would have run up a \$3 trillion deficit in 2 years, 10 times the deficit they were complaining about just 5 short years ago.

Well, those are some things that are great cause for concern. Did Republicans not learn anything from the election? Did people think that once the election was behind us, it was business as usual? Do Democratic and Republican Senators who are up for election in 2 years think that people across America are not watching? They're watching more today than they've ever watched in this Nation's history. They're paying attention. Who's doing what? And for those who are found to have had one big last zesty giveaway program after another, there will be a price to pay. And for those who rushed in and cut a deal with the Russians that the Russians didn't agree with; therefore, it is not binding. The only thing that's binding is what they consent to that the President has already agreed with Russia on, that will be the treaty, and it limits our missile defense. And it will be no consolation to anyone someday that—whoops, incoming—and we agree not to develop our missile defense with the Russians. Sorry, these missiles aren't coming from Russia, but the Russians got us to agree not to develop missile defense; therefore, we have no defense to what these enemies of America are sending. That's irresponsible. We should not be doing that. And I had hoped to end on a more positive note tonight.

Madam Speaker, if I could inquire how much time I have left.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. You have 34 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. I thank the Speaker. I would like to finish by going through some of the Christmas proclamations by U.S. Presidents. I touched

on some of these last week but was wanting to read some different messages this week because I think they're very helpful to Americans who believe, unfortunately, as the President does, that we have never been a Christian Nation. I won't debate whether we are or not now because we may very well not be now. But fortunately, this country was established under Christian notions that allowed people the freedom to worship as they choose. Because heaven help us if we had a Constitution based on sharia law, then obviously there wouldn't be a Don't Ask, Don't Tell because that's a capital offense, to commit a homosexual offense under sharia law. So no need for Don't Ask, Don't Tell. No need for appeal under sharia law. Apparently it is a capital offense if you commit a homosexual act.

But also under sharia law, there's no room for Christians to worship any way they choose. The only way you can have all religions worship as they choose is to have a country based on Christian tenets. And that's what we started with. And we seem to be trying to get away from that, and it seems to be eroding people's freedoms of religion, particularly Christians.

So how ironic that we seem to be coming full circle, 360 degrees, so that we can eliminate the freedom to worship publicly in the public square, which are the very Christian tenets that allowed us to have and become the greatest country on Earth in Earth's history.

So these are words from Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. This was his first year as President. Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 24, Christmas Eve 1933, provided us these words. Roosevelt said, "This year marks a greater national understanding of the significance in our modern lives of the teaching of Him whose birth we celebrate. To more and more of us, the words, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' have taken on a meaning that is showing itself and proving itself in our purposes and daily lives. May the practice of that high ideal grow in us all in the year to come." Roosevelt finished by saying, "I give you and send you one and all, old and young, a merry Christmas and a truly happy new year. And so for now and for always, God bless us, everyone."

Moving to 1947, another one of the Christmas messages I did not mention last week. This is Harry Truman, December 24, 1947. And I won't read the entire message. But these are Harry Truman's words. He said, "There can be little happiness for those who will keep another Christmas in poverty and exile, separation from their loved ones. As we prepare to celebrate our Christmas this year in a land of plenty, we would be heartless indeed if we were indifferent to the plight of less fortunate peoples overseas. We must not forget that our revolutionary fathers also knew a Christmas of suffering and desolation. Washington wrote from Valley

Forge 2 days before Christmas in 1777, 'We have this day no less than 2,873 men in camp unfit for duty because they are barefooted and otherwise naked.'"

Truman goes on, "We can be thankful that our people have risen today, as did our forefathers in Washington's time, to our obligation and our opportunity. At this point in the world's history, the words of St. Paul have greater significance than ever before. He said, 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three. But the greatest of these three is charity.'" Truman said, "We believe this. We accept it as a basic principle of our lives. The great heart of the American people has been moved to compassion by the needs of those in other lands who are cold and hungry. We have supplied a part of their needs, and we shall do more. In this, we are maintaining the American tradition. In extending aid to our less fortunate brothers, we are developing in their hearts the return of hope."

Because of our forts, the people of other lands see the advent of a new day in which they can lead lives free from the harrowing fear of starvation and want. With a return of hope to these peoples will come renewed faith, faith in the dignity of the individual and the brotherhood of man. The world grows old, but the spirit of Christmas is ever young. Happily for all mankind, the spirit of Christmas survives travail and suffering because it fills us with hope of better things to come.

Let us then put our trust in the unerring star which guided the wise men to the manger of Bethlehem. Let us hearken again to the angel choir, saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace, goodwill toward men.' With hope for the future and with faith in God, I wish all my countrymen a very merry Christmas."

□ 2040

Christmas Eve, 1949, President Harry Truman gave us these words: the first Christmas had its beginning in the coming of a little child. It remains a child's day, a day of childhood love and of childhood memories. That feeling of love has clung to this day down all the centuries from the first Christmas. There is clustered around Christmas Day the feeling of warmth, of kindness, of innocence, of love, the love of little children, the love for them, the love that was in the heart of the little child whose birthday it is.

Through that child love there came to all mankind the love of a divine father and a blessed mother so that the love of the holy family could be shared by the whole human family. These are some of the thoughts that came to mind as I gave the signal to light our national Christmas tree in the south grounds of the White House.

President Truman goes on and says, sitting here in my own home, so like other homes all over America, I've been thinking about some families in other once-happy lands. We must not

forget that there are thousands and thousands of families homeless, hopeless, destitute, and torn with the despair on this Christmas Eve. For them, as for the holy family, on the first Christmas, there's no room in the inn. We shall not solve a moral question by dodging it. We can scarcely hope to have a full Christmas if we turn a deaf ear to the suffering of even the least of Christ's little ones.

Since returning home, I've been reading again in our family Bible some of the passages which foretold this night. It was that grand old seer, Isaiah, who prophesied in the Old Testament the sublime event which found fulfillment almost 2,000 years ago.

Just as Isaiah foresaw the coming of Christ, so another battler for the Lord, St. Paul, summed up the law and the prophets in a glorification of love which he exalts even above both faith and hope.

Truman says, we miss the spirit of Christmas if we consider the incarnation as an indistinct and doubtful, far-off event unrelated to our present problems. We miss the purport of Christ's birth if we do not accept it as a living link which joins us together in spirit as children of the ever-living and true God. In love alone, the love of God and the love of man, will be found the solution of all the ills which afflict the world today.

Slowly, sometimes painfully, but always with increasing purpose, emerges the great message of Christianity. Only with wisdom comes joy, and with greatness comes love. In the spirit of the Christ child, as little children with joy in our hearts and peace in our souls, let us as a Nation, dedicate ourselves anew to the love of our fellow men. In such a dedication, we shall find the message of the child of Bethlehem the real meaning of Christmas. That's Harry Truman.

And I'll skip forward several years. Let me read this from 1976, from Gerald Ford: the message of Christmas has not changed over the course of 20 centuries. Peace on Earth, goodwill towards men, that message is as inspiring today as it was when it was first proclaimed to the shepherds near Bethlehem. It was first proclaimed, as we all know, then.

In 1976 America has been blessed with peace and significant restoration of domestic harmony. But true peace is more than an absence of battle. It is also the absence of prejudice and the triumph of understanding. Brotherhood among all peoples must be the solid cornerstone of lasting peace. It has been a sustaining force for our Nation, and it remains a guiding light for our future.

The celebration of the birth of Jesus is observed on every continent. The customs and traditions are not always the same, but feelings that are generated between friends and family members are equally strong and equally warm.

God bless you.

This is from President George H.W. Bush's message December 8, 1992: during the Christmas season, millions of people around the world gather with family and friends to recall the events that took place in Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, whose life offers us a model of dignity, compassion and justice, we renew our commitment to peace and understanding throughout the world. Through his words and example, Christ made clear the redemptive value of giving of one's self for others. And his life proved that love and sacrifice can make a profound difference in the world.

Over the years, many Americans have made sacrifices in order to promote freedom and human rights. Around the globe the heroic actions of our veterans, the lifesaving work of scientists and physicians and generosity of countless individuals who voluntarily give of their time, talents and energy to help others all have enriched humankind and confirmed the importance of our Judeo-Christian heritage in shaping our government and values.

Moving on to 2002, December, George W. Bush's message. He said, throughout the Christmas season, we recall that God's love is found in humble places, and God's peace is offered to us all. For nearly 80 years, in times of calm and in times of challenge, Americans have gathered for this ceremony.

The simple story we remember during this season speaks to every generation. It is the story of a quiet birth in a little town on the margins of an indifferent empire. Yet that single event set the direction of history and still changes millions of lives.

For over two millennia, Christmas has carried the message that God is with us; and because He's with us, we can always live in hope.

Our entire Nation is always thinking, at this time of the year, of the men and women in the military, many of whom will spend this Christmas at posts far from home. They stand between Americans and grave danger. They serve in the cause of peace and freedom. They wear the uniform proudly, and we are proud of them.

That's George W. Bush, December 2002, Presidential Christmas message.

And I might interject at this point, we know from our Declaration of Independence, we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among them is the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Then why, some would ask, if we're endowed, if these are given as an inheritance, why then do people all over the world not have life and liberty and the opportunity to pursue happiness like we do in this country?

It is an endowment. The Founders had that right. But as with any inheritance that's left to heirs, if the heirs are not willing to protect their inheritance, if they're not willing to fight the forces of evil, forces of greed, forces of

lust and power lust, they will lose their inheritance to other evil people who will be glad to take it from them.

□ 2050

Thus it comes to us, the sacred, really sacred obligation that we owe this Nation to ensure our common defense so that the inheritance of all those alive today will be passed on to future generations. We don't have these freedoms because we earned them. We were not born to freedom because we deserved it. We were born to freedom, others came to this Nation, to freedom, because of the sacrifice of others who went before us. And so we enjoy the freedoms and inheritance, the endowment we have today.

We can fritter away this endowment or we can protect it. We can avoid unilaterally disarming and protect the American people in this blessed country so that future generations can enjoy that same inheritance.

Another message, Christmas message from George W. Bush was this: "During Christmas, we gather with family and friends to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As God's only Son, Jesus came to Earth and gave His life so that we may live. His actions and His words remind us that service to others is central to our lives and that sacrifice and unconditional love must guide us and inspire us to lead lives of compassion, mercy, and justice. The true spirit of Christmas reflects a dedication to helping those in need, to giving hope to those in despair, and to spreading peace and understanding throughout the Earth.

"As we share love and enjoy the traditions of this holiday, we are also grateful for the men and women of our Armed Forces, who are working to defend freedom, secure our homeland, and advance peace and safety around the world. This Christmas, may we give thanks for the blessings God has granted to our Nation."

We took an oath to provide the protection for this Constitution, in essence this country, against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We did not take an oath to legalize theft from people who earn money to give to our favorite and many extremely deserving charitable causes. That's not what we were supposed to do. We need to defend this Nation so that others can be as philanthropic, as charitable as only Americans seem to reach the full height of doing.

In this Christmas season, we want all people of all religions to be able to worship as they choose freely so long as they do not threaten the freedoms of this country. We have an obligation, we took an oath, an oath before God below those words, "In God We Trust." Well, the people have trusted us not to shirk our duties to defend this Nation. And so that means individually we should be charitable, individually we should serve and help others, but as a Congress and as a Nation we should provide incentives for people to reach their God-given potential.

We shouldn't be paying people for every child they can possibly have out of wedlock so that we encourage nearly 45 years of people having babies out of wedlock. No one cares for deadbeat dads. It's despicable to have fathered a child and to not help in any way with the upbringing and the sustenance of the child that a father helped bring in the world. And yet the answer lies not in providing a financial incentive to lure young single women into a rut from which they cannot extricate themselves. It's immoral to lure young women into ruts with no hope of getting out.

And as a judge, I was prompted to leave the bench when I first started about thinking about running for Congress as I saw these young women who came before me for welfare fraud or for selling drugs, and their stories seemed so hopeless. But they were told if you just have a child, forget high school, you can start getting a check. And there are young women around the country who are going into this Christmas week feeling they have no hope. I saw them in my courtroom. And this Congress is to blame, the ones that preceded us are to blame. You meant well. Congress meant well. But instead of helping, we hurt future generations. Not just one, future generations.

It's time we undid that. It's time that in a spirit of Christmas we don't legalize taking somebody's money that doesn't want us to have it and giving to our favorite charity. What we legalize is incentives for people to reach their full, God-given potential, regardless of their race, creed, color, national origin, gender. We make sure that they have that opportunity. That's our obligation.

And as we go and approach Christmas, I close with the words of Benjamin Franklin in 1787. Suffering from gout, 80 years old, the Constitutional Convention was falling apart. There seemed no hope. Eighty-year-old Franklin, brilliant as ever, witty and clever as ever, but who had to have help getting into Independence Hall, was recognized by the president of the Constitutional Convention, President George Washington.

And he pointed out we have been going for nearly 5 weeks, we have more votes than ayes on virtually every vote. Franklin said, "How does it happen, sir, that we have not thought of once applying to the father of lights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning contests with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered." That's not a deist, by the way.

He went on and eventually said, "If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire could rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writing that unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Franklin went on and said, "Firmly believe this." He said, "I also firmly

believe without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in our little political building no better than the builders of Babel. We will be confounded by local partial interests, and we ourselves shall become a byword down through the ages."

He eventually moved that henceforth we begin each day with prayer in Congress. It was seconded by Mr. Sherman, unanimously adopted. And then Mr. Randolph added not only that, since this was the end of June, he added a provision that everyone in Congress be required to go hear a Christian evangelist on July 4th before they return and begin again in the constitutional making.

And one of the diaries reported that after that, and after they heard that Christian message, after entering into joint prayer as a Congress, led by a local minister, there was a new atmosphere, there was a new spirit, and as a result we got the Constitution that is the greatest founding document of any nation in the history of the world. Now, that is something that we have to thank God for.

So at this time of blessings, and thanks giving, and this Christmas season, Madam Speaker, I yield back.

□ 2100

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT OUR DEMOCRACY AND OUR COUNTRY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Madam Speaker, as I leave Congress after 20 years, I would just like to share a few personal observations about our democracy and our country.

First and foremost, I believe we still live in the greatest country in the world. We are a blessed Nation, and we have more freedoms and opportunities than most citizens of the world could ever imagine. The proof that all is not wrong in our country today is that our immigration challenge is not that people are trying to leave our country; it is that millions of people from all parts of the globe would do almost anything, including risking their lives, to come here.

Several years ago, I learned a lot about our country from a D.C. taxicab driver. In hearing his accented English late one night when I arrived at National Airport, I asked him when he first came to our country. He answered 20 years earlier. Then I asked him if he had a family, and he answered, yes, a wife, two sons and a daughter. I asked if they had come with him when he came here 20 years ago, and he said, no, they came 3 years earlier. He went on to explain. Imagine this:

For 17 years he came to our country for 10 months out of every year, work-

ing two jobs at a time, washing dishes and any other minimum-wage job he could find here. He said he would save a little bit every year for his family nest egg and enough to return to his home to be with his family for 2 months each year.

As the father of two young sons, I was floored, and said he could put millions of dollars in the back seat of that taxicab that night for me if I only would agree to be away from my wife and sons as much as he had been from his family, and it would not even be a temptation.

I asked him why he did it, and I will never forget his answer. He said, I had a hope and a dream that some day I might be able to raise my three children in a country where they could have just two things—religious freedom and the opportunity to be whatever they wanted to be.

Now, he said, my family is together here. I am a U.S. citizen. My sons are studying to become engineers and my daughter will be a doctor.

This hardworking immigrant taught me a lot that night in his taxicab about the American Dream and what is so special about our country.

I realize our democracy is not perfect, and I am well aware of the imperfections of those of us who serve in it. But sometimes in the midst of our daily lives, we Americans need to stop and think about our many blessings as citizens of this great country. In a time of widespread cynicism toward government, I believe it is also worthwhile to ask ourselves what is the role of our Federal Government. There can be no better foundation for that answer than the Preamble to our Constitution:

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and to our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

As with any statement of principle, our Founding Fathers left honest room for disagreement on the specifics of interpretation, but I would like to make several personal observations.

The preamble first begins with the words "We the people." Those words make it clear that the cornerstone of our democracy is the people—not politicians, not Presidents, not any institution or special interest.

I believe one of the frustrations toward government today is that "we the people" don't feel government is listening to or working for us. There is a sense that the voice of the special interest is too often drowning out the voice of everyday citizens.

There is much truth in that observation, and I have concerns that the recent Supreme Court decision to let corporations and unions spend unlimited, unaccountable, untraceable amounts of money in campaigns will make the voice of everyday citizens even less au-

dible. If outright bans don't meet the limits of a flawed judicial decision, that at the very least transparency must be required. "We the people" have a fundamental right to know who is spending millions of dollars to influence who is elected to our Congress.

"In order to form a more perfect union." I believe the greatness and goodness of our country is that ours is a history of each generation trying to reach ever-closer toward the ideals of liberty and justice for all. Rights that were once just the domain of white male landowners have slowly but surely been expanded to more and more Americans. The barriers of race, religion, gender and sexual preferences have with great pain and sacrifice slowly been knocked down. This road of progress has been paved with detours and roadblocks along the way, but it has inevitably been a road of progress toward a more perfect Union.

I am proud that in 2008 our Nation broke the racial barrier for the highest office in our land. But I temper that pride in 2010 with the disappointment that the issue of race is still an issue for anyone over a century-and-a-half after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Let us not, however, let the imperfections of our Union blind us from seeing our blessings and our progress toward becoming a more perfect Union.

"Establish justice." In a society that is often critical of our legal system, I am grateful that we live in a country that presumes innocence until guilt is proven and that offers the fundamental right to a jury trial. While frivolous lawsuits do occur and should be stopped whenever possible, reason should dictate that we not limit the constitutional right of the citizen to a jury trial and that that right should not be based on one's wealth. It is not fair to begin the work of Congress in this House on this floor with the words of our Pledge, "with liberty and justice for all," and then proceed on the House floor moments later to cut legal aid for low-income citizens.

"Insure domestic tranquility and provide for the common defense." In a world where evil and greed will always exist, defending our citizens' lives and property must always be a top responsibility of government. That is why I am so grateful for the noble calling of those who choose to serve our Nation in law enforcement and in military uniform. Those who defend us from criminals here at home or from threats from abroad have chosen a noble calling in life and should always be treated with our words and our deeds as the true heroes they are.

The record will show that in the past 4 years under the Democratic leadership of Speaker PELOSI and with the leadership of Chairman OBEY and Chairman FILNER and others, this Congress has made unprecedented strides in our investments in better health care and benefits for our veterans. We did so while recognizing that we can