

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

never fully repay our debt of gratitude that we owe those who have served our Nation in uniform and their families.

"Promote the general welfare." On this principle there can be much honest disagreement, and I respect that fact. Perhaps what is most important in this idea to me is that it underscores that we Americans are not just individuals separate from one another, but that our Founding Fathers recognized the welfare of one is not distinct from the welfare of all of us. "We the people" truly have common bonds as American citizens.

My personal view is that government cannot ensure success for individuals. That requires hard work and solid values, and those come from our families and our faith, not from the government. Yet I do believe that the general welfare of "we the people" is enhanced if government and private enterprise work together to give those willing to work hard and play by the rules a fair opportunity for just a few things in life for themselves and their families.

□ 2110

A good job, a decent home and a safe neighborhood, affordable health care, a quality education for their children, and retirement security. Government cannot guarantee these outcomes, but it should work to provide a fair opportunity to all willing and able to work hard for them. Government should provide a helping hand to those who are willing to help themselves.

The general welfare, to me, really means opportunity. And it is my belief that the ultimate goal of government should be to provide every child in America—every child—a fair opportunity to reach his or her highest God-given potential. That is what Head Start, public school funding, college student financial aid, and many other Federal programs are all about. These programs are helping hands, not handouts. They're investments in opportunity for our citizens and our country's future.

For those who cannot help themselves because of their physical or mental health care problems, we the people are a compassionate people, and the general welfare, along with our basic sense of decency and faith, dictate that we help those who cannot help themselves. That is a proper role of the Federal Government.

For those who believe there's virtually no role for the Federal Government much beyond national defense, I would point out that our Founding Fathers realized over two centuries ago that the failure of the Articles of Confederation was that they committed ourselves to being a country of separate States, more than one union. That's why our Founding Fathers committed to adopting a new Constitution with stronger powers vested in a Federal Government. Our Founding Fathers so long ago understood that the general welfare of our citizens could not be effectively served by simply

that loose association of States. There are some today who envision turning the clock back to a system that didn't work over two centuries ago and certainly would not work today in today's more complex society and economy.

Despite its imperfections, I believe the Federal Government plays a vital role in providing for the general welfare of we the people. At the same time, I would say that the general welfare of our children and grandchildren demands that the Federal Government do a better job of living within its means.

While deficits are to be expected in times of war and recession, long-term deficits must be brought down. This should be one of the highest national priorities in the years to come. After having turned serious deficits from the early 1990s into the surpluses of the late 1990s, Congress, in my opinion, made an enormous mistake in letting expire the pay-as-you-go rules, passing massive unpaid-for tax cuts in 2001 and 2003, and in expanding Medicare prescription drug programs in 2003, with none of these being paid for. This is not rocket science. It is simple math. Massive tax cuts passed in 1981, in the face of a major defense buildup, led to historic, unprecedented deficits. Two decades later, the same mistake was repeated when Congress passed massive tax cuts, the first ever of their kind during a time of war. Those of us who opposed those tax cuts predicted they would lead to deficits. Those who supported the tax cuts, if you'll check the record, said they would not lead to deficits. We were right, unfortunately, and they were wrong.

It is my hope that the free lunch philosophy of no-pain balanced budgets has been discredited enough by now so the next Congress can realistically make the tough choices needed to get our fiscal house back in order. Republicans in Congress need to stop peddling the disproven that tax cuts pay for themselves. They do not. Democrats in Congress need to understand that spending must be cut, that no cuts will be done without pain, but that ultimately uncontrolled deficits will harm low- and middle-income families even more through slower economic growth and the crowding out of education and health programs by increasing interest payments on the national debt.

Most importantly, the partisan finger-pointing should stop and the bipartisan work should begin. It should begin to ensure the general welfare of we the people is served by a physically sustainable Federal debt level. The choices will be difficult, but if they are made on a bipartisan basis, the people of the country will understand the necessity of those tough choices, just as they did in 1983 when President Reagan and Speaker Tip O'Neill worked together to save Social Security.

"Secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." Our forefathers understood that freedom is

God-given and should be protected as the divine gift it truly is. Our troops have, for over two centuries, protected our freedoms from threats from abroad. Here at home we must continue to be faithful stewards of the freedoms of religion, speech, press, and association.

It is no coincidence that the first words of the Bill of Rights are dedicated to the principle of religious liberty built upon the foundation of what Thomas Jefferson called the sacred wall of separation between church and State. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Religious freedom is the first freedom. It is the freedom upon which all other freedoms are built. Mr. Madison and Mr. Jefferson understood that religion should be based on a pedestal high above the reach of politicians.

I believe America's model of religious liberty is perhaps the greatest contribution to the world from our experiment in democracy. It has been built upon the bedrock of church-State separation. And for those who misunderstand that principle, church-State separation does not mean keeping people of faith out of government. It does mean keeping government out of our faith. All of human history has proven that if politicians are allowed to regulate and get involved in religion, they cannot withstand the siren songs of using religion as a means to their own political ends and of stepping on the rights of religious minorities by trying to ingratiate themselves with the religious majority.

If I could offer only one piece of advice to the press, the public, and to future Members who will serve in Congress, it would be to be aware of those who, whether motivated by good faith or by political gain, would try to help religion by chiseling away at the wall of separation between church and State. God doesn't need their help or government's help. If He chose to give each of us the right to believe or not to believe, it would be sacrilegious for politicians to limit that divine right.

Government can make a lot of mistakes that can be corrected, but if the Pandora's box of intermingling government and religion is ever open, it will unleash divisions among us that we cannot even imagine. Human history has proven that lesson over and over again. Mr. Madison and Mr. Jefferson got it right in the first 16 words of the Bill of Rights, and it would be wrong to undo those words or the principle they represent.

In the short run, I have some serious concerns about our democracy. Partisanship is too prevalent, especially since solving the major challenges facing our country—the deficit, health care, energy, immigration reform, and competing in the world economy—will require bipartisanship to not only pass effective legislation but to secure public support for those laws after their passage.

Sound-bite politics of television and radio interviews and talk shows and

campaign ads make it difficult to develop responsible solutions to complex problems. Thirty-second campaign TV ads are seldom a template for responsible problem-solving. The stovepiping of news sources, where citizens are hearing the news they want to hear, reinforcing their already held views, is digging deeper the lines of political division in our country. The demonizing of those who think differently is creating coarseness in our political discourse that neither serves our democracy nor sets a positive example for our children. If adults don't treat each other with respect, can we expect any different from our children?

□ 2120

The loss of centrists—Republicans and Democrats alike—in Congress will make it more difficult in the years ahead to find the common ground of compromise. A parliamentary government can work with one party on one end of the political spectrum and another on the other end with few in between, because the party in the majority in that type of government has the power to implement its programs. However, in our American democracy, built upon the principle of checks and balances, bipartisanship is needed to pass laws on major issues and then to earn acceptance of those laws from the public.

The financial problems of major regional newspapers have reduced the impact of one of the key checks and balances of our democracy—a vigorous and free press.

The financial power of corporations, unions and special interests, especially under the Citizens United Supreme Court case, to spend unlimited, non-transparent millions in congressional races without any accountability to the public who funds those races could seriously undermine the integrity of not just campaigns but of voting decisions made by Members of Congress.

Despite all of these challenges in the short term, I am confident of America's long-term future. Our people and our democracy are resilient. When Americans face hardship, we find a way to endure and overcome those hardships. They always have. We always have and always will as a people. When our democracy gets off center, we the people find a way to bring it back in line.

In every generation, including that of our Founding Fathers, there have been predictors of doom. In every generation, they have been wrong. Americans have faced a revolutionary war, a civil war, two world wars, and a great depression. In each case, we the people found a way to meet those challenges and overcome them.

While I have met some famous people over the past 20 years of my public service, I have seen the soul and spirit of America through the lives of everyday citizens. It is they who give me faith in our future. It is the teacher who volunteers to help students after

school; the military widow who asks how she can help other grieving widows; the soldier who misses the births of his two children while he is serving his country overseas; the veteran who continues giving back to country long after his or her service is completed; and the hardworking small business people—farmers and workers—who work hard every day just to provide a better life and hope for their families.

I will never ever forget Erin Buenger—a beautiful, little, red-headed girl from Bryan, Texas—in my district—who came to Washington to lobby me for better health care research for rare children's diseases. For 7 years, Erin fought bravely against a rare cancer, neuroblastoma. Yet you would never have known she had had a bad day in her life because she was so full of life. Erin won my heart. She won my heart before she died at the age of 12, but her spirit will always live on to inspire me and those blessed to know her—to inspire us to do better, to be better. As long as we have Americans with the courage, values, and heart of Erin Buenger, who personified the American spirit, our Nation's future will be bright.

I would save the last words I will speak from this House Chamber for my family. Throughout my years in Congress, it was my wife, Lea Ann, and our two sons, J.T. and Garrison, who always kept me grounded. Every day of public service has truly been an honor, and I am grateful to the people of Central Texas for that privilege, but throughout the years, it was the love from my family and my love for my family that always meant the most to me. It was their love that reminded me what life and public service should be about.

I can never say enough about the personal sacrifices and responsibilities that Lea Ann took on to make my work possible. She has been my personal hero throughout these years, and I love her with all my heart for who she is and what she has done as a wife, as a mother, as a USO cochair, and as a Boy Scout leader.

To our sons J.T. and Garrison, it is my hope that somehow I have shown them that trying to make a positive difference for others is part of our mission here on Earth, and that that mission begins with loving our families.

Serving the American family has been the privilege of my life, but the joy of my life has always been my family.

We the people are fortunate to live in the greatest Nation in the world. God has truly blessed us, and now it is up to us to be good stewards of those blessings.

Thank you.

THE DREAM ACT AND ITS WAY FORWARD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Colo-

rado (Mr. POLIS) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the Majority Leader.

Mr. POLIS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about the young people whose futures are impacted by our Congress' failure to find a path forward with regard to the DREAM Act or to find some way of determining what they should do, what they should be—these Stateless individuals, these young people, these children of our Nation.

The DREAM Act is truly one of the most, if not the most, important pieces of legislation that we have discussed on the floor of the House. Certainly, for the individuals involved, it means everything—everything—to hundreds of thousands of de facto Americans. To them and to all of us, it is extremely important. We have a choice between forcing a brain drain from our country or retaining the best and brightest to contribute to our economy and make our economy stronger and our Nation more prosperous.

I will discuss the moral, economic, educational, and security reasons why we should pass the DREAM Act. As this Congress failed to act on the DREAM Act, it remains an issue that we simply must address with regard to these young people, and it cannot be ignored. I also want to pose two questions.

One is: What would we ask of these young people? What do we want them to do? The second: What action would they undertake that is best for us and our country? What should we be asking them to do for us?

First of all, what we are talking about here are young people who grew up in this country, who were brought here when they were 2 years old, when they were 6 years old by parents who were illegal immigrants but who made no choice to ever violate our laws and grew up in this country as any other American does. The young people we are talking about are the children that any parent would be proud of—our sons and daughters, our classmates in our schools, our brothers and sisters of native-born Americans, kids who stayed in school and graduated, who work hard, who stay out of trouble, who serve in our military. They are the children of our great Nation.

We in our country should be proud—not proud of the broken and dysfunctional immigration system and lack of enforcement that put them in this situation; not proud of their parents' violations of our immigration laws, no matter how out of touch with reality those laws may be; certainly not proud of the indignities, discrimination, and fear that these young Americans have faced at every turn—but proud, proud of how these young Americans have overcome adversity and have demonstrated American exceptionalism, their pluck, their ingenuity, their ambition, their drive, and their creativity in pursuit of, as our Declaration of Independence puts it, life, liberty and the pursuit of