

CREDIBILITY GAP

I'm hardly the only one who has noted the discrepancy between official statements and the truth on the ground.

A January 2011 report by the Afghan NGO Security Office noted that public statements made by U.S. and ISAF leaders at the end of 2010 were "sharply divergent from IMF, [international military forces, MGO-speak for ISAF] 'strategic communication' messages suggesting improvements. We encourage [nongovernment organization personnel] to recognize that no matter how authoritative the source of any such claim, messages of the nature are solely intended to influence American and European public opinion ahead of the withdrawal and are not intended to offer an accurate portrayal of the situation for those who live and work here."

The following month, Anthony Cordesman, on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote that ISAF and the U.S. leadership failed to report accurately on the reality of the situation in Afghanistan.

"Since June 2010, the unclassified reporting the U.S. does provide has steadily shrunk in content, effectively 'spinning' the road to victory by eliminating content that illustrates the full scale of the challenges ahead," Cordesman wrote. "They also, however, were driven by political decisions to ignore or understate Taliban and insurgent gains from 2002 to 2009, to ignore the problems caused by weak and corrupt Afghan governance, to understate the risks posed by sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to 'spin' the value of tactical ISAF victories while ignoring the steady growth of Taliban influence and control."

How many more men must die in support of a mission that is not succeeding and behind an array of more than seven years of optimistic statements by U.S. senior leaders in Afghanistan? No one expects our leaders to always have a successful plan. But we do expect—and the men who do the living, fighting and dying deserve—to have our leaders tell us the truth about what's going on.

I first encountered senior-level equivocation during a 1997 division-level "experiment" that turned out to be far more setpiece than experiment. Over dinner at Fort Hood, Texas, Training and Doctrine Command leaders told me that the Advanced Warfighter Experiment (AWE) had shown that a "digital division" with fewer troops and more gear could be far more effective than current divisions. The next day, our congressional staff delegation observed the demonstration firsthand, and it didn't take long to realize there was little substance to the claims. Virtually no legitimate experimentation was actually conducted. All parameters were carefully scripted. All events had a preordained sequence and outcome. The AWE was simply an expensive show, couched in the language of scientific experimentation and presented in glowing press releases and public statements, intended to persuade Congress to fund the Army's preference. Citing the AWE's "results," Army leaders proceeded to eliminate one maneuver company per combat battalion. But the loss of fighting systems was never offset by a commensurate rise in killing capability.

A decade later, in the summer of 2007, I was assigned to the Future Combat Systems (FCS) organization at Fort Bliss, Texas. It didn't take long to discover that the same thing the Army had done with a single division at Fort Hood in 1997 was now being done on a significantly larger scale with FCS. Year after year, the congressionally mandated reports from the Government Accountability Office revealed significant problems and warned that the system was in danger of

failing. Each year, the Army's senior leaders told members of Congress at hearings that GAO didn't really understand the full picture and that to the contrary, the program was on schedule, on budget and headed for success. Ultimately, of course, the program was canceled, with little but spinoffs to show for \$18 billion spent.

If Americans were able to compare the public statements many of our leaders have made with classified data, this credibility gap would be immediately observable. Naturally, I am not authorized to divulge classified material to the public. But I am legally able to share it with members of Congress. I have accordingly provided a much fuller accounting in a classified report to several members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans. Senators and House members.

A nonclassified version is available at www.afghanreport.com [Editor's note: At press time, Army public affairs had not yet ruled on whether Davis could post this longer version.]

TELL THE TRUTH

When it comes to deciding what matters are worth plunging our nation into war and which are not, our senior leaders owe it to the nation and to the uniformed members to be candid—graphically, if necessary—in telling them what's at stake and how expensive potential success is likely to be U.S. citizens and their elected representatives can decide if the risk to blood and treasure is worth it.

Likewise when having to decide whether to continue a war, alter its aims or to close off a campaign that cannot be won at an acceptable price, our senior leaders have an obligation to tell Congress and American people the unvarnished truth and let the people decide what course of action to choose. That is the very essence of civilian control of the military. The American people deserve better than what they've gotten from their senior uniformed leaders over the last number of years. Simply telling the truth would be a good start.

OBAMACARE VIOLATES FIRST AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HARRIS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, once again we are reminded why we need to repeal the President's Affordable Care Act, which most Americans know as ObamaCare. Mr. Speaker, a majority of Americans already understand how harmful ObamaCare will be to American health care, especially to the millions of seniors on Medicare who will have that program cut by \$500 billion if we don't repeal it.

But 2 weeks ago, the latest administration rule implementing ObamaCare was announced by the Secretary of Health, and that rule would impose the latest mandate, this time, a mandate on all religious institutions to provide government-mandated coverage for drugs and surgery that is contrary to the beliefs of those religions.

The greatest uproar was from the Catholic Church over the rule that would force Catholic institutions to pay the full cost of all government-mandated drugs and procedures, and that would include sterilization and abortion-causing drugs. That mandate would put those institutions in the position of either paying the full cost of

those drugs and procedures that violate their beliefs or paying a government fine. I repeat: It would end up being a government-imposed fine to practice your religious beliefs, with the administration using the broad mandates of ObamaCare to impose those fines.

But the religious intimidation by the administration didn't stop there. When the Archbishop for the Military Services, Timothy Broglio, wrote a letter about this new mandate to his diocese to be read at Sunday services, the U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains, a recent Obama appointee, ordered his chaplain corps not to read the letter at those Sunday services. Mr. Speaker, you know that those services are attended not only by the military, but by family and DOD employees. And this order was a clear violation of the First Amendment guarantees not only of the freedom of religion but the freedom of speech.

Let me read from the letter, and you will see why the administration was so concerned:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ: It is imperative that I call to your attention an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the church in the United States directly and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The Federal Government, which claims to be 'of, by, and for the people,' has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful. It is a blow to a freedom that you have fought to defend and for which you have seen your buddies fall in battle.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those immoral 'services' in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be forced to buy that coverage as part of their policies.

In so ruling, the administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation's first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled to choose between violating our consciences or dropping health coverage for our employees.

We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second-class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America's cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God-given rights.

Mr. Speaker, after protest, the Chief of Chaplains finally allowed most of the letter to be read, but ordered that the line "We cannot—we will not—comply with this law" still not be read.

Mr. Speaker, now you can see why The Wall Street Journal—not usually a paper that comments on religious matters—found this issue so compelling

that today's lead editorial deals with this under the headline, "ObamaCare's Great Awakening," with a highlight line, "HHS tells religious believers to go to hell. The public notices." Yes, Mr. Speaker, the public noticed.

Let me just read the opening of that editorial:

The political furor over President Obama's birth control mandate continues to grow, even among those for whom contraception poses no moral qualms, and one needn't be a theologian to understand why. The country is being exposed to the raw political control that is the core of the Obama health care plan, and Americans are seeing clearly for the first time how this will violate pluralism and liberty.

Mr. Speaker, in the last few days, a strategist in the President's campaign—not the Secretary herself or an administration official—has suggested that, well, maybe something can be done. Really, Mr. Speaker? Are we leaving dealing with First Amendment rights violations to campaign staff for resolution?

This latest controversy has given us yet another reason to repeal ObamaCare, a bill forced on America by the last Congress and this administration. Given the obvious willingness of regulators to force their value system on all Americans regardless of religious belief, the editorial comes to the right conclusion: "Religious liberty won't be protected . . . until ObamaCare is repealed." Mr. Speaker, the time for repeal is now.

PUTTING THE BRAKES ON RUNAWAY DEFENSE SPENDING

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke testified on Capitol Hill last week and warned us that deficit reduction "should be a top priority" and that current spending projections are unsustainable. In response, the gentleman from Wisconsin, who chairs the Budget Committee, said that we needed to get our fiscal house in order, otherwise, "it's going to get ugly pretty fast."

To him, I would say: It's already ugly. It's really ugly for 13 million Americans who woke up this morning without a job to go to. And it would get uglier still if we embraced his vision of a shredded safety net and a voucher program that ends Medicare as we know it.

Here is what I find particularly distressing and disturbing: for my colleagues in the majority, every other sentence out of their mouths is about reducing Federal spending, and yet the programs they want to cut are the very ones that are keeping working families afloat. They never seem to aim their ax at the part of the budget that has shot through the roof the last 10 years and now eats up more than half of discretionary spending. I'm talking, of course, about the Pentagon budget.

It doesn't make any sense that the military industrial complex has gotten a virtually blank check while important domestic programs—and also important civilian international programs that promote national security—look for change in the couch in order to survive.

If we're in belt-tightening mode, then we should all be in belt-tightening mode. But if there are Federal dollars available—and there certainly are—I want to know why we can't make strong investments in the food stamps program, Head Start, or Pell Grants. If there's enough money to give the Pentagon a staggering \$700 billion-plus a year, I want to know why we can't make relatively modest, but meaningful, investments in paid family leave or early childhood education.

The good news is that the President of the United States gets it. With the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he is taking a strong first step toward putting the brakes on runaway defense spending.

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But I think that we need to do more and we need to be much bolder. When we spend more on defense than the next 10 nations combined, clearly our priorities are out of whack.

The Cold War has been over for 20 years, and yet we still have tens of thousands of troops stationed in Europe. This makes no sense at all. Something else that doesn't make sense: our presence in Afghanistan. And it's not just the peace and justice folks who are calling for the end of this misguided adventure. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel L. Davis, Army "brass," is asking, "How many more men must die in support of a mission that is not succeeding?"

He goes on to say, "You can spin all kinds of stuff, but you can't spin the fact that more men are getting blown up every year."

Mr. Speaker, what we need is a fundamental overhaul in the way that we think about protecting America. We need to be smarter about national security.

SMART Security means replacing weapons systems with humanitarian aid and development. It means a civilian surge instead of a military surge. It means peaceful diplomacy instead of military devastation. It means lifting up and empowering innocent Afghan people instead of occupying their country and perpetuating a war that has killed them by the thousands.

This SMART Security approach is not only the better way to protect our interests and keep our country safe, it comes at a fraction of the cost of what we are spending.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our national conscience, also for our national treasury, it's time to do the smart thing and bring our troops home. Don't ask me; ask Colonel Daniel Davis.

GETTING AMERICA BACK TO WORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DOLD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOLD. Mr. Speaker, small businesses are reluctant to expand today. With so much economic uncertainty, our local job creators don't know if they can afford the risk of hiring a new worker.

As a small business owner myself, I know the pressures of meeting a budget and a payroll. I employ 100 people, and for me that's 100 families. I have to make sure that I can ensure that we can provide health care insurance and other benefits before it is time to hire new workers.

Mr. Speaker, there are 29 million small businesses in our Nation. Here, in this body, I believe our goal has to be to create an environment that enables those small businesses to have the confidence to be able to grow and thrive, to be able to add that one new worker. And think about where we would be at that point in time, Mr. Speaker; 29 million businesses across the Nation all hiring just one worker, we'd have a different problem on our hands.

The partisan rhetoric and the lack of progress in Washington is hindering businesses from hiring more people. But I do believe we can come together and tackle some of these problems. Washington has to stop viewing legislation through a political lens and start viewing it through the eyes of the American people.

One area we can agree on is the payroll tax extension. The House voted at the end of the year to extend it for an additional year. The President has asked that we extend it for a year. The holdup is yet again in the United States Senate. Senator HARRY REID would rather play political games with this important measure, and now some Members are asking for a 2-month extension.

Mr. Speaker, I say enough is enough. We need to extend this tax holiday for the entire year. Small businesses don't have the luxury of hoping that we'll get it right. So let's come together today and pass the yearlong extension in both the House and the Senate. Let's give hardworking American taxpayers the relief that they need.

Mr. Speaker, new regulations are also hindering small businesses from expanding. Hundreds of pages of new regulations in the President's health care law, hundreds of rules that have still yet to be written in Financial Services with regard to Dodd-Frank are hindering the financial services industry. Small businesses do not know what new rules are coming next; and, thus, they can't prepare for the future and job growth remains, at best, uncertain.

But we can and must find common ground on regulations. No one is arguing for the elimination of regulation, Mr. Speaker. What we need is smart regulations. It's vitally important we