honored every day, not merely once a year, and I believe that America should fully honor the debt we owe to our veterans.

Right now, more than 250,000 troops are stationed in Iraq, all of whom will come home as war veterans. America's military veterans are there for us, wherever and whenever duty calls. It is our turn to stand up for them.

Through the ''Salute to Veterans and Armed Forces Act,'' House Democrats are fighting to preserve and protect the health care and financial future of our nation's veterans.

As we speak, disabled veterans are prevented from collecting both their retirement pensions and disability compensation because of the unfair Disabled Veterans Tax.

Five hundred sixty thousand disabled military retirees see their retirement pension reduced one dollar for every dollar of disability pay.

They sacrificed their well-being for the Nation, and should receive their full disability pay. Every dollar.

In the 1st Congressional District which I am proud to represent, which encompasses rural eastern North Carolina, nearly 1,500 veterans lose benefits every year to the Disabled Veterans Tax, costing each veteran approximately $5,664 in lost benefits.

Mr. Speaker, the working families in my district are already hard hit by tough economic times and widespread plant closings. The veterans in eastern North Carolina barely get by as it is.

This unfair tax on their rightfully earned income, translates into a total loss in benefits for the 1st Congressional District of almost $8.5 million for an economically devastated area.

Mr. Speaker, my Democratic colleagues and I are fighting for an additional $1.8 billion in veterans' health benefit that have been recently cut from the budget.

It is nothing less than shameful that military veterans have to wait as long as six months for a doctor's appointment.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, if your child fell ill, and yet, you had to wait six months to get them help. This unacceptable scenario is a reality for 60,000 American Military Veterans every year in this country.

We are fighting to expand veterans' job training, higher education and housing programs. If we have money to send them to war we must also provide for their full benefits when they come home.

This is the call for true shared sacrifices. We were able to spend $1.3 trillion in tax cuts; we should be able to spend for our veterans.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEARCE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

END PARTIAL BIRTH ABORTION

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

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, 2 days ago the President of the United States signed into law a historic piece of legislation, a bill that would end partial birth abortion, a law that will now end this heinous and truly gruesome, barbaric act of killing innocent little boys and girls.

But as was all too expected, a lawsuit was immediately filed and a court immediately prevented this life-saving law from going into effect. Most appalling is the fact that the court did so not on any sound basis of law, but on what is becoming all too often the case with courts in this Nation, a decision by the court to simply impose its feelings on the issue over the findings of a legislative body, this United States Congress.

As has been reported in the press, the U.S. Department of Justice asked the court, as courts should do, to give deference to the finding of fact by Congress. Instead, the court replied to that request that it could find no record of any doctor who performs abortions in the last trimester to testify before Congress. The court stated: ''Isn't that important if Congress was really interested in knowing about this procedure?'' Indeed, if this court was truly being honest, it would realize that no abortionist would ever want to testify before Congress because in so doing, the awful truth about this heinous act would be revealed before the opponents of this act, before this House. It is telling that no abortionist of such late-term abortions would want to testify about such horrific acts that they do.

It is so patently clear that the court here was searching for a way to impose its personal view instead of abiding by the law of the land, a law which is supported by the vast majority of the people of this Nation, as well as most State governments. The court simply refused to abide by the findings of this Congress that a health exception was not necessary. The court stated: ''While it is also true that Congress found that a health exception is not needed, at the very least it is problematic whether I should defer to such a conclusion when the Supreme Court has found otherwise.'' Problematic, court?

If the court was indeed wanting to uphold the law of the Nation and not its personal views, it would have recognized that the Supreme Court's holdings were not its own, but were the opinions of a lower court that the Supreme Court simply did not have sufficient legal basis to overrule.

Congress, however, very clearly and upon substantial hearings and evidence set out its findings of fact of no need for a health exception. This court, however, as past Supreme Courts have stated, should have abided by the findings of facts by this Congress. This court has failed to uphold the findings of this Congress. This court has failed to abide by the precedent of the Supreme Court in granting due deference to such findings of fact. And most tragic of all, this court's actions may well result in more deaths to innocent little children.

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

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

LIGHT RAIL IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, many times I have come to the floor of the House to express what I believe should be the chief responsibility of the Federal Government, problem solvers, working with local communities to enhance the quality of life of all of our citizens throughout America.

So today I take the special privilege of saluting my local community in Houston, Texas. It has been a 30-year journey, 30 years of trials and tribulations, of misrepresentations of the facts, and yet we have overcome it.

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But I do not fault those who opposed rail in totality because I do believe in democracy, and a vigorous debate has occurred in Houston, Texas on the question of implementing a light rail system. Those that hear my voice might say that that is probably not one of the more serious issues that we have in our community and in our Nation, but all of the long work of my community leaders, the Metro board, the City of Houston, deserve the tribute because in Houston it is a serious matter.

I do want to thank the mayor of the City of Houston, Lee P. Brown, and I am delighted to have been one of the strongest stalwarts and supporters of the Metro system over the last 30 years. One would not like to count those long journeys that we have had to take and the stark and strong opposition that we have had. And so I pay tribute to the members of the Metro board, former Ambassador Arthur Louis Schechter, the chairman; Mr. Thomas E. Whitson, vice chairman; Mr. Jackie Freeman, secretary; Mr. James E. Cumming; Dr. Samuel J. Gilbert, Sr.; Dr. Carol Lewis; Mr. Art Morales; Ms. Janie Reyes; and Mr. Don Wang. I also pay tribute to Metro's political action committee, Citizens for Public Transportation, led by Mr. Ed Wolfe; Community Outreach and Governmental Affairs Division led by Mr. Frank Russ and Mr. Tom Jasien; and most importantly the people of the Houston communities, all of the Houston communities and Harris County in the Metro service area who will benefit from this tremendous victory, all of my constituents in the 18th Congressional District who came together to cast a total of almost 400,000 votes and the majority of those supported the implementation of a Metro system.

What does it mean? It means that we will have a 50 percent increase in Metro's existing bus service. We will have

new light rail, new commuter service and we will have no new taxes. We realize that in order to enhance the quality of life for the physically challenged and others who are disabled, for veterans, we will need a real light rail system in Houston.

Let me share with you that the distance between the earth and the sun is about 93 million miles. Houstonians drive about 156 million miles a day through a weave of roadway that will further ensure the congestion and the entanglement on our freeways and highways and byways. Furthermore, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality tells us that one-third of Houston's air pollution comes from our cars and trucks. Since light rail is powered by electricity, it produces no on-site emissions. Houston residents need and deserve nonpolluting transportation choices like light rail, and now the plans will come to fruition.

Over the years we will support a 72-mile system that will go into Sunnyside and Akers Home and into the Gulf Gate region, into East End, into areas near the small cities. And I want to thank my friends in Fort Bend and out in the Woodlands. We will be looking forward to a commuter rail that will take us to the airport, to the Fort Bend area, to Sugarland and certainly to the northwest area. We are looking for the support of our entire community, the county officials, city officials, and it is imperative that the next mayor of the City of Houston be a vigorous supporter of light rail. The citizens will tolerate nothing less, that that person be vigorous and that they will not be overcome by special interests that will tell them that we cannot move on the 39-mile system and then the 72-mile system. It is interesting to watch those who are physically challenged relish to have a system that is accessible to the disabled and then to our senior citizens who need to have, if you will, low-priced but good service, clean service, mobility systems that they can access. And our senior citizens who we are fighting for on this floor to give them a guaranteed Medicare prescription drug benefit need the complement of good rail systems and a good Social Security system. That is what we have planned for them in Houston with the vote of the Metro system.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD my op-ed in the Houston Chronicle on Derailing Metro Transit Plan Isn't an Alternative and here we support in totality the Metro plan that has passed and the 72 miles.

Hooray. Congratulations to our city for doing the smart thing and being smart on transit. You deserve congratulations today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay special tribute to a local victory—I pay tribute to the Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRO) of Harris County, Houston Texas for having successfully won the vote of approval for its light rail project in a referendum held on November 4.

Because of the undaunted effort of (1) the Houston METRO Board of Directors which consists of former Ambassador Arthur Louis Schechter—Chairman, Mr. Thomas E. Whitson—Vice Chairman, Mr. Jackie Freeman—Secretary, Mr. James E. Cumming, Dr. Samuel J. Gilbert, Sr., Dr. Carol Abel Lewis, Mr. Art Morales, Ms. Janie Palomo Reyes, and Mr. Don J. Wang; (2) METRO's Political Action Committee ''Citizens for Public Transportation'' led by its able Chairman Mr. Ed Wolfe; (3) METRO's Community Outreach and Governmental Affairs Division with Mr. Frank Russ and Mr. Tom Jasien; and (4) most importantly the people of the Houston communities who will benefit from this tremendous victory.

The victorious results of the November 4 referendum—of a total 366,226 votes cast from a pool of citizens of Harris County, Ft. Bend County, and Montgomery County, 189,443 (52%) voted for METRO Solutions and 176,783 voted against it—was the fruit of over two (2) years of hard work by the METRO Board, Staff, PAC, and the community all working together as a cohesive unit. Now, we may concentrate on the actual benefits that the METRO Solutions plan will achieve: 50% increase in METRO's existing bus service, including approximately 44 new local, signature express, and Park & Ride bus routes; Nine (9) new Transit Centers and nine (9) new Park & Ride lots, as well as expansion and upgrading existing facilities; Expansion of the METRORail line and commuter line components. The overall plan includes 72.8 miles of rail; Extension of the payments to local governments for street and other mobility improvements for five additional years (2010–2014); Initiating of the first 10 years of construction, which includes 22 miles of rail with no new taxes!

Road and freeway improvements, as well as the construction of an enhanced public transportation system, will now be put in place to alleviate problems such as congestion and pollution while generating significant tax dollars. Statistically, Houstonians travel more miles per day than there are miles between the Earth and the sun. The distance between the Earth and the sun is about 93 million miles. Houstonians drive about 156 million miles per day! Houston has one of the worst air quality problems in the nation. Furthermore, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality tells us that one-third of Houston's air pollution comes from our cars and trucks. Since light rail is powered by electricity, it produces no on-site emissions. Houston residents need and deserve non-polluting transportation choices like light rail and now the plans will come to fruition.

This victory demonstrates that despite the force of an extremely well-financed opposition driven by special interests and partisan influence, the great effort and the will of the people overcame in the end. I would actually like to thank my friend on the other side of the aisle, Mr. DELAY for his efforts to aid in giving METRO the funds it needed to conduct the studies that concluded that the METRO Solutions plan is smart.

Congratulations to METRO and congratulations to the local government.

[From the Houston Chronicle, Oct. 23, 2003]

DERAILING METRO TRANSIT PLAN ISN'T ALTERNATIVE

(By Sheila Jackson Lee)

Just over one century ago, in 1880, Houston, the powerhouse of Texas business, had a population of only approximately 16,000 people, according to a federal census. Since then, the metropolis has seen unprecedented growth to become one of America's most populous cities. That's why we need a public transportation system that is funded by the public and will be used by the public.

The greater Houston area is subdivided into six counties: Chambers, Fort Bend, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller, Harris County proudly hosts the city of Houston, and that is where the largest part of the population is concentrated. In 2000, approximately 3.5 million people lived in Harris County alone. Over the next 20 years, the population of the Houston region will continue to grow. In fact, the influx of more than 2 million additional people in Harris County and another million in the surrounding counties is expected. With respect to transportation, Houston and Harris County already experience serious problems. The imminent increase in population will only exacerbate the problems and will have a negative impact on the overall quality of life in the region. All forms of infrastructure improvements must provide the solution.

Road and freeway improvements, as well as the construction of an enhanced public transportation system, will alleviate the problems while generating significant tax dollars. Statistically, Houstonians travel more miles per day than there are miles between the Earth and the Sun. The distance between the Earth and the Sun is about 93 million miles. Houstonians drive about 156 million miles per day!

The Metropolitan Transit Authority has worked over the past two years to create a long-range plan for mass transit in the Houston area called Metro Solutions. Texas has a Transportation Code, and it is authorized to act in this field of local government through Metro. Given the need for the service to be provided by Metro's plan and the state's jurisdiction to implement a plant that has been accepted by the public, why does the federal government and a member of the House Appropriations Committee need to interfere with its progress?

This member has worked to hinder this highly beneficial transportation project for quite some time. In fact, his amendment to the Transportation, Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2004, also known as H.R. 2989 and incorporated as Section 163, aimed directly at this project with proposed restrictions that are both redundant and unnecessary. This member introduced Section 163 under the guise of ensuring that the citizens in the transit authority service area had an opportunity to voice their desires with respect to the light-rail proposal. He took these measures despite his knowledge that the Metro board has been diligently working with the community to establish development plans that do not violate Texas law and despite the fact that Chapter 451 of the Texas Transportation Code requires the referendum process that will take place on Nov. 4.

Furthermore, his actions likely precipitated the issuance of an opinion by the Federal Transit Administration's chief counsel as to the denial of funds for the Advanced Transit Plan largely due to the redundant prohibitions of Section 163. Although Metro has called for a referendum pursuant to Chapter 451 of the Texas Transportation Code, in addition to having held several public hearings on the matter, the FTA, by way of this opinion, had summarily deemed the process insufficient for purposes of the Section 163 prohibitions. Because neither H.R. 2989 nor Section 163 is law, the FTA opinion effectively disrupted and interfered with the local administration of a transportation project that has been fully accepted and supported by members of the community.

In addition to the fact that the basis for this opinion was premature, i.e., the fact that both Section 163 and H.R. 2989 are not law as yet, the Metro board held a meeting to change the language of its referendum ballot for Nov. 4 to further conform to these prohibitions that are not yet law. This ballot was then accepted by the Department of Transportation for compliance with federal regulations. Metro held 178 public and stakeholder meetings during its development of the Metro Solutions plan between December 2001 and July 2003.

The alternative plan backed by Metro Solutions opponents and formulated by the Houston-Galveston Area Council, the ''100 Percent Solution'' plan, is still in draft form and has not yet had specific public involvement for the additional 5,000 lane-miles on top of the already planned 5,600 lane-miles. In terms of economic benefits projected for Metro solutions, between $130 million and $200 million per year in regulatory costs will be saved to reduce pollution emissions.

The opponents of Metro solutions offer the 100 Percent plan as an alternative. However, it is not an alternative. First, unlike the Metro solutions plan, the 100 Percent plan is an unfinished study and not a plan at all. Secondly, Metro Solutions covers only a portion of the eight-county region, while the 100 Percent plan contemplates the incorporation of the Regional Transportation Plan, or RTP, which is a multimodal plan that covers the entire eight-county region. The RTP is not an alternative to Metro Solutions—it includes Metro Solutions. Also, unlike Metro Solutions, the 100 Percent plan is based on a wish list of regional road and transit projects that have no identified funding and would require significant amounts of right of way. The claim by Metro Solutions opponents that the 100 Percent solution plan can reduce congestion depends upon the sudden appearance of this wish list of projects that the federal government currently prohibits local officials from planning and programming, as they have no existing revenue streams to fund such projects.

In conclusion, there is no need to impede or to derail the Metro Solutions plan. Houston is the only city in the United States that was affected by funding restrictions of H.R. 2989. As a result, the city has been singled out and excluded from the 25 slices of a funding pie worth $1.2 billion federal dollars. Dallas is slated to receive $30 million under the act. The referendum vote on Nov. 4 will translate to more needed rail, more buses and more roads with no new taxes. Metro Solutions is a public transportation plan that will serve the public—therefore, the will of the community should supersede any federal special interests. I strongly urge a yes vote on the Metro referendum.

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON 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 California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California address the House. His remarks will appeared hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CHILD SAFETY

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

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to take a moment to thank the chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means, the gentleman from California (Mr. HERGER), for calling a hearing yesterday to examine the failure of our system to protect our children. It was a very, very difficult hearing for those of us who attended to listen to the traumatic and heartbreaking story of four young men in a family, the Jackson family of New Jersey.

As someone who has worked on child protection for my career in the Congress and in the State legislature and as cochairman of the Congressional Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus, I was shocked to hear and to see the photos of these four young men who were suffering at the hands of their adoptive parents. What struck me even more, or at least made me more outrageous, was the fact that the Division of Youth and Family Services from New Jersey had visited the home of this family over 38 times in the past several years.

What did they fail to observe in these visits? For one, they failed to observe a 19-year-old boy who weighed just 45 pounds and was a mere 4 feet tall; a 14-year-old boy who was 3 feet in height and, I believe, less than 40 pounds. Where were they protecting these children?

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, most Americans treat their pets better than New Jersey cared for their children. We heard arguments, which we always do when there is a child tragedy, that, A, we lack resources and funding, we have too many caseloads. Those excuses and finger-pointing and blame-gaming must stop, because they are outrageous accusations suggesting money was at the root of the children's problems. The family received over $30,000 annually in a subsidy to care for these children from the Federal and State government. $30,000. There is no excuse that money, or shortage of money, was the reason these children were starved. Thirty-eight visits by a caseworker to this house indicates obviously that they had a routine appearance in the household.

What did they fail to observe? One thing they failed to observe is that there were locks on the doors to the kitchen, not allowing the children to come into this home, into their own kitchen to eat. When you look at the photos, and you have probably seen these photos if you have picked up any paper in this country because they have been blasted across the headlines of every newspaper in America, including both TV and print journalists.

We have to in this country get a handle on this problem because this is sickening to its core that children that would be in the hands of people would be allowed to be treated so miserably. And regrettably at yesterday's hearing a person, a man of the cloth from the church where the Jackson family attends, actually got up and defended the parents and started to blame the children, suggesting they had eating disorders, that they were violent children. We are talking about 19, 17 and younger than that. I would have accepted some of that argument from this reverend had the family sought medical attention or had the family chosen to return the children to foster care because they were too difficult to care for. But no, they did not do any of that. What they did was cash checks from the welfare system and then fail to feed the children.

Testimony from children's services indicate all of these boys have now had remarkable weight gain in the last several weeks. So the argument put forward by the reverend that these children were eating three square meals a day and they suffered from eating disorders is absolutely false and spurious when you look at the results of the care and feeding under Division of Youth Services of that State.

At the end of the day, and fortunately for the gentleman from California's leadership in calling this hearing, we may get to the bottom of some of these problems, but we must act quickly. We are not talking about overdue library books, we are talking about human life. We are talking about children who are allowed to starve, we are talking about a system that is run amuck, and we are talking about only getting a response when some politician's job is on the line.

It is time to get serious. It is time to get to the job of protecting our children. I only hope that there is never again an example like the Jackson family suffering at the hands of a State agency.

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

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, on October 14, the Supreme