

deal with do not justify it. This project epitomizes the need for reform and modernization of the Corps and for Congress to exercise its oversight role.

In the year 2000, Corps economist Donald Sweeney filed for whistleblower protection after Corps leaders fired him when he claimed that Corps officials had ordered him to underestimate how much grain would be shipped to alternatives on the river. Two generals and a colonel ultimately lost their jobs after the Army Inspector General concluded that the Corps had indeed "cooked the books". Yet we have the project before us here today, an example still of the continuing problems of the Corps planning system where non-structural alternatives such as congestion fees, scheduling and switch boats are ignored. This project demonstrates the need for independent review of huge Corps projects. If outside independent review had been applied in the beginning, we would have saved millions of dollars and decades on studies and we would not be arguing about it today.

Make no mistake, every Member of Congress has a stake in this argument, because if we pass this project, it will take up 10 to 15 percent of the entire Corps construction project for years to come. It will delay or eliminate funding for many worthwhile projects around the country when we currently have a \$58 billion backlog of unfinished Corps projects and less than \$2 billion a year to construct them.

Each Member of Congress should ask, Is there a demand for this project? Is it worth the money? Are there cheaper alternatives?

That demand issue is particularly important because this is a project to reduce river congestion on the upper Mississippi and Illinois Rivers. But according to the Corps' own data, barge traffic has declined 23 percent from 1992 to 2003. Last year it dropped 19 percent. Lock delays have significantly declined as well in recent years.

The cost justification according to three National Academy of Sciences studies over the last 4 years and the Office of Management and Budget have questioned the methodology used in this project. In 2001, an NAS panel concluded the Corps had relied on overly optimistic barge forecasts for traffic. In December 2003, a second NAS panel reviewed the revised study and renewed their objections. Yet another NAS report came out in 2004 and concluded that, and I quote, the Corps has made substantial progress on the study in the past 3 years but the study contains serious flaws, serious enough to limit its credibility and value within the policymaking process.

There are, in fact, cheaper alternatives. The National Academy of Science concluded in its 2004 report that nonstructural approaches for managing waterway traffic appear not to have been considered at all. Why should we go forward with a project on this scale until we have examined all

the inexpensive, small scale congestion management measures that could be just as effective and make a much greater difference much quicker?

Last but not least, it should be pointed out that we have been pouring money into the area for years. Over the last 15 years, the Corps has rehabilitated many of the locks they now plan to replace. They have spent over \$900 million extending the productive lives of the existing locks and dams.

People ought to take a very close look at this before it comes to the floor. As I mentioned, every Member has a stake in it. When you compare this to our overall water construction projects, it is actually five or six times larger than the "Big Dig" road project in Boston compared to our highway system.

I plan to offer amendments with the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE) to make sure that if we go forward, that we do so with the proper assessment. We should not have political decisions take the place of economic analysis. We have to make sure we are funding legitimate projects, not politicizing the Corps.

NATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP MONTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. HARRIS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 2 minutes.

Ms. HARRIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of National Homeownership Month. I am a strong advocate of homeownership, not only because it is a key component of the American dream but also because it is vital to America's economic security. Statistics show that higher levels of homeownership translate into safer and stronger communities, communities in which people feel more rooted and engaged, in which they feel stronger stakes in their local schools, civic organizations, businesses as well as their churches and synagogues. Additionally, children who are raised in families that own their own homes have shown greater academic success as well as greater levels of self-esteem.

Two years ago, we passed the American Dream Downpayment Act which I introduced to help more American families enter the market for quality, affordable housing. This was an important step on the way toward making homeownership available to everyone, but it was only a first step. We still have much more work to do.

I am proud to have been a cosponsor of the resolution we passed yesterday in honor of National Homeownership Month and I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to bring the American dream of homeownership to more families across this country.

COMMEMORATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF IRAQ'S SOVEREIGNTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 1 minute.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Iraqi people on the anniversary of the establishment of Iraqi sovereignty. A year ago today, Iraq took the first crucial step toward establishing a democracy and rejoining the international community as a free nation. In January, as all of us know, the Iraqi people took another step forward. In defiance of an insurgency threatening to "make the streets run with blood," 8.5 million Iraqis cast their ballots.

Now, the political and administrative duties of government are run almost entirely by Iraqis. With the help of U.S. and coalition troops, Iraq's security forces now number approximately 170,000. The people of Iraq deal a crushing blow to the insurgency each and every day through the spirit and courage that they demonstrate. The American people stand firmly beside the people of Iraq in their efforts to establish full democratic rule for themselves.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 10 a.m. today.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 23 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 10 a.m.

□ 1000

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Reverend Dr. Ruffin Snow, Senior Pastor, Tri-City Baptist Church, Conover, North Carolina, offered the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, we bow humbly before You, for You have told us in Your word that You "resist the proud and give grace to the humble." Without You we can do nothing of good consequence. We embrace our place in history and our responsibility. With the psalmist we recognize that promotion comes from God: "He puts down one and sets up another."

We thank You, Lord, for this Nation. We beg forgiveness for our sins. May we become the Nation You intend.

We pray for all those in authority including the Members of this Congress, their staffs, and families in their pressurized lives. Please give our troops and their families strength, protection, and encouragement. Bring confusion to the forces of evil and terrorism.