up before the August break to deal with the Central America Free Trade Agreement, commonly called CAFTA. It deals with five Central American countries plus the Dominican Republic.

There has been a lot of opposition to CAFTA in Washington, DC. Much of it is by labor unions and by people who want to become more isolationist in their view of America. I think we need to look at some things, that not only are economic but also geopolitical, related to CAFTA.

On the economic side, America has been open to trade. We have a 2 percent tariff on anything that is imported into America. In the Central American areas, they have a tariff that would be reduced by CAFTA, but that tariff can be as high as 15 percent. Textron owns Cessna Aircraft in Wichita, Kansas. Cessna makes single-engine aircraft. Cessna told me they have lost $43 million worth of sales just last year because of the trade barriers in Central American countries. That $43 million would have been jets and single-engine airplanes that could have been built in Kansas, built in America, and exported to these Central American countries.

The reason they had to face a 15 percent tariff, that increased the price of those airplanes by 15 percent, they were competing with a Brazilian company which does not have that 15 percent tacked on because they have a free trade agreement with these Central American countries. So it is 15 percent less costly to buy from a South American company than buying from a North American company. That is unfair. The way to change that is to get CAFTA in place so that economically it makes sense.

According to the Chamber of Commerce, we could increase our sales next year by $3 billion by passing CAFTA. The Farm Bureau estimates we would increase agricultural sales by $1.5 billion by opening up trade through CAFTA. Economically it makes sense, but we also need to look at the geopolitical implication of CAFTA. We want to have strong economies in these free countries in Central America and in the Dominican Republic. We see now a lot of effort on the part of Mr. Chavez in Venezuela, who is a socialist who is working cooperatively with Fidel Castro from Cuba. With Mr. Chavez funding efforts and Mr. Castro putting people behind it, there are at least 35,000 Cubans in Central America trying to impact the effort to overcome CAFTA. Why would Mr. Chavez or Mr. Castro want to overcome this trade agreement with America? Because he wants to weaken the economies in these five Central American countries so he can take over and put a friendly socialist government in place. It is important to think about what kind of impact a trade agreement with America would have on these economies. Their economies will become weakened and vulnerable.

Right now, we see money being spent by a socialist in Venezuela through his oil money, and people coming from Cuba to activate that. They are putting up health care clinics in rural Central American countries, giving money to political candidates and funding efforts to try to defeat any relationship these countries would have with America.

We are either going to deal with this issue through trade or through troops. If we do it through trade, we are going to have a strong economy down there. The people in Central America will tend to stay in their home countries rather than try to migrate to America.

If not, we are going to have people in the Central American countries that are pro-Castro, pro-Chavez, and they will be running these economies. And they will be socialists, communists, and they will be unfriendly to America. It could create a further problem down in that area. So we can deal with this issue with trade or troops. My view is to do it with trade. The way to do that, we pass CAFTA on the floor of the House.

Who opposes in Central America besides the Castro troops? It is the labor unions. The labor unions in Central America are opposed to a free trade agreement. I do not know why they are joining with American labor unions. I guess they have the same isolationist view. Maybe there is some common thread between the socialists in the labor unions in Central America and the labor unions in America.

I think by having free trade agreements, we are going to see very strong economies in the Central American countries, and that will keep people involved in jobs that can make their dreams come true in their home country. And they will be less likely to migrate to America.

One of the things that we grow in Kansas is cotton. A lot of people do not know cotton is grown in Kansas. We have always been known as the Wheat State, but when former Congressman PAT ROBERTS, now Senator ROBERTS, when he was chairman of the Committee on Agriculture in the House, he was essential in passing the Freedom to Farm Act. The Freedom to Farm Act allowed Kansas farmers to not have to maintain a wheat base, and they could experiment with new products.

They decided they could make money by raising cotton. Kansas State University came up with a way to have a shorter growing period for cotton. Combining those two things, we started growing cotton in southern Kansas. We now have over 50,000 acres. They are building their fifth gin mill to separate the cotton fiber from the cotton seed. That cotton is then put into a bale that is shipped to the Carolinas where it is manufactured into cloth stock or thread, and then it is sent to Central America where it is made into clothing and imported back to America. And we buy shirts and clothing made out of Kansas cotton that was put together by people in Central America.

That relationship is jeopardized if we do not pass CAFTA. The reason is because we will see these economies falter. We will not be able to keep the same supply chains, and that work will then migrate to southeast Asia. We will not be using Kansas cotton stock, it will be something that is grown in a different part of the world.

So CAFTA is very important to even remote areas of our economy, such as the cotton growing area; but also for south central Kansas. It is also important for the aerospace industry.

So one of the things that we are dealing with here is trade fairness and opportunity. The way we can see that as a reality is through the free trade agreement we have with Central America.

Just to summarize, this morning, we launched the Economic Competitiveness Caucus. We did it with the support of Republican leadership, with the support of the administration, with the support of strong groups like the National Association of Manufacturers that is represented by former Governor John Engler. We had the Secretary of Commerce there. The Majority Leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) and the Majority Whip, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT) were there.

We kicked off this effort to deal with these eight issues: Health care security; bureaucratic red tape termination; lifelong learning; energy self-sufficiency and security; spurring innovation and investment; trade fairness; tax relief and simplification; and ending lawsuit abuse so we can create an environment that will be conducive to keeping and creating jobs in America.

When we look around the world, we see there are other economies that have done some things right. We want to make sure that we take those things and do them right here in America. These eight issues are going to be part of the agenda that we are going to deal with this year so the future economy will be strong.

□ 1645

30–SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. DRAKE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, once again, it is an honor to not only address the House but the American people also at the same time. Madam Speaker, we would like to thank the Democratic leader for allowing us to have the 30-something Working Group once again here before the House. The 30-something Working Group is comprised of Members that are in the 30-somethings and 20-somethings on the Democratic side here in the House, and we come together on a weekly basis to talk about issues here on the floor that are facing Americans

and also issues that will be facing Americans in the future.

We think our purpose here in this Congress is to, A, talk about those things that are working, put forth proposals that will make life easier for future generations and those generations that are rearing children now as we speak, such as myself, and that are trying to provide for their families, such as myself. But the average American, we give voice to them. We make sure that even if they have retired, issues like Social Security, issues like national security, issues like health care, the Federal debt, that are going to bring challenges to their homefront, that we give them voice here in this Congress.

Being in the minority, every week, Madam Speaker, I always share not only with the Members but everyone within the sound of my voice that in the minority, by the House rules, the majority side runs the agenda: what comes to the floor, what goes to committees, who comes before the committees, what will be the agenda in those committees. And I think it is important for people to understand that and also for Members to be reminded. So many of the issues that are facing our veterans, many of the issues that are facing everyday families as it relates to health care, education, the environment, general things, homeland security, what our men and women get in Iraq and what they do not get in Afghanistan, what have you, goes through the process here, and it is a majority/minority process. Some pieces of legislation we are able to work on in a bipartisan level.

The main issues that are facing Americans are, unfortunately, partisan in many ways, not by what I will call the everyday Republican and Democrat, but as it relates to individuals in leadership.

We have been talking for several weeks, Madam Speaker, on the issue of Social Security. We are going to talk about that some more tonight. I think it is also important to talk about issues that have taken place. We had our birthday recently just out here on the Washington Mall, July 4th, which was an outstanding celebration not only giving honor to those that have served in past conflicts but the fathers of our country for standing up on behalf of the very freedom that they provided us and we live under today. Also, we had an opportunity to look at the issues of the minimum wage increase proposal that came before this House that was presented by Democrats here, making sure that Americans will have more to take home in their pockets to provide for their families, but, unfortunately, that did not turn out the way we wanted it to. And also, Madam Speaker, we would be remiss if we did not address the issue of a possible breach of national security as it relates to the outing of a CIA agent by an adviser in the White House, and there is a lot of discussion not only going on throughout the country but also here in the Congress.

So kind of setting out some of the issues that we will talk about tonight, those are the main issues. But I want to just open up and talk a little bit about the Social Security issue.

As the Members know, for several weeks, there has been a lot of discussion. The President flew around, spent a lot of Federal jet fuel at taxpayers' expense trying to make us belief that there was a crisis, an outright crisis, that the roof was going to cave in on Social Security if we did not move towards privatization. And I think that, not only in recent weeks but in recent days, the American people have told the White House that they are not in love—neither do they want Social Security to be privatized. Claude Pepper, from the very State that I am from, fought on this floor and stood where I am standing now and in the well, fighting for Social Security not only for the retirees but for those Americans that receive disability benefits, for those young children that are receiving survivor benefits, and privatization was nowhere in the discussion.

So being from Florida and understanding the significance of Social Security, understanding that it is social and security at the same time for those Americans that have put in the hours of work and commitment of paying into a system that will be there for them when they need it, not to pay into the system, to invest and gamble with their retirement or with their security if they were to get hurt on the job.

So the proposals that are there now, the President came out with a privatization proposal, and then we had some Members on the majority side, the Republican side, that came out with a proposal that was also privatization. Let us just put it this way: He said, My plan is privatization, and without privatization, Social Security will not work. Their plan is saying, We are going to take from the trust fund and we are going to move some things around and make a right and a left. But at the end of the game, it is still privatization.

I think that, as we continue this debate here in Congress, I want to commend some of my friends on the Republican side that do not see it the way some of their colleagues see it as it relates to the privatization of Social Security. I commend them for standing up to those individuals, but I also especially commend my Democratic leadership from day one, not, well, we decided to get on the side of right after the American people said that they rejected the thought or they continue to reject the thought of privatization. We were there all along. We have some of our Republican colleagues that are saying, I am not with my leadership on this.

So for the leadership on the said committee that handles Social Security, I think it is important that we identify that. Why do we come to the floor? We come to the floor to shed light and let Members on the floor in this Congress know that we know exactly what some Members are up to as it relates to watching out more for privatization versus shoring up and making sure that Social Security is there for future generations. I think they're well intended, but I believe that they are married to privatization more than they are married to making sure that Social Security is there.

So the gentleman from the great State of Ohio (Mr. RYAN), my very good friend and our co-chair of the 30-something Working Group, it is good to be on the floor with him again.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN).

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, it is good to be back. And I cannot help but thank the gentleman from Florida for all his leadership on this issue and a variety of other issues not only in the State of Florida but around the country.

We had our friends here on the other side of the aisle, good people, good Members of Congress, but a little flawed in their data. They were talking about how the President's tax cuts accounted for a 22 percent drop in the budget deficit, 22 percent from the prediction that they had had. And what I would like to say is, all of a sudden, the tax cuts are working now. All of a sudden, they are working. What they forget to tell people is that the decrease in the deficit, and I have news reports here from five or six different news organizations, is the President said that this 22 percent drop vindicates his tax-cutting policies, and I just want to read several accounts here. This is from NBC News: ''An independent budget analyst said that the improvements are almost all the result of one-time events, including the expiration of a 1-year corporate tax holiday. There was also an increase in taxes paid on investment gains from last year's stock market run-up.''

The Wall Street Journal said: ''private- and public-sector analysts remained unimpressed given the fiscal pressures just ahead . . . Private-sector analysts reiterated that the promise was calculated from the administration's 2004 deficit projection, a number widely considered inflated.''

The Washington Times, not exactly a liberal newspaper, reports, the new forecast would ''leave a deficit that is still the third largest in history.''

Goldman Sachs ''in a research note on Wednesday, said it agreed with the administration forecast for this year but not for the longer term.'' The main reasons? ''The jump in tax revenues stemmed largely from one-time gains in the stock market and the elimination of a temporary tax break last year for business to invest in new equipment.''

So we had the stock market, the expiration of a bonus depreciation rule that reduced business tax collections

until the end of 2004, and a 1-year tax holiday for corporations. This is a one-time bonus for the government, and it was based on a number that was inflated from last year.

And the fact of the matter is this: There are people all over the country who do not benefit from that. They do not benefit from the corporate tax bonus that this Congress passed. And the money that is getting invested is not getting invested in Ohio. It is getting invested in Beijing and Shanghai and all over the world while people are struggling, going out to get a second job and a third job. This is not having the kind of impact we wanted to have here in the United States of America. And that is why the tax cut has not worked. The deficit is going to go back up next year. We do not even factor in the cost of the war, which is at $300 billion. And I am not arguing that a lot of our systems do not need reform because I believe that they do. But to say that we do not need to make investments in education, that we do not need to invest; like today in the Committee on Education and the Workforce, we wanted to increase funding for Pell grant. We could not get it done. We wanted to get it up to, I think, $8,200 by 2013. We could not get it passed through committee. And how are we going to compete with the Chinese? How are we going to compete with the Indians if we are not willing to make the proper investments in the education system in this country? Barriers are being put up, and kids will not go to college because they cannot afford it. Those that do go, the next thing, they owe more money when they get out, $15,000, $20,000 just for a bachelor's degree. So to say that we do not need to make the proper investments, that there is enough money in the system, and to say that those people who pay the lowest corporate tax rates in the history of our country somehow are making the kind of contribution and meeting their obligation to society, I think is wrong.

I did not mean to divert from the Social Security debate, but one of the issues that we always talk about during the 30-something hour, Madam Speaker, is that we are running these annual deficits, and the long-term debt, as shown here on this chart, is $7.8 trillion we owe. That is our national debt. Each person who is alive and breathing in the United States of America owes $26,436.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, how about the baby that was just born an hour ago? What do they owe?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, $26,436.78, and counting.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. How about the individual that is retired, veterans who have served our country?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, $26,436.78. So to every citizen that can hear me, this is what they owe, and to every citizen that cannot hear me, this is what they owe. And to run the country, the Republicans, a few months ago, had to lift the cap on the debt. They had to lift the debt ceiling because they are running high deficits. And to come down here in 2005 and tout supply-side economics, which the first President George Bush called ''voodoo economics,'' is hilarious, absolutely hilarious, when we have kids going to school all over the country that live in poverty; 50 to 60 percent of the kids in Youngstown City School District live in poverty; 85 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. And we are talking about how great the economy is going? I would like to live in some of these places.

And I think it is offensive, quite frankly, in many ways to somehow suggest that, by a slight decrease in the budget deficits because a loophole was closed and the stock market had a halfway decent run for a few months, that that somehow suggests that everyone is doing well is just out of touch really, out of touch with reality.

□ 1700

This is the reality: $7.8 trillion this country owes. I love how the President says, well, if Congress would just rein in spending. The Congress is Republican. A Republican House, Republican Senate, Republican President; and they are blaming each other about who has got to rein in spending; $26,000 you owe to the Federal Government. And they play this game, well, the President says Congress has got to restrain spending; the Congress says, well, the President has got to do his thing. They are all Republicans. This whole Chamber is controlled by the Republican Party. The Senate is controlled by the Republican Party. The White House is occupied by a Republican. And one of the issues we talk about all the time here is at the same time they are passing all of these corporate tax breaks and they tell everybody how great everything is going, veterans are underfunded by almost $3 billion. We have enough money to give tax cuts, but we do not have enough money to fund our veterans.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, the real issue here is the fact that even when the veterans receive more money, does my colleague know why they receive more money?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Why?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Not because the leadership on the opposite side thought it was the right thing to do. It is because we came to the floor and members of the committee ran amendments, and newspaper articles were printed, the fact that we have veterans clinics that are only open once or twice a month to assist veterans. That is the reason why.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Wait a minute. You are contradicting a statement here. The majority leader said, veterans need to know that no veteran will be without their health care in 2005 and no veteran will be without their health care in 2006. Is the gentleman saying that that is not the case?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. What I am saying is that the reality of the situation is the fact that veterans are waiting a long time. Some veterans are not receiving the care that they deserve. Veterans that are returning back from theater, and the gentleman is on the Committee on Armed Services and so am I, they cannot even get an appointment at the VA. These are true statements.

Just before the July 4 break, 2 weeks ago, we reported that one of the highest priorities of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs was to make sure that the Veterans Affairs Secretary's picture was posted at every VA hospital and clinic throughout the country. That was the topic of a conference call. Thank God some of the people that were the administrators of the Veterans Affairs were appalled by it and said, our real issue is trying to pay for meds and to make sure that we are able to provide for the veterans who are walking through our doors, that we have what they need to be able to make themselves whole and to be able to make themselves healthy. We are selling furniture; we are thinking about things in our budget that we can move to provide some level of care to these veterans.

Now, I say to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), I cannot wait to really dive into the issue of the whole veterans issue, because I can tell my colleague right now, I do not care what one's party affiliation is. If there is an American out there that is not registered and there are Americans out there who are not registered to vote, if you participate in the democratic process and elections, good. If you do not, this issue is still your issue. If you believe that you do not want anything to do with government, or you think there is too much government in your life or too less government, not enough government in your life, this is your issue.

The bottom line is, we have individuals that have stood in harm's way recently, not just several, 4 or 5 years ago, 300 yards from the enemy that was trained to kill them, who are not even able to receive primary care from the VA hospital. Not because the VA hospital employees and administrators are not willing to provide that care; it is the fact that here in this Congress decisions were made on the majority side not to provide the funding that is needed to make sure that veterans are able to receive what we told them we were going to give them.

Now, I do not care what anyone says about the whole issue of Democrat versus Republican. We are under one flag, okay? And the bottom line is, we talked about the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and what happened to him, the former chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, what happened to him. He was removed.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, he was not only removed from the chairmanship, he was removed from the Committee on Veterans Affairs altogether.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. For doing what? For doing the right thing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Trying to stand up.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. All the veterans organizations stand firmly with him, but guess what? They stand firmly with him off the committee right now, because that is where he is.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is right. I am glad he corrected me. Not only was he removed as chairman, his stationery does not even have the name of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs on it any more because they moved him off the committee.

So I am saying that I do not, and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) does not, and the 30-something Working Group does not apologize for bringing light to the issue of the fact that we are going to talk about veterans and talk about mom and apple pie and drape ourselves in the flag and get all choked up down here and raise our voice talking about how we love the veterans. Well, the real deal comes down to who is running the House, what the veterans are getting and what they are not getting. And I will tell my colleagues right now, they are not getting that.

Now, I am going to yield back to the gentleman, but I have a few points that we must make on Social Security before we leave that, because the veterans issue, we can go on for 12 hours on that. We also have to talk about Mr. Rove and what he is sharing with members of the media, putting CIA agents in jeopardy. But that is a whole other issue. It is a serious issue that we have to deal with, especially in the middle of this effort against terrorism, global terrorism.

Now, let me just say, I am just going to take this moment since we are pausing here for a minute, so we do not have to come back to it, the issue on Social Security.

Now, there has been some news report, the gentleman mentioned the Washington Times, which I think that they are not necessarily, like the gentleman said, a liberal newspaper, as a matter of fact, the most conservative one, one of the most conservative newspapers here in Washington, D.C., and they are talking about what is going on as it relates to the leadership between the White House, the House, and the other body across the hall about the whole debate of Social Security. I think it is important that they point out here in this article that was published on July 10 by Ms. Fagan, Amy, the President continues to campaign for comprehensive reform of a system, but Democrats oppose what they call ''privatization,'' and what is privatization, I must add parenthetically. Congressional Republican leaders realize the public expects action after hearing about the issue for months, that from one of my colleagues from Florida that will go unnamed at this time; but if my colleagues want to get the article, they can. ''We've told everyone the House is on fire. It is time to offer them a fire hose or a bucket, or maybe a glass of water, depending on what the Senate can pass.'' Fighting amongst themselves on privatization.

Another headline, Congressional Daily. This is the publication that comes out here under the Capitol dome for not only staffers, but those individuals who are working on issues within the Federal Government, Federal Government issues, especially legislative, let you know what is going on. ''White House Still Pressing For Robust Private Accounts.''

Now, I am going to tell my colleagues that it is important, and that is also an article from 7/6/05 if anyone wants to look it up, any of the Members want to take a look at it. It is important that we read not only these articles, but we take part in what goes into these articles.

I will tell my colleague one thing. This whole issue of saying we are going to continue to say privatization until we have privatization will not work. The article goes on to say, we believe the majority of Republicans are for privatization, private accounts. I do not believe that is true at this moment.

I will tell my colleague another reason why it is something that I think that Republicans will make a career decision. I think the people of America, once they learn more about privatization of Social Security, will know that, A, they will lose benefits; B, it will increase the deficit; C, it will not bring a better situation to their overall need of Social Security in the long run.

So once that happens, I say to the gentleman, I think it is important that people understand, even some of our Republican friends understand that if they want to make a career decision just to get along with some members of the leadership on their side, they may very well be handing their seat over to someone else, either in their own party or maybe a Democrat replacing them. Because Americans overall, they watch out for family and making sure that they are able to provide for future generations and that they are secure.

So one other little piece here as it relates to another article I think is important. It came out of an Ohio paper, about a truck carrying Social Security debate to the steps of Congress. They sent a flatbed with a million signatures saying, no privatization of Social Security. Make sure Social Security is in surplus; yes, do that, but no privatization of Social Security. People are seeing this, Democrats and Republicans alike. So these are just a few articles that I was able to pull up. I wanted to take some of the articles that were considered ''mainstream media'' and also ''conservative media'' to show that there is a nexus there of shedding light on the issue that this issue of privatization is not a great idea.

What we stand for on this side of the aisle is making sure that, A, we keep the integrity of Social Security and we do not drive the deficit all the way into the ground in trying to go to private accounts. That is what we are asking for. We are asking for also, Madam Speaker, a bipartisan debate, not only debate, but action of Democrats and Republicans working together, like we did when Tip O'Neill was sitting in that seat, Speaker Tip O'Neill, and Ronald Reagan was in the White House. I do not think that is too much to ask for in this debate.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. People want us to solve problems. They do not want us to sit here and be partisan. The fact of the matter is this. These are facts. The Democrats are not in power. It hurts me to say it. I do not like saying it, but when you are analyzing the direction of the country and both Chambers and the executive branch are all run by one party, and they come out with privatization schemes, tax cuts, primarily for people who make over $400,000 a year, corporate tax rates are the lowest they have been in the history of the country, all of these things, and then we are here trying to say, well, wait a minute. You are not funding veterans. Wait a minute. The American people do not want to privatize Social Security.

In fact, we have the poll here of the rural voters: Are President Bush's proposed changes to Social Security mainly consistent with the values of the people in your community or out of step? Mr. Speaker, 61 percent of rural voters say that the privatization scheme is out of step with their values, because we have guaranteed benefits. We have a system that works, has worked, will continue to work with minor adjustments, not a privatization scheme. That is not the right way to go.

If you look at the decisions that have been made over the past few years, they have not been good for the country: losing hundreds of thousands of jobs in Ohio alone, millions of jobs throughout the country, and the jobs replacing the jobs that are leaving are $10,000 less, $11,000 less a year, without health care benefits. Wal-Mart is basically getting corporate welfare because so many of their employees are on Medicaid. So they think, why should we give our people health care, they could go on Medicaid. Who pays for Medicaid? We pay for Medicaid. The country. The public pays for Medicaid. Why is the public subsidizing the wealthiest company in the country? It just does not make any sense.

And the decisions that are being made, the lack of attention to the issue of China and what is going on with the manipulation of their currency and the lack of trying to implement democratic reforms in China, all of these things add up to say, we are going in the wrong direction.

Now, I would like to bring up one point, I say to the gentleman from Florida, if I can, because we started talking a little bit about the veterans. I just want to kind of lay out, and the gentleman knows I like my charts.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. You love your charts.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I love my charts, because I think they lay it out for us.

Now, I want to just talk about for a couple of minutes exactly what the scenario was. We have been talking about, and I was on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs last Congress, how underfunded the VA was and is.

□ 1715

On the VA committee, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) was always down here talking about these issues, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), we had a great committee.

The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) has done a great job as the ranking member, talking about how the veterans are not getting the proper funding for health care. They are raising user fees. They are raising their copay. It went from $2 to $7 to $15. More veterans are moving into the VA system, especially in places like northeast Ohio where people are losing their health care benefits, so veterans go into the VA system.

So we were complaining about this and arguing that we need more funding. So was the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the chairman of the committee. He tried and tried and tried to get more founding in there. Bang, leadership knocked him out, stripped him of his chairmanship and of his committee assignment on Veterans.

So, on June 23, the Bush Administration acknowledged a 2005 shortfall for the VA of a billion dollars. Now, they knew in April, but they announced it in June. So what did the Democrats do? Why are we different? We are different because 1 day later, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) offered an amendment to eliminate the billion dollar shortfall in the VA health care for 2005 and put another billion dollars in through the Labor, Health and Human Services Bill and in the Education Appropriations Bill.

The Republican majority refused to allow that amendment. Let me repeat that. The Republican majority refused to allow us to offer an amendment that would put $1 billion more back into the veterans system. On June 28, the President and the Bush administration acknowledged, in fiscal year 2006, the shortfall would be $2.7 billion.

The Secretary also acknowledged that there will be a shortfall of $1.5 billion in 2006, which would reach $2.7 in the fiscal year of 2006, way too many details.

The bottom line is, there is going to be a shortage of money in the out years as well. So on that same day, the Democrats tried again, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), tried again to add a billion dollars in. The Republicans refused to allow us to do it.

So there, on a couple of different occasions, we had tried to fix the billion dollar shortfall in veterans health care, and we were not allowed to bring it up for a vote here in the House of Representatives.

It is not brain surgery. And the way this body works, you do not have to be a Philadelphia lawyer to figure it out. But that is how things transpired. The Democrats wanted to offer a billion dollars to close the gap in veterans spending, and we were not allowed to do it.

So my point is that if we were in charge, these are the things that we would be doing. These are the kinds of initiatives that we would try to implement in the country. And, you know, we come here, and we come to the floor, and we try to do as much as we can to try to talk about veterans and a lot of other issues. But quite frankly, we continue to run into stone walls.

As I said, the Majority Leader said there would not be a shortfall. That is just simply not what the numbers tell us. So I appreciate it. This is great. But I think this veterans component fits into the kinds of decisions that are being made, the kind of leadership that we are getting here out of this body, out of this chamber.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It is important. Our job is to be able to speak the truth, share, not only with the Members, but with the leadership what is happening, what is not happening. But I just want to back up here. You mentioned a June 24th date that the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) offered the amendment.

Because I like third party validators to make sure that folks do not think that we are coming to the floor, we are having a little pregame, we talk about, well, you say it like this, I say it like that, and who cares if we are telling the truth or not.

House Resolution 3010, the vote was number 320, on June 24, 2005, failed on a partisan vote 185 to 216. Republicans voted against that opportunity to add in a billion dollars to the Veterans Affairs legislation to shore up the shortfall.

On June 28, a couple of days later, Republicans rejected a Democratic attempt to make up the shortfall in the House. Once again, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) leading Democrats down the area of making sure in the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill to be able to provide for our veterans throughout this country. H.R. 3057, vote number 325, June 28, 2005, failed 217 to 189; once again, the majority stopping the Democrats from assisting our veterans in the way that we want to assist them.

I would even go further on to say, on June 29th, a day later, where the Senate approved, and this is important, because you talked about this, but I just want to go further into it; the Senate understood what Democrats were trying to do here, or the other body understood what Democrats tried to do here on the floor. And there was a Member that said we need to be able, when we get into conference, match up on the $1.5 billion effort to make sure that we give Veteran Affairs some of what they need, not all, a $1.5 billion effort.

We then came to the floor, Democrats, once again. The other body passed it 96 to zero, 96 to zero Senate vote on June 29th of this year. On June 30th, we had a vote here on the floor right before the break, to go on the break for Independence Day Break. Republicans blocked procedurally that effort from happening, and did not want to put in the amount of money that the Democrats were looking to put in.

And I think that it is important that we understand that they wanted to add $300 million, saying, when we get to conference, we will kind of figure it out, when we could have matched up with the Senate, or with the other body I must add, in making sure that there would be no question, and that veterans will not be in a holding pattern, and Veterans Affairs administrators will not say, maybe if, I do not know, if we get the 1.5 this is what we will be able to do to provide care for our men and women that are coming out of the theatre, and those men and woman that have served in World War II and other conflicts, Korea, Vietnam, what have you, first Gulf and so on.

Making sure that they receive the benefits, Grenada, making sure that they receive what they deserve. Bosnia, making sure that they receive what they deserve. So like you said, what is the difference?

Well, the difference is that we are here fighting on behalf of not only veterans, this is not the only issue, we are fighting on making sure that Social Security is there for every American for the future and that they have as many benefits as they need to be able to survive.

We are also here to make sure that working Americans can make a livable wage and also to promote not only health care, but education. So when folks start talking about what is the difference, there is a big difference. And it is right here in the record.

And so if we have to take the journal and pull it out and start talking about where there has been Democratic leadership and where there has been Republicans standing in the schoolhouse door, then we will do that. And, hopefully, one of two things will happen: Either the American people will say enough is enough, just because someone says I need to vote a certain way, and I am going to vote that way because I am who I am and my father and mother and what have you have been a Republican; it is not about Republican. It is not about Democratic. It is not about independent. It is about leadership. It is about making sure that we do what we are supposed to when we are supposed to on behalf of the country.

What I want to do, I know that you have your chart there, but I want to talk a little bit about homeland security when we come to the floor next week. Because I am very, very concerned about some of the issues that I am hearing, especially after the London transit bombing attacks. We are fine. We have moved mass transit security to a higher level. We are in good shape.

I think it is important that we share with the American people, and also with the Members of the House that may not be aware, that we are not fine, and that there are things that we should be doing on behalf of every American to make sure that they are secure.

Because if we are walking around saying we are fine, that means that we really have no work to do, and we have a lot of work to do. So I am glad that you took the record out, and you have your chart and I have my piece of paper, about what is actually happening as it relates to Veterans Affairs, what has happened, what is happening to veterans. And we are here, even though we are in the minority, doing what we can to make sure that they have a voice on this floor, amongst many other Members that are also doing good work and making sure that they have voice in this Congress and the battle continues, and we want them to be with us in that battle.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. There is no doubt about it. You have been down to Guantanamo. I was down to Guantanamo last week. You know, we have soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are the people who are going to come back and use the VA system.

And just to wrap up the VA portion of our program, some people may be sitting at home and may be saying, well, maybe we just do not have enough money, maybe we just do not have the resources to provide for the veterans. And I want to show this graph, which the last graph was just too jammed up; there were a lot of words on there.

But I think this is just where we are at. Permanent tax cuts way on the left. What is the cost in trillions of dollars over the next 10 years? We are going to spend $1.8 trillion over the next 10 years to make the tax cuts permanent.

We are going to spend $800 billion to make the tax cuts permanent for the top 1 percent; $800 billion for people who make $400,000; $500,000; $600,000; $700,000; $800,000; $900,000 a year, over a million dollars a year, not begrudging people who make a lot of money, God bless you, but we are going to spend $800 billion giving them their tax break, and we are only going to spend $300 billion on veterans.

And all we are asking for here is a billion dollars for the next year, or $2.7 billion for 2006, and $3 billion or $4 billion maybe for 2007. We are giving $800 billion away to the top 1 percent of the people who live in the country. We cannot come up with $3 billion for our veterans? Almost 2,000 already over in Iraq and Afghanistan who have been killed.

I mean, this is just a priority. It should be a priority for the country. So it is not that we do not have the money, it is an issue of choice. It is an issue of priority. And right now, it is obvious that we are not making the veterans a priority.

You know, quite frankly, I know the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) has and I have, many Members in this chamber have been to the funerals of our soldiers who have been killed. And I think the least we can do is make sure those who get injured or those who serve this country can come back and know that their veterans health care is going to be there for them.

So the money is there; it is just not a priority. Again, the Democrats tried on several different occasions to put amendments on to spending bills. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) has taken the lead on this. The gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) has taken the lead on this, to try to put that billion dollars in there to make sure that everybody is covered.

And it was clearly rejected. So it is an issue of priority. The money is there. We have chosen not to do it.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I am glad that you broke it down even further as it relates to the whole Veterans Affairs issue and where our priorities are and where they are not right now. I think it is also important for us to shed light on this question of national security.

□ 1730

As you know, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), ranking member of the Committee on Government Reform, put forth a letter today asking Mr. Rove and the White House to send the Presidential advisor Karl Rove to the Hill to explain under oath what he said and what he did not say as it relates to this issue of outing a CIA agent.

I would go further to say, this is a very serious issue. When this was first broken, when this story first broke that a CIA agent was out, the White House denied any involvement in that practice. And when the question was brought up by Mr. Rove, we were told by a White House spokesman, the press was and the American people, that he would be shocked if he had anything to do with this.

Later, after the special prosecutor which had to be appointed, and the President did appoint a special prosecutor or the call for a special prosecutor or the administration did, we find out that his attorney admits that he did have a conversation with a reporter about the fact that the ambassador's wife was a secret agent, or CIA agent.

Now, the gentleman and I both, and Members of Congress and some members of the staff and definitely of our intelligence agencies, receive a level of security clearance of top secret. So did Mr. Rove. By virtue of the fact that he works in the White House, he advised the President of the free world on decisions that he should make and that he should not make. He has been in very high secret, top secret conversations. The White House receives more intelligence than the average Member of Congress, be it House or Senate and their staff. And Mr. Rove is a part of that very small group. To have any discussion to head off bad press of a reporter or a weekly magazine does not reach the bar of breaking national security.

Now, I think it is important that you also know and we share with the Members who may not know that in this particular case this is connected with the whole issue of going into Iraq. Now, I will tell you Iraq is Iraq and it has happened. We are dealing with it. We are supporting our men and women there, making sure that they have the supplies, making sure that they have the equipment that they need to be able to fight daily against insurgents and to try to help the Iraqi people make themselves whole or stand up or stand firmly on their own two feet governmental-wise.

But I will tell you this, that the Republican Congress has pulled individuals to the Hill to testify for far less than outing a secret agent of the CIA, far less. And I will not demoralize the time here on the House floor for how much less than they have pulled people for lesser issues, for statements, for what we may believe has something to do not with national security but with their personal affairs that they have pulled issues to this floor for far less.

This is very serious. And I do not agree with the White House on, well, you know, we do not believe we had anything to say. Now the tune is changing, and they are now saying to make sure that there is no problem and to make sure that we can assure the American people that those individuals that have received top secret clearance in the White House, that the integrity of every employee that has received that clearance, we are willing to hold ourselves to the highest standards, and they are not doing that right now.

Now, this is not just political spin. This is outing of a secret agent of the CIA. And so to say that, how do we know that he knew that she was a secret agent? Well, I am sorry. Any agent that works for the Central Intelligence Agency should not be identified as far as I am concerned unless they work in the public information or they are on the recruitment trail going to universities and out to military facilities to recruit CIA agents. We should not even be talking about it.

This is the Central Intelligence Agency, not Boy Scouts of America, not we want everybody to know who we are. These are the individuals that go out and head off terrorism. These are the individuals that go out and give us the intelligence so that we can stop a 9/11 from happening. And so anyone, including Mr. Rove, that thinks that they

have the prerogative to share with the reporter about someone else's wife to try to head off a story, and especially if they work with the CIA and they are a secret agent, I am sorry, but I have to be proven wrong because I happen to think the latter here.

I think the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform should have Mr. Rove come to the Hill and share with the committee under oath what he said and what he did, not say because I believe national security is at stake here. And once again, this has nothing to do with who is a Democrat and who is a Republican. It has everything to do as it relates to the integrity of national security. Period. Dot. There is nothing more than you can say about it.

So for the White House to drag their feet on this and for the leadership over here not to demand it, the majority side not to demand it, I think we are derelict of duty. I am sorry. But I will tell you this: I think by the fact that the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) has asked for this, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), the ranking member of the Committee on Government Reform, asked for such a hearing, I think there is no question to the Members of this House if the tables were turned and we were in the majority, there would be a hearing right here right now. Mr. Rove and company would be coming to the Hill to share with Members under oath about what he said and what he did not say. Period. Dot.

That has nothing to do with politics. It has everything to do with national security. So when I read accounts in the paper about, well, that is just the Democrats taking a shot at the GOP, I am sorry. That does not rise to the level of a response for what has happened. So I think that the American people definitely should stand up and let their Congressman or Congresswoman know that they want to get to the bottom of this. This is not about they are donkeys and we are elephants. It has nothing to do with party pride. It has everything to do with national security.

I commend our leadership for standing up and saying that we want to know more. We need to know more. The American people need to know more, and we also need to know why, even today I am sure Mr. Rove is still sitting in national security briefings, still getting top secret information and has admitted saying that, yes, this man's wife is a CIA agent.

Just today I was in a top secret briefing. Do you think that is something I want to share with anyone? Of course not, because it could have national security implications. And even if I do not believe that it has national security implications to it, it is not my obligation or my right to share it with anyone. Period. Dot. That is just the way it is. It may very well jeopardize the life of someone or lives of individuals that are in harm's way because he wanted to head off a bad story. It is just that simple.

I am sorry for getting a little emotional about it. But when you sit for 3-plus years and some Members have sat for 30 years, double-digit years, and have received top secret information and have said nothing to individuals who do not have the same level of clearance behind closed doors of our national secrets, for someone to feel that they can go, and I must add unelected, to share with a reporter, trying to head off a story, they print stories every day, some good or bad. They call it democracy, okay, it happens. You do not have the right to be able to do that.

So I say not only for Mr. Rove but also for the White House, somebody better go see the Wizard and get some courage and say we are going to come to the Hill; even if we are not asked, we will come to the Hill to clean up this situation. Because if it is what I think it is, I guarantee you this, the American people are going to demand leadership on this, be it in the other body or in this House; but they are going to demand leadership, and they are not going to allow individuals just because they feel like they want to head off a story and they are going to share with a reporter anytime they feel like it.

If we do not check Mr. Rove right now and people that are like him leaking national secrets and outing CIA agents, who is next? Who is next? It is like my kids. If I allow my kids to come up and kick me in the shin and do nothing about it, I might as well get a shin guard because they will kick me every night. So it is important that we understand we do not allow those that are walking around with badges, that we allow them to go into top secret discussions to share with the media when they feel like it

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, I think it is important, the gentleman makes a tremendous point. We have to ask ourselves, not only in this body but around the country, why? Why would Karl Rove do that? Why would he out a CIA agent? We know why. Because her husband was the ambassador that went to Niger that basically blew up the whole idea that the Iraqis had a nuclear weapons program. He eliminated that from the argument of why we should go to war with Iraq.

So he had information that was going to blow it out of the war. They stuck it back into the State of the Union address that the President gave from right up here, and so the response was to try to destroy these people. Is that what we want? Is that how this operation is supposed to run, who can destroy who? And now this woman cannot work in the same capacity that she used to work in.

But the reason goes back to the war and the build-up and the drum beats that were going for us to go to war in Iraq. And here we were trying to say, wait a minute, all of the sudden Iraq is North Korea. All of the sudden Iraq is Iran. All of the sudden Iraq has all of these nuclear capabilities. No, they did not. And the administration manipulated the data and then tried to destroy any person or couple that tried to prove otherwise. That is the bottom line and that is not a Democrat or Republican issue. That is the fact of the matter.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, we have a couple of more minutes left. I want to make sure we do what we always do and give the information out, not only to the Members but to make sure everyone understands how to get in contact with us. What we are talking to as it relates to the letter and the Committee on Government Reform, people can go to our Web site, www.housedemocrats.gov/pinkslip. That is housedemocrats.gov/pinkslip.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Send us an e-mail if you would like to—www.30something dems@mail.house.gov. That is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov or you can get us at democraticleader@mail.house.dot/ 30Something.

Send us your e-mails. Let us know what you think. One of the things you need to send us is what you think the priorities in your family are or your friends or the people that you hang out with. What are your priorities? What should we be doing here? Let us know. We would love to hear it.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address the House. I would like to thank the Democratic leader once again for the time.

A FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that having made the technical corrections to the engrossment of the Senate amendment to H.R. 2985 the Senate returns to the House the papers to accompany (H.R. 2985) ''An Act making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes.''.

Resolved, That the Senate insist upon its amendments and requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints Mr. ALLARD, Mr. DEWINE, Mr. COCHRAN, Mr. STEVENS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. JOHNSON, and Mr. BYRD, to be the conferees on the part of the Senate.

PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. DRAKE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, Cary Ann Medlin, 8, Tennessee; Nicole Parker, 8, California; Chris Byers, 8, Arkansas; Sherrice Iverson, 7, Nevada; Amanda Brown, 7, Florida; Christina Long, 13,