

EXXON'S EXTRAORDINARY PROFITS

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, tonight I would like to place on the RECORD the extraordinary profits of one corporation registered with the New York Stock Exchange by the name of Exxon. Today, news reports indicate that Exxon, the world's largest publicly traded company, has posted the largest U.S. corporate profit in world history: nearly \$10 billion. That is \$10 billion in just 3 months.

We know where that money came from. It came from all of us. It came from the American people. Quarterly profits for Exxon are up 75 percent since last year. The revenue of this company alone will ring in at over \$100 billion this year.

Now how big is \$100 billion? Well, \$100 billion is about one-quarter of what the U.S. Department of Defense spends in 1 year. But \$100 billion is more than all of the following U.S. Departments spend in a year combined. The whole U.S. Department of Education, all of the student loans, all of the help for our school children around the country, it is a drop in the bucket compared to the profits of Exxon.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, that is small potatoes compared to what Exxon earns.

The Department of Transportation, with all of those bridges across the United States that have to be fixed, some in rural areas, certainly in the big cities, crumbling infrastructure, well, Exxon's profits are a lot larger than the Department of Transportation spends in a year.

NASA, poor NASA, they only have about \$16 billion a year to explore outerspace and the heavens beyond us.

If you add them all up: Department of Education, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, and NASA, they do not equal the revenues of Exxon.

Now the interesting thing about Exxon, it is the world's largest publicly traded company, but it has a special deal. Guess where most of its oil comes from? Saudi Arabia. Have no doubt, with the special licensing agreement signed with that company, a lot of that money drawn off of this marketplace will not go to education of our children, it will not go to fix up our roads, it is not going to help clean up our environment, and it certainly will not take us as far as Saturn.

No, a lot of those dollars will be used to hire mercenaries to protect the Saudi oil interests, which is one of the major places this country imports petroleum from because we cannot figure out how to get it right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, \$9.9 billion in one quarter. Think of what those funds could do if you did not put them in Exxon's pockets. Think what they could do in your community. Take a program, a

teeny program like the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which spends not \$9.9 billion, but \$15 million a year. That is pocket change to Exxon. It gives little coupons to senior citizens across our country who cannot afford to pay these rising gas prices and cannot afford to pay for their heating bills this winter. It gives them \$20 a month in the summer to go to farmers' markets in their communities to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. We cannot put it in all of the States. Only 28 States even have this program, and not in every county.

But if you ever watch one of these senior citizens take one of those farmers' market coupons and stand in front of fresh fruits and vegetables and struggle with the decision of whether they are going to buy raspberries for the first time in 25 years, what is more important, Mr. Speaker, more profits for Exxon or a little bit to help the senior citizens of America who want to buy fresh fruits and vegetables?

Seniors need that food so much that they literally buy it at the end of the day when the farmers reduce their price, and they turn it into soups and stews and put it in their freezers or their friends' freezers so they can have soups during the winter time made out of fresh vegetables that have been frozen.

Mr. Speaker, \$9.9 billion. I am going to write a letter to the president of Exxon. I do not even know who the person is. I am going to ask if they would take \$15 million out of the \$9.9 billion in profits they just made to double the senior farmers' market nutrition program in our country. Would they even really miss it? How does Saudi Arabia use all of that money? And why do they need all of those mercenaries to protect their oil wells? Why is that country so unstable? Why do they have to take money out of our pockets through Exxon every single day?

It is really unbelievable that one corporation could make that much money off this marketplace in one quarter and this Congress does nothing.

□ 1715

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP:
CALLING FOR AN INDEPENDENT
KATRINA COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DUNCAN). 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. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to come before the House. As the Members know, the 30-Something Working Group, we come to the floor to bring about not only good change for the Congress, but also for the country. And we try to promote legislation that the Democratic side is offering towards some of the issues that are facing the country, but at the same time talk about the re-

sponsibilities of the majority that are unmet.

Mr. Speaker, as the Members know, Hurricane Wilma hit not only my district, but many of the Florida delegation in southeast and southwest Florida, and we are constantly struggling with trying to make sure that we can provide for our constituents. And we come to the floor week after week, especially the 30-Something Working Group, talking about what happened in Hurricane Katrina, the lack of response in Hurricane Katrina and Rita by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and also calling up House Resolution 3764, which has over 190 Democratic cosponsors. Unfortunately, last I checked, there are not any Republicans who have signed on to it, and that is very unfortunate because it is an identical commission to the 9/11 Commission that brought about great recommendations, some that have been met, others that we still have to make sure that we implement to secure our country. It was about not making the same mistake again, again, and again. And that is the reason why we are calling for an independent Katrina Commission.

And that is a piece of legislation that is not a Democratic plan, but it is an American plan. Eighty-one percent of Americans support it, and I think it is very important that we do not allow partisan committees that have been established here in the House to dictate the response to natural disasters and a possible terrorist attack.

We have to make things better to protect Americans. It is almost like I feel like an insurance salesman saying that we have to have insurance not after the fact, but before the fact. And if we know we have shortcomings, then we need to deal with that in a very effective way.

Being an "evacuee" of Hurricane Wilma due to the fact that there is very little power in south Florida, there are gas lines, Mr. Speaker, I hold up here the front page of the Washington Post that has many people here in south Florida, as a matter of fact in West Palm Beach, standing for hours for gas because we could not get the generators running at Port Everglades to be able to pump the gas to allow many of the stations to have gas and power. These are things that we need to work on.

Governor Bush jumped in front of the train because folks were getting upset with the Federal response once again as it relates to getting the simple things like ice, water, and food down to the affected area. There was a lot of chest-beating prior to the storm, saying, we have 2,000 FEMA personnel in place; we have a set number of trucks that are lined up in Florida, pre-positioned, to go in and provide ice water and food. And in many cases the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) showed that either there were very few, trucks were extremely late like 8, 7 hours. People

there just went through a major hurricane waiting 8, 7 hours just for 1 bag of ice and 3 jugs of water, and in some cases nothing showed up, and folks had to go back home.

That is why we need an independent commission. We do not need officials that have relationships with the President to say, blame me, I am the State of Florida, blame me for the shortcomings of the response. We know in hurricanes, natural disasters, that there are going to be shortcomings. But as it relates to the very simple things that have to be provided, they must be provided. And the reason why they were not provided is that the supplies were not there, period, dot.

FEMA was in charge of making sure that those supplies made it to said location. The truck drivers were not hired by the State of Florida, but were hired by FEMA. And I think it is important that we look at it for what it is.

We do not have to have a commission for every natural disaster or event that takes place here in the United States, but we have a House resolution that, Mr. Speaker, will be part of a discharge petition here in the House, and I want to break that down so that everyone understands what a discharge petition is.

Basically, we are using the rules of the House to call this resolution up to the floor to discharge it, and we need a said number of signatures to be able to pull it up on the floor so that the House can take a vote. And if we do not have some Members of the majority side to see fit to have an independent Katrina Commission that 81 percent of Americans are in approval of, then we are failing to meet our obligations.

We know that we have problems. The Department of Homeland Security telling people in my district to be patient 72 hours after the storm, saying, we will get it right. Well, that is the reason why we have it. We are supposed to be prepared for these events, but we are not, and we are not even willing to correct ourselves. So that is in place as it relates to the Democratic response.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate his yielding to me. Just so that we can go back, and, obviously, he has outlined why we have a need for this independent commission. I think it is important that we go back and we explain what is actually happening here right now. We have been asking for this thing for how long now, months? Almost 2 months we have been asking for an independent commission. We want to go back, Democrats and Republicans, and look at what happened with Katrina so that we can stop and prevent these things from happening.

We are not doing a good job in this country of administering emergency services. And we have the Republicans

in charge of the House and in charge of the Senate, in charge of the White House, in charge of FEMA, in charge of the whole executive branch, and we keep having these missteps and these failures, and no one is figuring out what in the heck we are doing wrong because the committee down here that the Republicans have appointed only gives subpoena power to the Republicans. So we have the Republicans overseeing the Republicans. And I think we might as well put Ed Gillespie in charge of the committee down here to oversee what is happening, the head of the RNC, because this has become political.

And what we want to say to the American people, Mr. Speaker, is that Democrats want an opportunity to govern this place because our friends on the other side do not know how to govern. They have been in charge now in the House since 1994. They have control of the Senate, they have control of the White House, and they do not know how to govern. And we need to be prepared for not only natural disasters, but potential terrorist attacks to the United States of America.

And we need to do what we did with the 9/11 Commission, an independent commission, independent of all of the nonsense that happens in this body that has gotten us to a point where the Republican majority does not know how to govern. Get an independent commission with an outside Democrat and an outside Republican, bipartisan, where they can subpoena people, oversee what happened for Katrina, oversee Wilma, oversee Rita, and figure out what we need to do, because at some point, at some point, something is going to be more tragic than these natural disasters, and we are not going to know how to respond. And our kids and our grandkids are going to look back and the American people are going to look to this body and say, What have you done to prevent this? What have you done to improve the emergency management execution in the United States of America? And we are saying on record here five times a week sometimes with the 30-something Group we want an independent commission. We do not want politics involved. Do the right thing.

And we are asking people at home to contact us, housedemocrats.gov/katrina, and become a citizen cosponsor of H.R. 3764, become a citizen cosponsor, and I think we have over 40,000 citizen cosponsors for this. Get on this Website, housedemocrats.gov/katrina, become a citizen cosponsor so that we can become prepared for a possible terrorist attack that may happen in the United States, another natural disaster that may happen in the United States. We will be ready, and then down the line we will be able to look back, and there is always room for improvement. We watch the game film the next day, and we see what we did right and what we did wrong, but at the end of the day,

we can say we have done our job. We have put the microscope up to the problem. We have looked at it, put the sunshine on it, and figured out what we did wrong.

And it takes courage. I mean, it is not easy to be self-reflective. It is not easy to critique oneself. And that is what we are asking this Congress to do, have the courage to do the right thing: Get an independent commission here.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, it is not like we are by ourselves as it relates to calling for this independent commission. And the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I were talking about an independent commission, and we have been going week after week here on this floor saying it is the responsible thing to do not only in natural disasters, but also in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. An independent commission will be able to look at the Federal response, the State response, and the local response and learn from either what was good or bad that took place in those events.

If we are not going to have an independent review of our capabilities, then something is wrong. If we are not going to have that, that means that without having it, people will lose their lives possibly because of the lack of response, because they definitely did in Katrina. We had people that were running out of medical supplies. We had people that needed insulin, could not get it because they were stranded and that we were not able to reach them. So I think that is very important.

There are a number of papers that have come out for an independent commission on Katrina: The USA Today; the Tennessean from Nashville, Tennessee; the News & Observer from Raleigh, North Carolina; also Capital Times, Madison, Wisconsin; the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in Georgia; the Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky; the St. Petersburg Times in Florida; the Salt Lake Tribune in Utah; also the Denver Post in Colorado; and the San Antonio Express, obviously in Texas; and the Houston Chronicle of Texas.

There are a number of papers, and those are just the major ones, that have come out for an independent Katrina Commission.

We have talked about House Resolution 3764, but also as it relates to contracting fraud that may very well happen in Wilma because of a lack of oversight. We have called for House bill H.R. 3838, a bill to create an antifraud commission to prevent waste and fraud and abuse of Federal contractors as it relates to these emergency declarations or what have you. This is about saving money and making sure that we do not make the victims of a natural disaster or a potential terrorist attack victims all over again because we failed to have the proper oversight.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to add the fact that we have to continue to push. Once again I give the report. Every day

I go on the White House Website. I have the Website page here. No mention of an independent or any evaluation of what the failures were during Hurricane Katrina, and we also have the Website that has not changed on the partisan committee that is here in the House. And I think it is important for us to identify that so that we do not have to continue to have Ground Hog Day all over again.

One last point, Mr. Speaker, while we are on this issue here. The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I talked last night about the fact that we were here pushing for this commission week after week. I mentioned that. And we shared with not only the Members, but also Americans, Mr. Speaker, the fact that it could be them next, victims of a poor, short response or an inadequate response.

□ 1730

Little did we know at that time that we would be victims of the shortcomings of the fact that we say we are ready, but we are not really ready or really prepared; and in some cases some people question are we saying we have trucks in certain locations and they are not there, do we need to get prima facie proof that they were there? These are the questions that my constituents are asking.

So I want to share with Members that this independent commission is very important, to make sure that one day it may be you and your constituents going through this and you are going to say, Gee, you know, it is amazing that we cannot even get a truck to come in here with water.

We talked about last night the fact that the terrorists are not going to call up and say, Hey, I want you guys to get prepared. I am going to carry out an attack in another month or so, so you need to get together and pre-position.

That is the reason why the 9/11 recommendations need to be fully implemented. That is the reason why we need a Katrina Commission to look at the lack of response we had on the biggest natural disaster that took place on U.S. soil and the Federal, State and local response to that. That is very, very important. It is not an indictment document; it is a document to make sure that we prevent loss of life in the future.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, he is absolutely right. I think the gentleman makes a great point. This is important. This goes beyond Katrina. The independent commission that we want goes beyond Katrina.

We had a situation in Ohio a year or so ago where a potential terrorist was planning an attack in Columbus. You are in the middle of Ohio, it was something about a shopping mall. The gentleman was stopped and held, and I do not even know what the status is right now. But this was in Ohio. It is not just the gulf States or Florida.

Katrina and the independent commission, these are all the editorials that have been written in support all over the country. I think a lot of the editorial boards understand what we are trying to say here, and they are being very supportive.

We talk about an independent commission. I want to read a little bit from the Houston Chronicle in Texas, a little bit of what they say about trying to fix the problem: "The most promising option is an independent commission along the lines of the September 11 problem. This is great, because this puts a little meat on the bone. It should be headed by national figures of unassailable independence and credibility such as former President Jimmy Carter, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor."

We are talking about Republicans, but just to be independent of the day-to-day politics that go on in this Chamber. This is not something that needs to be compromised. This is an issue that has long-term ramifications, and we have an obligation.

We come here early in January every other year and we put our hand on the Bible and one up in the air. We have an obligation to make this government run effectively and efficiently. A lot of hard-working people pay a lot of tax dollars that come to us, and then we invest it to improve the quality of their lives.

Part of that is to make sure they are safe. So when we had all these problems with body armor, where their kids, their sons and daughters were going over, we wanted to make sure they have the proper body armor and the up-armored Humvees; and we fought through the 30-something Group and the Democrats and put enough pressure on where we finally got that problem fixed. It is a whole other issue why we went to war without the proper equipment.

But we have a responsibility here to make sure that this government runs efficiently. A component of that is emergency management services, which, as we found, became very apparent in the past few months. So we have this obligation; and we are trying, the 30-something Group, the Democratic Party, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), we are trying to move this committee out of politics into an independent commission, get Sandra Day O'Connor, get Colin Powell, get some good, solid Republicans who are going to be independent and do what is best for the country, because time and time again, unfortunately, my friend, the Republicans continue to prove their ineptness, their inability to govern; and we have a responsibility as the minority party, as the opposition party, to provide alternative views, and we want an opportunity to run the government.

We proved in 1993 with not one Republican vote that we could balance the budget and handle those difficult

decisions, and that vote in particular led to the greatest economic expansion in the history of the United States of America.

Our friends on the other side are not only inept in trying to administer emergency services, because they appoint all their cronies to the top positions in FEMA, all friends of friends of a college roommate who gives a lot to the Republican Party, which led to poor execution of emergency services. Their party, the Republican Party, takes higher precedence for the people who govern this Chamber than the country, and they have proved that time and time again. Party over country. What the Democrats are trying to say is pick the country over the party.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, the gentleman is 110 percent right. I think every day Republicans want to see, and Democrats and Independents and even folks that are not voting in America, they want to see leadership. They want to see leadership on behalf of the country. Veterans want to see the flag that they fought for and that some of their friends and comrades died for, that it is not caught up in what we call this culture of corruption and cronyism.

We want to talk about cronyism for a minute, Mr. Michael "Brownie," I am not one to say it is his fault as it relates to staying on with FEMA for 60 days, and then the Secretary of Homeland Security extends his contract at the salary he was making as director of FEMA for another 30 days.

The reason given for doing that is that we need to learn from Director Brown, or Brownie, the President calls him Brownie, we need to learn from him so that we can know more about what happened in Katrina. Now, if you could not get it in the first 60 days, he was only in charge for about maybe 5 or 7 days, thanks to the fact that we were raising the question. The Democratic Leader first called for his resignation because we saw that we had someone that did not have the experience.

The fact he is on for 60 days, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, I am waiting to have a conversation with him on why he would extend it for 30 more days at taxpayers' expense.

Now, folks went into their pockets and said, Well, we are going to help you out for another whole month. That is on them. I do not have a problem with that. I do have a problem with the fact that we are rewarding him in confidence and cronyism with the taxpayer dollar.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If the gentleman will yield further, Mr. Speaker, Brownie is still on the payroll, \$100,000.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. \$148,000.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. \$148,000. Talk about rewarding negative behavior. Do you do that with your kids? Your kids come home, they took a spelling test, got a D, do you throw them \$20? Good job, Kendrick. Go out and get another

one. That is what we are doing. We are reinforcing bad behavior.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time once again, well, I can tell you, the part that I am more concerned about is the fact that this is a high-profile individual within FEMA. What is happening on an everyday basis with someone that really is not competent in Federal Government and is known to the managers? I guess it is okay, because when you think about the culture of corruption and cronyism, if it comes from the top, then it must be okay. If it is all right with the Vice President, then it is okay. That means it is okay with the Department Secretaries and Under Secretaries and the regional directors. So that is the reason why we have to cut it off.

Mr. Speaker, do you know something? Not a mumbling word from the majority on this. Not a mumbling word. Better yet, we have folks coming to the floor, and we started talking about responding to the needs of Americans saying we have to have offsets in Medicaid, we have got to have offsets in possible Medicare, that is not off the table.

What I mean by "offsets" is the fact we have to take money from those programs to respond to the Katrina-Rita issue. We have to do that. But, better yet, we have an example of an individual that I think pretty much all Americans, and I am pretty sure that almost close to every Member of the House, agree with the fact that he did not know exactly what he was doing.

I do not blame Mr. Brown. I do not blame him. I blame the individuals that placed him in that position. I blame the managers that saw that he was not up to par and endorsed lackluster, leave-alone performance, lack of competence in doing that particular job. He is probably good somewhere else.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. "You are doing a good job, Brownie."

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Yes, "You are doing a good job, Brownie," on national television, broad daylight. The world is watching.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The world is watching. You are not doing a good job. You are doing a bad job. In fact, you are fired. Get out. What do you mean, you are doing a good job.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And we are going to give you a 60-day extension and have you on as a consultant, have you on so we can learn from your bad job. Maybe we can learn more. No, as a fat matter of fact, hey, you know, 60 days is not enough. Let us extend it 30 more days.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Maybe their plan was this: they said we will keep Brownie on, pay him \$148,000, and when there is a situation, we will go to Brownie and ask, what do you think we should do? He will tell you. Then they do the complete opposite. Maybe that you is how they are using him, do you think?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. There are too many people around here paying taxes,

folks running around here trying to put fiscal responsibility in the back-drop, saying we are conservatives. Meanwhile, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security is defending and extending contracts of a person that the front-page national publications say is incompetent and not in any way knowing what to do in a natural disaster. So this is beyond comprehension. And not a mumbling word.

I would say this: I do not blame him. I am not running around here saying I am disappointed in Michael Brown for accepting a 30-day extension on a \$140,000 salary. I am not blaming him. He could not do that on his own.

No one from the White House called and said, You know something? Over at the Department of Homeland Security, I think you all are probably not playing with a full deck if you think it is okay to do this. Not a mumbling word. So I am concerned, leave alone as a Congressman, as a taxpayer, that this is okay.

Now, this is just a high-profile case. We talk about corruption and cronyism, a culture. People think, well, wow, they are just saying that because they can say it. No, this is a shining example, and we have been talking about this, and it has been in all of these publications, and they are still doing it, like it is okay.

The only people that can put this administration and set us on a new course and put this majority in check are the American people. But, unfortunately, they will not have an opportunity until late 2006, and on behalf of the country we cannot continue to sit idly by and watch this kind of activity take place.

I would feel a little uncomfortable saying that my colleagues on the majority side are not standing up to their responsibilities in oversight. The Secretary, as soon as he leaves from down in south Florida from Wilma, should be called on the carpet in some committee room saying please let us know what we can learn from Mr. Brown. Please let us know what we can learn from the Director of FEMA. Why do we have to continue to pay him and use the taxpayers' dollars? Someone needs to ask that question. It should be not only the Committee on Homeland Security; it should be congressional leaders calling and saying you need to reverse that.

So I do not even feel half uncomfortable about me being upset about this thing, because I can tell you right now, there are a number of people out there that are very upset; and it is time, it is time, that we cut out this culture of corruption and cronyism, because it is weakening this country. I am going to tell you that right now.

Folks might see little events, but I can tell you right now, I am concerned about clandestine operations that we have going on, especially in this culture of corruption and cronyism. I am concerned about taking people for face value when they say, well, this is what

we have in place, and we find out later that it is really not.

I am concerned when we come to this floor and the clock opens up for 15-minute votes, and because the majority side is not prevailing or winning, they decide to hold the vote clock open for 90 minutes. I am concerned about these events taking place under lights, cameras, and action.

□ 1745

I am concerned about those events that are taking place in the back halls of Congress, in the White House, and in other Federal agencies that are not under lights and camera.

So this is the kind of boldness, cronyism, boldness and possible corruption in many places that takes place. And do not take it from me, just pick up your local paper or turn on the news. It is full of it. So if we do not hold ourselves in check, and if the majority is not willing to rise up and police this corruption and cronyism; because, Mr. Speaker, I used to be a State trooper, and we had what they call a game warden, and I always used to say, the game warden cannot be the lead poacher. You cannot be leading off the poacher saying that I am in charge of policing the poachers. So I think it is important that we have folks that will leader up and say, you know something, I know I have been told to be quiet on this, but I have a constitutional responsibility to make sure that we have oversight.

These are not personal decisions, Mr. RYAN; these are decisions that are affecting the governance of this country. So when we allow this kind of stuff to go on, it is making the country weaker versus stronger, because the Federal tax dollars are being spent in ways that they should not be spent, and we are not saving any money by allowing this kind of culture to continue.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I think it really comes down to the fact that every decision that is made by this Congress, by the Republican-controlled Congress, by the Republican-controlled Senate, and by our Republican President is based on supporting and lifting up the Republican Party. I hate to break it to them, but this is not about the Republican Party; this is about America. This is about what is best for America.

You talk about violating basic House rules, and every time they have done that, every time they have kept the roll call open at 2:00 or 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning; I mean, last year, I cannot remember what vote it was, but we were here until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. It was on the prescription drug bill, because we had to kick over \$700 billion to the pharmaceutical industry, one of the most profitable industries in the whole entire world, them and oil, and the reason is they put the Republican Party before the country.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN, I am sorry to cut in, sir, but I am going to tell you this: I know a lot of Republicans. A lot of Republicans are supporters of me. They vote for me, and

some of them say, great job. I have some great friends on the other side of the aisle, I mean great friends. We do a lot together. We talk about things that are common interests. We are friends. My mother was here before me, and some of them are great friends of my mother, and, because of that relationship, we have a great bond.

But I can tell you this: I think this goes far beyond building up or doing something on behalf of the Republican Party, because some of these decisions that are made, it will turn the stomach of Republicans that I know. It would turn their stomachs. I know on the majority side, I know that there are some Republicans that go home, and they are sick. They are sick of what is going on here in this House. But you know something? If they were to stand up, unfortunately they would be knocked down politically. They will find themselves fighting the whole reason why we are here on this floor, fighting against them doing their jobs.

So I kind of feel that there is a purpose for what we are doing here, because as far as I am concerned, we could sit back and just say, well, let them do it, or let them look the other way, because the American people are going to see that they are not governing. But you know something? We are Americans, and we have an obligation to not only our constituents. When our constituents voted for us, they federalized us. So that means that we have to care about the entire country and what happens to the Federal dollar, which is the taxpayers' dollar. It is very unfortunate.

So, Mr. RYAN, I know that it is an influence of the special interests. Their pockets are full because of the relationships here on Capitol Hill that they have and in the White House. Guess what? The average Republican is paying more at the pump, the average Republican does not have health care; just like many of our constituents, there is no health care plan. The average Republican is going to have to bear the brunt, Mr. RYAN, and I am sorry for taking a little of your time here, but bear the brunt of taking away from Medicare, Medicaid, free and reduced lunches for poor people; taking away from projects that would go to local government to build communities; and all of these faith-based groups that are out there trying to bring about some change, it is going to take away from them.

But, meanwhile, when it comes down to saying to a billionaire that we probably cannot give you hundreds of thousands in tax cuts that we have given you over the last number of years, and I am going to reference a report here, a third-party validator, a little later on, to say that it is not working, they say, no, no, no, do not worry about it, do not say anything, millionaire. We have you. We have your back. We are going to protect you, but we are going to make sure that the average Republican, the average Democrat, the aver-

age Independent, that they bear the burden, that they send their children into conflict and war, that they pay higher gas prices; not you, special interest. No, no, we are here for you.

But see, the problem here, and we talked about it last night, Mr. RYAN, about the fact that this is the only legislative body on the other side of the aisle in the Senate, where you can be appointed by a Governor to the Senate if someone leaves office. But when someone leaves office here in the middle of a term, you have to be elected. You cannot be appointed to the House of Representatives. So that means that we are representatives of the people, not representatives of the special interests, not representatives of the billionaires of the world; we are representatives of everyday folk.

So I think this is important, because Democrats, we have budget alternatives like pay-as-you-go, saying that if you are going to do it, you are going to show how you are going to pay for it, okay? We have alternatives as it relates to dealing with Hurricane Katrina so that we do not continue to waste the taxpayers' dollars and also make the victims of the event victims all over again. So, Mr. RYAN, we have the alternatives.

I believe that this goes higher than the party. I believe that it goes right to this culture of corruption and cronyism, and I will tell you one thing: The American people will see us bring about great change if just one of the Chambers of the legislative body was to turn Democrat, because what you see right now, based on law enforcement agencies saying, listen, we need to have some level of oversight, this country is going down the drain, because they are dragging it down the drain, and we have to do this. Imagine if we had an oversight committee that would call some of these things into question before they get to the level to where they are now, Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Yes, no doubt about it. We maybe could have prevented, if we had been really on the stick and really open, we maybe could have prevented some of the things that are happening.

I think this really goes to the fact that the Republican majority believe that the government and the taxpayer dollars that we have here are just for them. It is for them to build their party up. It is for them to use it to build up the Republican Party.

I am sorry, but my citizens in my district do not pay taxes so that the leaders of the House, the Republican leaders of the House, can go out to Shake Down Street out there on K Street, just a cab ride away where all the lobbyists are, and go and shake down the lobbyists. I mean, when a Democrat applies for a job, and the leaders on the Republican majority say to the lobbyists, you cannot give that job to a Democrat because we will not do business with you then.

And when you come to the American people and you try to say with a

straight face about fiscal discipline, but when we are here at 3:00 in the morning, and arms are getting twisted to pass a Medicare prescription drug bill, and the Republican majority does not have the courage to go to the pharmaceutical industry and say, listen, we want to pass a Medicare prescription drug bill, but we want to give the Secretary of Health and Human Services the opportunity, the power to negotiate on behalf of the Medicare recipients to get the costs under control. The Republicans put a provision in the Medicare bill that explicitly said the Secretary of Health and Human Services is not allowed to negotiate down the drug prices. Can you imagine that? Can you believe that? And then only 25 Republican Members voted against it.

Then you come to the energy bill, and with the energy bill, you have billions of dollars in there to subsidize the oil companies, and a major oil company comes out today and talks about 89 percent profits in the last quarter, \$10 billion, and you are getting public tax dollars from middle-class Americans who live in Youngstown, Ohio, one of the poorest areas in the country, you are taking their tax dollars and you are giving it to the oil companies.

Now, a third-party validator, right here, Cal Thomas, one of the most conservative Republican columnists in the country right now, suggests to our friends on the other side, to the Republican majority, he is commenting on the offsets to pay for Katrina, and the Republican majority is taking the money from Medicaid, free and reduced lunch, and college students. Cal Thomas says, here is a suggestion: Do not start with the poor, start with the rich. That is Cal Thomas. That is not KENDRICK MEEK, that is not TIM RYAN, that is not DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, that is one of the most conservative Republican columnists in the country.

He also goes on to say, talking about using government as their own little sandbox that they can play in and as a welfare state for corporations, because this is corporate welfare. Cal Thomas, conservative Republican. Did I mention he is a conservative Republican?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. You mentioned it.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I appreciate that.

Quote: Seventy-two percent of farm subsidy money goes to 10 percent of recipients, the richest farmers, partnerships, corporations, estates, and other entities. Corporate welfare, my friend, to the oil companies, to the pharmaceutical companies, and to the big agribusinesses, and the Republican leadership in this Chamber goes out to Shake Down Street and tells all the lobbyists on K Street that they have to hire Republicans or they are not going to do business with the Republican majority.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, let us just make sure that we are crystal clear so that everyone understands. Not just saying, well, let me check, let

us see. Let us look at the people that apply for the job. Oh, there is a Republican. No. I want you to hire my right-hand staffer. I want you to hire him or her, put them in the position, okay, and so I can deal directly with them so that we can have a line of communications and we are not confused, because this person has my cell number, okay, and I want to make sure that that happens.

Now, we are not talking about something that the House Ethics Committee has not already dealt with, because of the fact that this issue was brought up and it was very public. It was not any kind of clandestine operation that was going on. You just pick up the paper. Yes, that is what we are doing. What is the problem? If they are going to do business up here, they are going to hire the people that they want hired, period, dot, with a straight face, under the lights with the cameras on and the press running.

That is a problem, Mr. RYAN, and I believe that when you start looking at the whole culture of corruption and cronyism, you have to look at these activities that are taking place under lights, camera, and on the front pages of newspapers. And you know something? The American people, Mr. Speaker, may feel, well, it is okay, because Congress is not calling any of these people in. Once again, you cannot be the game warden and the lead poacher at the same time. You just cannot do it. It is not physically possible. You cannot have a problem and be over the very thing that is the problem.

Once again, I said it last night, I will say it again. These are not personal decisions, Mr. RYAN. These are decisions that are affecting the policy of the country and the Treasury of the country. This is not someone that went off and made an individual bad decision and said, you know, I made a bad decision, it only really affected me, okay, and I am sorry. It will not happen again. No, it is not that; it is a whole Medicare program. It is an entire industry: Energy, we are going to give you what you want.

□ 1800

That is what is going on, and it is affecting the U.S. taxpayers.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We are going to give you public tax dollars for the energy companies, public, through subsidies, billions of dollars in the energy bill. You are going to raise money for Republican candidates. It is that simple. Go out and shake down K Street. That should be called not Operation K Street; it should be Operation Shake-down.

So the American people should be outraged at this, corporate welfare to the most profitable industries in the country with your tax dollars, and the Republican majority uses it to raise money for the Republican Party. They are putting their party, the Republican Party, before the country.

And that is when it has got to stop. You did not come to Congress to rubber-stamp this stuff. The people in my district did not send me here to rubber-stamp this stuff. They sent us here to end it, because the average worker, the average small business person in every single instance, health care, energy, gas prices, natural gas, pharmaceuticals, wages, on every single count they are forgotten.

They are forgotten because we spent so much, the Republicans spent so much time giving out public tax dollars, corporate welfare so that they can increase their campaign coffers and run 30-second ads. And they go out and shake down K Street. It is ridiculous.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. If you want to call it an energy bill, I will not, because it did nothing about true conservation. It did nothing about true price gouging. I mean, there was some language in there; but it was not there. We had, on this side of the aisle, a Democratic alternative that stopped price gouging, that put us on a track of alternative fuel and also protected the environment at the same time. We offered that.

That is the reason why the board, the voting board was open for 90 minutes, because it did something. Now, it did not do what the special interests wanted us to do. And you know many of them, I see them. It is not personal; it is just business. I see them. Hey, how are you doing? I am fine. Are you okay? I am doing just fine. Nice day out today. Okay.

But the bottom line is when it comes down to my constituents and it comes down to Exxon-Mobil coming out today saying, hey, guess what, wow, 75 percent up in profits, give me a high-five. What is unfortunate, I think some of the folks in this Congress are actually giving these special interest groups a high-five, and it is unfortunate because it is on the backs of Americans.

We are running around here paying more for gas than we have ever paid before, and there are record profits for the industry. I think there is something wrong there, and I think it is something that is clear as day. And guess what? It is happening under the lights. It is happening in front of the cameras. It is on the front page of the paper in print for historical preservation to the next election.

And what is unfortunate is that we could stand by and allow this to happen and say nothing and say, you know, the American people will respond in an appropriate way of making sure that we have the kind of leadership that is willing to lead. We are trying to lead. Guess what? We cannot prevail, because they are in the majority, and they have the majority of the Members in this House.

If given the opportunity, Americans will see a different kind of policy that is for the people and not for the special interests, not only in that case. You go back to no longer making mistakes in the Federal and State and local re-

sponse after natural disaster/terrorist attacks.

Not only that, looking at House Resolution 3838, dealing with the issue on contractor fraud, why do we have to read it in the paper? Why do we have to watch television to see that we have not provided the kind of oversight so that contractors do not have cost overruns up to millions of dollars, in some cases billions?

Then we turn around, you want to talk about rewarding a culture of corruption and cronyism? Over in Iraq we have contractors that are under investigation by our government, and the very same Departments of Defense and Homeland Security investigating them, Katrina goes down, hey, guess what? Come on over here. We have a multimillion-dollar no-bid contract for you. Sign right here. We ask no questions. There is no ceiling. There is very little oversight. And we will get around to that thing of oversight. But we are in an emergency so we know that you messed up before.

It is almost like someone going in a convenience store, taking out a gun, taking a couple of hundred dollars out of the cash register, unfortunately it is in the millions as it relates to the Federal taxpayer dollar, they run out of the store, the police catch them, they say, well, you know, not only do you not have to give me the money, but you do not even have to turn over your gun. Go back out there and rob another store. That is what is happening right now.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Well, let us look. My friend brings up Iraq, which is a perfect example. We just talked about corporate welfare to the oil companies; corporate welfare to pharmaceutical companies; tax cuts that go primarily to those people who make over a million dollars a year. And this President does not have the guts, and the Republican Congress, they do not have the guts to ask the wealthiest people in the country to contribute. Two wars and major natural disasters, poverty is increasing, the tuition cost has doubled over the last 4 or 5 years, and this Republican Congress, they do not have the guts to go ask the billionaires in the country to contribute.

But we are going to give them public tax dollars to support their corporations. But there is more welfare going on. Iraq has become a United States welfare state. Look what is going on here. 110 primary care centers built in Iraq with American tax dollars. Okay. 2,000 health educators trained with the American tax dollar.

3.2 million children vaccinated in Iraq with the American tax dollar. Great. Super. We went in there, we broke Iraq, we buy it. That is our responsibility. But back at the ranch, \$10 billion-plus, as I have talked to a few of our friends on the Committee on Energy and Commerce, \$10 billion-plus cuts in Medicaid for American kids. American citizens. \$252 million cut for health care professionals; \$94 million

cut for community health centers in the United States of America.

Student loans. We are building 2,700 schools that have been rehabbed in Iraq; 36,000 teachers and administrators trained in Iraq. We are cutting student loans in the United States. Iraq is a welfare state. So if you are sitting on the couch listening to the 30-something Group right now, and these are all third-party validators, this is not us making this stuff up.

Cal Thomas, the conservative Republican columnist, agrees with us. You see a Republican-controlled government, one-party government spending your tax dollars, giving your tax dollars to the oil companies, to the pharmaceutical companies, to the billionaires in the world, and/or in the United States, and creating a welfare state in Iraq while you are cutting health care in education and research and development. Even the Centers for Disease Control, our conservative friends on the other side want to cut the Centers for Disease Control at a time when we have this bird flu epidemic waiting in the wings.

We can do a better job. The Democratic Party has proposals. We want to create a million new engineers and scientists in the next 10 years. We want to build magnetic levitation trains in the United States and connect the United States of America. We want to invest in the research and development and create alternative energy sources so we no longer have to worry about being dependent on foreign oil.

And that is part of the magnetic lev trains. We want arts and sports in all of our schools for all of our kids because we recognize in the 21st century that learning a musical instrument helps you with math. And when you are good at math, you become an engineer or a scientist, and you will go out and generate wealth. We make good investments. The Democratic Party makes good investments.

We balanced the budget in 1993 with not one Republican vote. And President Clinton made a lot of tough decisions, and the Democratic Congress made a lot of tough decisions. And, quite frankly, some Members lost their seat over it. But it led to the greatest economic expansion in the history of this country. And I do not think there is an American out there that would not say, boy, I would love to go back to the late 1990s. Boy would that not be great. Portfolio was up. Everything was up that should have been up. Everything was down that should have been down.

But meanwhile, our Republican friends keep this culture of corporate welfare and corruption and keep propping up the Republican Party, instead of propping up the United States of America, and being more concerned about shaking down the lobbyists on K Street, instead of propping up the United States.

The Democrats want to take this country in a new direction. We want to

provide new leadership. We want to change the direction of the country, and we want to get rid of this culture of corruption and cronyism, and we want to prop up the country, not any one political party, and use the government to enhance opportunity for people in the United States of America.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, there is nothing more that I can possibly say about where we stand, what we are trying to do in the minority right now, what we would like to do if we had the majority. So with that, sir, will you give the closing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Our Web site is www.housedemocrats.gov/katrina. Become a citizen cosponsor to the independent commission so we can reform government the way it needs to be done.

And 30-somethingdems@mail.house.gov. We have been getting a ton of e-mails lately and a lot of support, over 40,000 citizen cosponsors for the independent commission for Katrina.

Help us change this government. Help us help the Democratic Party take this country in a new direction, a better direction, and help us get rid of this Republican-controlled government that does nothing but corporate welfare and create a welfare state in Iraq at the expense of the American worker and the American taxpayer.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, Mr. Speaker, we would like to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us to come here in the first Democratic hour. And like I say, it was an honor to address the House.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to come before the body and also to talk with the American people a little bit this evening about what we as a House majority are doing.

You know, I have been sitting here for the last few minutes listening to my colleagues talk about their plan and talk about what they were doing. And one of my colleagues was talking about we want this, we want that. I was beginning to think I was listening to one of my children name the Christmas list, got the we-wants.

And I will remind the American people that the we-wants are going to take a lot of your money. And I did not hear one single word mentioned about fiscal responsibility and spending less.

And I would encourage my colleagues to come and work with us, really to work with us on this issue, because we would appreciate having them choose to propose some spending cuts. They

have been going through this process of trying to come up with a slogan for 2006.

And it has been interesting to watch them talk about this slogan. I think they are going with something like We Can Do Better, Together We Can Do Better, or something of that nature.

There again, we are not hearing anything about controlling spending and reining in government. I did a cable news show last week with a Member of the Democratic Party. He said, well, you know, they had not been invited to join in working on submitting spending reductions.

Mr. Speaker, if they are waiting for an invitation, I hope they consider this the invitation. It is in that spirit that I wanted to come down to the floor tonight and talk a little bit about the Republican security agenda and invite the Democrats to join us, because we are living in uncertain times. We are facing significant challenges, and the Republican majority has a clear plan on how we move forward on this.

We are focused on our national security, our economic security, our moral security, our retirement security. And we are going to talk a lot. We have been working already, the 108th, 109th Congress, and putting quite a bit of time and energy into continued tax relief, lowering energy costs, working toward affordable health care, and talking about preserving access to health care for all Americans.

You know, I am just going to have to correct one of things that one of my colleagues said. They were talking about Medicaid spending and how we were going to cut Medicaid spending. And I was kind of scratching my head. We have been sitting in the Committee on Energy and Commerce since 3 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon now working on many of these issues.

And all we are talking about doing is slowing the rate of growth of Medicaid from 7.3 percent a year to 7 percent a year.

□ 1815

I think a lot of my constituents in Tennessee have, they have kind of wised up to a lot of this Washington talk, and they know that any time you talk about reining in growth, any time you talk about bureaucrats and having to learn to live with less so that families in houses in communities can keep their money, that you are going to hear talk of a cut. You are going to hear talk of a cut. My people know and understand that.

They also were saying a little bit about energy over there. I have got to make a comment there, too, and they were talking about how glorious the '90s were. We probably would not be talking so much about energy right now if President Clinton had not vetoed drilling in ANWR in 1995. He had the opportunity to do something bold and visionary, and he chose not to. Democrats chose not to. And I think we need to remember that as we talk about energy costs.