years into the Iraq war, the Bush administration has seen fit to share with the American people their war plan.

The bad news is that there is no ''there'' there. The ''national strategy for victory'' shared with the American people last week is barely worth the paper it is printed on.

It is essentially the same old warmed-over rhetoric that we have become accustomed to and frustrated with: the enemy is bad; we are good; we will never back down; we will achieve total victory.

To the extent that this strategy for victory contains specifics, they are completely divorced from reality.

In last week's speech, the President mentioned that Haifa Street, formerly called Purple Heart Boulevard because of all of the U.S. attacks incurred there, is now safely under the control of Iraq's security forces, but taking control of Haifa Street in Baghdad does not make Iraqi forces self-sustaining. Taking the battle to the enemy, as the President likes to put it, has not thwarted terrorism but, instead, made Iraq a hotbed of terrorism.

The President insists that fighting the terrorists ''over there'' means that we are not fighting them at home. I doubt the people who call London, Madrid, or Bali their home would agree with that assessment. Who is to say that next time it will not be Chicago, Las Vegas, or San Francisco? There is no evidence that we are any more secure at home because of the war in Iraq.

Iraqi democracy is anything but a certainty. We are undermining our own stated goal of advancing freedom when we torture prisoners and when we spend millions of dollars to spread propaganda in the Iraqi press.

When the White House's statements are not divorced from reality, they contradict everything they once said about the war. Like this one, from the supposed ''victory strategy'' document: ''It is not realistic to expect a fully functioning democracy, able to defeat its enemies and peacefully reconcile generational grievances, to be in place less than 3 years after Saddam was finally removed from power.''

Now they tell us. So much for ''Mission Accomplished.'' We have sure come a long way from the confident assertion that we would be greeted by grateful Iraqis throwing flowers at our feet, that we would be in and out in a flash, that all we had to do was depose Saddam and democracy would instantly take hold.

The President's speech last week demonstrates his inability to recognize the intensity of people's anxiety about this war. Americans are not looking for the administration to do the same thing but just do it a little bit better and to put it in a glossy booklet.

They want to see a fundamental shift in direction, like the plan outlined in a letter I wrote to the President, which was cosigned by 61 other House Members: one, engage in greater multilateral cooperation with our allies; two, pursue diplomatic, nonmilitary initiatives; three, prepare for a robust postconflict reconciliation process; and, four, and most importantly of all, bring our troops home.

I wish this administration would step out of its bubble. They should break away from the yes men and listen to the American people who do not understand the cause for which more than 2,100 and countless thousands of Iraqis have died.

It is not just the American people that the administration is ignoring. It is the Iraqis also. Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni leaders agree on practically nothing except that there needs to be a clear timetable for our troops to leave Iraq.

The President wants to have it both ways on Iraq. He will not change his underlying approach, an open-ended military commitment that will last as long as he deems it appropriate, but he can read the polls. So he wants to be perceived as doing something new and something different in order to rescue his administration from political oblivion; but, Mr. Speaker, repackaging a Twinkie does not improve its nutritional value, and the same goes for the Bush Iraq policy.

REBUILDING CASINOS IN THE GULF COAST REGION

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my strong opposition to the inclusion of any tax breaks to rebuild the gulf coast gambling industry in the tax package, which may reach the House floor in the near future. I believe that it is an extraordinarily controversial and improper measure to support the casino industry with tax incentives paid by other Americans. I would like to commend the distinguished gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for his active role in bringing attention to this important issue.

I certainly understand the need to provide general economic incentives for businesses to rebuild in the gulf region, which was so heavily devastated by the hurricanes earlier this year. I support efforts to encourage economic development and restore infrastructure in the area. However, I cannot support allowing casinos to access Federal tax breaks while at the same time we are proposing to achieve savings from a host of other governmental programs.

If Americans were given a choice, I believe that they would prefer not to use limited resources to support the casinos. Prudent use of hard-earned taxpayer money demands that we stay focused on concerns such as the defense of our Nation, education of our children, health care for veterans, and subsistence for the poor.

My constituents are aware of the proposal to potentially provide assistance to gambling interests and have let me know of their opposition to such an effort. Nebraskans, and Americans generally, are generous people, willing to help others in need. Congress, however, has a responsibility not to abuse this generosity by providing tax breaks to wealthy gambling operations which have already signaled their intention to rebuild in the gulf region. In fact, even without the tax breaks, the gambling industry has announced its plan to come back ''bigger and better'' in the area.

Government is an instrument of societal order, establishing priorities for how we choose to live. For instance, we have worked to reduce the marriage penalty in the tax code. We provide tax incentives to save for retirement. We provide tax benefits for health care, and there is certainly a precedent for targeting incentives toward certain businesses while restricting the use of tax breaks for others.

□ 2000

In fact, it would be unusual, I contend, if the government did not restrict these tax breaks and exclude casinos.

As a Gulf Opportunity Zone package was under consideration, Alberto Lopez, Director of Strategic Communication For Harrah Entertainment, Incorporated, was recently quoted in The Washington Post as saying, ''We are actually scratching our heads. We can't ever remember an instance of being offered a tax credit. Ever.''

In another telling comment in the same Washington Post article, a gambling company official, who wished to remain anonymous, stated ''Anything that the Federal Government can provide, obviously we'll take advantage of it.'' Unfortunately, these gambling conglomerates would be taking advantage not only of tax breaks but the generosity of American taxpayers as well.

Why should all Americans be forced to prioritize casinos in the Tax Code? How can Congress consider providing such incentives to the multi-billion dollar gambling industry when there are so many unmet needs in this Nation? Why should these incentives be considered when the gambling industry already plans to rebuild the casinos? To what extent were these casinos covered by insurance? These are a few of the questions that must be addressed before tax legislation reaches the House floor.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to join me in expressing opposition to the inclusion of any tax breaks for gambling interests. Do not let the casino interests hit the jackpot through the Tax Code.

THE LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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

Mr. WYNN. Mr. Speaker, humorist Frank McKinney Hubbard once said, ''Don't knock the weather. If it didn't change once in a while, nine out of ten people wouldn't start a conversation.''

Unfortunately, extreme weather is nothing to laugh about. Tonight, I would like to talk about the underfunding of the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, and how we have failed to protect our Nation's citizens against harsh winter and blistering summer elements. Lyndon Johnson once talked about building a ''Great Society.'' But we cannot have a ''Great Society'' if we only provide tax breaks for the wealthy while ignoring the suffering of the poor in America.

LIHEAP was enacted to assist low-income citizens who pay a high proportion of their household income to meet their immediate home energy needs. Low-income households spend 14 percent of their annual income on energy expenditures, compared to non-low-income households, that only spend 3.5 percent. In fact, two-thirds of the families that utilize LIHEAP assistance have annual incomes of $8,000, forcing them to choose between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

From 1995 to 2004, the average number of cold-related deaths was 27 annually. Meanwhile, my colleagues from the south note that during the same time period, the average number of deaths from heat was 237 annually. The point is that LIHEAP should be available to offset high energy costs in both winter and summer.

The hardships of high energy bills this winter can be visibly seen on the face of an elderly grandmother shivering in the cold of her living room or having to cut back on medicine to keep the heat on. Savings are used up, credits ratings are destroyed, and children are increasingly vulnerable to sickness and ill health. This is not the policy of a great society.

The National Energy Assistance Directors' Association's most recent survey on the impact of rising energy costs on poor families illustrates this troubling reality: 32 percent sacrificed medical care; 24 percent failed to make a rental or mortgage payment; 20 percent went without food for at least a day; and 44 percent said they skipped paying or paid less than their full home energy bill in the past year.

Since 2003, the price of heat to heat one's home has risen tremendously as the price of natural gas has risen by 45 percent and heating oil has risen by 50 percent. As a result, those who use natural gas to heat their home could see their average heating costs spike from $750 to $1,100 this year. For those who use home heating oil, like me, last year's expenditure of $1,200 could jump to as high as $1,600 this year.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle contend that Congress has increased funding for this critical program in recent years. They point to the $2 billion in the fiscal year 2005 and the $5 billion authorized this year in the energy bill. However, there are three problems with this argument, or as I like to call it ''the triple whammy.''

First, we have to understand the $5 authorized in the energy bill was cut to $3 billion in the House's pre-Thanksgiving budget reconciliation bill. Second, the $3 billion figure will be further cut to around $2 billion by the appropriators, because that is the figure they are pushing for to effectively flat line the funding for LIHEAP. Third, take a look at this graph. You can clearly see that even when appropriations increased for LIHEAP, the purchasing power, and that is what is critical for these funds, actually decreased for LIHEAP recipients. Inflation in heating oil and natural gas prices actually decreased purchasing power by 42 percent since the program's inception in 1982.

Ironically, during this time of inadequate LIHEAP funding, oil companies are boasting record profits, some as large as 255 percent. This situation is so bad that some of our Senate colleagues recently wrote a letter to the nine big oil companies and asked them to donate a part of their profits to help low-income people cover these increased energy costs.

Only one response was received, from Citgo, a state-owned Venezuelan company controlled by Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela. Chavez took this public relations opportunity to promote his socialist world view as counterpoint to the United States capitalist world view.

Specifically, he is using profits from Venezuelan-based Citgo to make friends in the United States and attempting to illustrate the failures of American democracy. Citgo has provided discounted heating oil this winter to low-income residents in Massachusetts. Twelve million gallons of heavily discounted heating oil was donated to low-income communities across the State of Massachusetts, helping consumers save between 60 and 80 cents per gallon. This is a total savings of $10 million to $14 million which will occur this winter.

While I am certainly appreciative of this gesture, by having to accept Venezuela's charity, we are playing into Chavez's hands. We cannot effectively promote democracy and free markets around the world if our policies here at home reflect a callous disregard for our poorer citizens.

Close to home in my State of Maryland, we will need about $84 million in Federal fuel assistance, that is more than twice the amount originally anticipated to help low-income residents heat their homes this winter. The Maryland Energy Assistance Program says it will need $51 million more to cover rising energy costs.

In conclusion, I call upon my Republican colleagues to forego or at least delay the additional tax cuts for the warm and the wealthy. Instead, I hope my colleagues on the right side of the aisle will fully fund the $5 billion promise in the energy bill for low income energy assistance.

IRAQ SECURITY

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

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps difficult for some to comprehend the extent of our successes in Iraq because they are focused on isolated incidents rather than looking at the totality of our efforts. So to fully grasp how far Iraq has come, it is necessary to take stock of these successes.

My stepson, Doug Lehtinen, and his fiance, Lindsay Nelson, are serving in Iraq right now. They are marine officers flying F–18s along the Syrian border. They know that the security component of our efforts in Iraq is the cornerstone for our mission for victory.

Iraqis are playing an ever-increasing role for providing for their own security. The Iraqi army and police forces are growing larger and are better trained and they are more effective than ever. The Iraqi army and security forces grew from just one operational battalion in July 2004 to more than 120 today. Many critics note that only one battalion is rated at what the U.S. Army categorizes as a level one, fully independent degree of operability. However, over 40 are at level two, which are capable of fighting, with some support, usually just logistics or artillery support from our coalition forces.

All of these units are patrolling their own areas of operations, and the cities of Najaf and Mosul are now patrolled exclusively by Iraqi security forces, as are large portions of the city of Baghdad. And there are also roughly 80 battalions, both police and military, identified as category three and are currently fighting alongside our U.S. and coalition forces.

As a result, the United States military recently transferred more than two dozen U.S. established bases to Iraqi control. In addition, there are now currently 25,000 Iraqi special police officers who can conduct combat and commando operations as well as routine policing duties. Also, there are 75,000 Iraqi police officers trained and equipped.

And looking to the future, Mr. Speaker, the current plans include establishing 10 Iraqi army infantry divisions. That is 160,000 soldiers, 135,000 regular police officers, 9,000 border police, in addition to the current force of 18,000, and 3,000 additional highway patrol officers in addition to the current level of 3,000, by the year 2007.

Today, thousands of young Iraqis are volunteering, volunteering for service, and they are training to become soldiers and police officers at several facilities throughout the country of Iraq. As a result, over 225,000 Iraqi soldiers and police officers will be available to