United States and its continuation as a representative democracy is just a given, that we are guaranteed to exist forever, kind of just because.

Madam Speaker, you and I both know all too well that simply is not an absolute. It takes constant vigilance. It takes the action of those individuals in Congress as well as men and women across this Nation to be constantly on alert and make certain that we constantly are giving back to our Nation.

It is certainly my hope and prayer that we continue to flourish so we in future generations will have the opportunity to live freely and to meet the challenges that allow all of us to reach our greatest dreams.

Madam Speaker, I know I believe in the wonderful goodness of our Nation. I believe in its wonder and its beauty and its awesome promise. But as you also know, Madam Speaker, I know that liberty and freedom and our Nation require constant vigilance and support. We truly are a wonderful and a glorious Nation, and we remain a beacon of light and a vessel of hope and freedom to men and women around the world. I think it is incredibly important that we appreciate that September 11 was simply the culmination of over 20 years of specific events, and that there are savages on the Earth who have admitted that they will go to incredible lengths, including their own death, in order to destroy our way of life. It is that kind of enemy, it is that kind of world that requires a different vigilance than we have known.

Each generation has its duty. Each individual has his or her role to play. We all know that freedom is not free and each of us has to sacrifice and each of us has a price to pay for the liberty and the freedom that we so enjoy.

Madam Speaker, it has been my privilege to come and present the Official Truth Squad perspective on national security this evening and to try to raise the level of the rhetoric here in the House Chamber, to try not to be divisive, to ask my colleagues to recognize, both Republican and Democrat, that we are all in this together, that the challenges that we have are not partisan challenges, the challenges we have are American challenges. And when we work better together, we are able to solve those challenges that much more easily.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the members of the conference once again for allowing me the opportunity to present this hour this evening. I want to thank each of my colleagues for joining me this evening.

God bless America and may God continue to richly bless our great Nation and the men and women who protect us.

THIRTY-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. FOXX). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. BEAN) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Ms. BEAN. Madam Speaker, I yield to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to be here once again with the 30-Something Working Group, and I want to thank the Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), for giving us the opportunity to spend some time talking tonight about the priorities of the American people.

I am thrilled this evening to be joined, as we come to the end of Women's History Month, to be joined by my fellow freshman colleague and also my roommate while here in Washington, D.C., the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. BEAN).

Ms. BEAN. Madam Speaker, it is an honor to join the gentlewoman.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Speaker, we spend a great deal of time at the end of the day talking about some of the frustrations about this job. The gentlewoman from Illinois and I, two of the few women Members, particularly in the freshman class that we were elected to, as were you, Madam Speaker, in 2004, who are moms with young kids that are trying to balance work and family. We find ourselves at home talking about that a lot.

Ms. BEAN, when you and I are sharing frustrations and stories about concerns that we have and that our constituents have, I find that we often end up talking about it in the context of our kids and the children of our constituents. I know you have a story that you talk to your constituents about, and you were telling me about the seventh graders in your district that you were talking to. I think that is a really neat story you should share.

Ms. BEAN. I mentioned it on the floor briefly that I had been with some kids several weeks back. More recently I mentioned to my colleague we were talking about Internet safety. I am the parent of teenagers, my daughters are 13 and 15, so the issue of Internet safety has been an important issue. I have been visiting middle schools to talk about some of the challenges that they face.

So we went to talk about Internet safety with the middle schoolers; and whenever I talk with middle schoolers, we also have a little bit of a civics lesson.

Many seventh graders I know in Illinois, as well as around the Nation, are studying the Constitution. I was pretty impressed with the quality of education our children are receiving because they had not expected me to ask them about it. They thought we were just going to talk about Internet safety, and I asked them about the Constitution and the Preamble, and if any of them had the Preamble to the Constitution memorized, and they did.

□ 2215

And they did. And I asked them to come on up. All the hands went up to be part of our little civics class. And they came up, and we took that preamble apart.

We talked about in order to form a more perfect union, you know, what does that really mean and they understood that that meant trying to make our Nation better. We talked about providing for the common defense, and how that meant that we not only needed strong national security, but we also needed to protect our citizens when natural disasters could come as well. And we talked about the general welfare and the economy and how their parents and their neighbors and their community needed a strong economic environment so that they could provide for themselves.

We also talked about domestic tranquility. Some of them admittedly did think that that meant, don't hit your sister, so we went through that.

But we also talked about fiscal responsibility. And one of the things that was alarming to them, and it was intended to be and to create a discussion with them, was to talk about the national debt, which is now over $8 trillion. And I shared with these seventh graders that their share of our national debt is now over $27,000 each. And they were very displeased to hear that that was their share of national debt and said, Well, why aren't you guys spending less?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I think you need to stress that again. How much is every American's share of the deficit?

Ms. BEAN. Every American's share of the deficit is over $27,000 of our over-$8 trillion of national debt; and as you now know, we are raising the debt ceiling so we can bring that up to $9 trillion. And it was really frightening to these kids.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We talk about the deficit quite a bit in our 30-something hour, and one of the ways that I sort of try to boil it down, because, you know, when you think about the number 8 trillion, especially, I mean, I imagine you were talking to seventh graders, and 8 trillion is a really big number. Even $27,000 is a big number.

Ms. BEAN. It is a big number when you are talking to 12-year-olds.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. So when we are on the floor here, I often try to boil down what those numbers mean in more simplistic terms. I can tell you that we, what we do is we talk about how it relates to someone's household budget. And you know, of course, families, millions and millions of families across this country struggle every day to balance their budgets to make sure that they are not spending more than they take in. And they are hoping that they are not racking up credit card debt and trying to balance all the needs that their family has, plus, you know, hopefully buying a few things that maybe aren't necessarily a need, but are just a want. I mean, that is something that in America we all strive to be able to accomplish.

But unfortunately, in Washington, when we got here, we found that there seems to be, between the two sides here, an ongoing struggle over whether or not it makes sense, amazingly, to not spend more than you take in.

Ms. BEAN. Well it is interesting how these seventh graders demonstrated greater fiscal sense than this Congress has been able to demonstrate, because we talked to them about debt and how essentially what we have been doing, to your point, to put it in their terms, would be like me, as a mom, getting a credit card in my daughters' names, okay, and going out and buying things for myself and then saying to them as soon as they are old enough to work, now you get to pay for all the things I bought myself.

That is essentially what we are doing to future generations. And they said, Well, that is just not right. And they were right in understanding that.

I also asked them, What would you do to not have debt; and they said, Well, spend less than you have. Pretty simple answer, but one that without PAYGO budget rules, which we once on a bipartisan basis adhered to in this body and were able to get ourselves to the largest surplus in the history of this Congress, we have now gone, since we have thrown out PAYGO rules and we are not requiring ourselves as a body of Congress to be more fiscally responsible, we now have the largest deficit in the history of the Nation, and that is pretty unconscionable.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Just to further explain the concept of PAYGO, we, as Democrats, have repeatedly introduced amendments and other proposals that would reestablish those PAYGO rules, the pay-as-you-go rules, and we have supported them. We have put all of our votes up on the board here that shows where we are versus where our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are, and Democrats have consistently supported returning to pay as you go, returning to the time when we didn't have to talk about a deficit, where we had a surplus, which was just before this, the beginning of this administration's tenure. And it would be wonderful if we could get back to talking about how we were going to spend the surplus, which we wish we had, when now, unfortunately, we are mired in debt and mired in deficit

Ms. BEAN. Very much so. I mean, what PAYGO really did is, it forced tougher decisions. It forced a greater degree of transparency and honesty with the public because it forced us to say, if we are going to spend more on a particular program, where was that money going to come from. And that has really gone away. And with the lack of that, there are a lot of false promises to the public about the reality of our false accounting.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You just can't have it all. I mean, the other story that I share with people when we are here on the floor during this 30-something hour is it is like when we talk to our kids. You know, sometimes my 6-year-old twins will say, Mom, you know, I really want, we will be in the toy store and they want everything in every aisle. And, you know, gosh, I would love to buy them everything in every aisle. But often, I have to say ''no,'' and then I try to explain to them, you know, our budget, the money that mom and dad earn really only enables us to afford to buy you some of these things. You can't have everything you want.

Ms. BEAN. Exactly. It is so fun to be here with you because this is my first time joining you in your 30-something colloquy, because at 44 I am a little outside of the age span, so I appreciate you inviting me today. But it is fun for us to be able to talk about our children on the House floor where we haven't done that before.

But I think there are some very strong parallels in what you are saying, in that oftentimes I think in our roles in Congress with the public, with our constituents, we have to bring a little bit of tough love to the equation the way we do with our children. We can't just tell people what they want to hear, but what they need to hear, which is the reality of our fiscal challenges.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And, boy, as moms, we certainly have a lot of practice at that.

Ms. BEAN. At the tough love.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Tough love is something that unfortunately the word ''no'' gets thrown around a lot more than I would like, than my kids would like to hear. ''No'' doesn't seem to exist in this body, at least under this leadership in the Congress.

Ms. BEAN. Well, that is why PAYGO is an important thing, because it creates an environment that forces those kind of tough decisions and forces a more honest dialogue with the public about what is affordable and what is not. Absolutely.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I want to go back if you don't mind. I want to go back to the chart that I was referring to earlier.

One of the things that we do try to do, and I am pleased to see that our colleagues from Florida and Ohio have joined us now. But when we talk about $8 trillion, and when we talk about what a billion means, we have come up with a chart that kind of tries to boil that down. This chart will help people; it has helped people understand the notion of how much a billion is.

A billion hours ago, humans were making the first tools in the Stone Age. A billion seconds ago, it was 1975 and the last American troops had pulled out of Vietnam. A billion minutes ago, it was 104 A.D., and the Chinese first invented paper. And then, of course, under the leadership of this Congress, and this administration, a billion dollars ago was only 3 hours and 32 minutes at the rate that the government spends money today. That is a startling contrast, and I have some excellent staff work that went into developing that, that figured that out and boiled down what a billion is.

But when you think about it that way, that means that we are spending money at a startling clip and that given how much in other definitions it took to get, it takes to get to a billion, it is really amazing when you look at it in these terms.

Ms. BEAN. I think you have another chart, if I am correct, that talks about what that means in terms of our spending priorities and that while we are spending so much on interest—you do have it—it essentially shows that we are spending more on interest on the debt that we have created than we are on education, on homeland security and on veterans' benefits. And I don't think the American public fully appreciate what those opportunity costs are, that that lack of fiscal discipline has consequences.

And, sadly, we are not moving in the right direction as we look at the 2006 budget, which only projects a $423 billion spending deficit, but it is considerably more than that when we factor in AMT fixes, and when we factor in the cost of the war, which we stopped counting in October, even though that is running at $6 billion a week, that we are not even projecting the real deficits, that this chart is going to look worse if we continue down this path.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You are absolutely right. And I would like to welcome my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. RYAN

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. As you are talking about the interest on the debt, we have got to get the money from somewhere; and as we show, night in and night out, here on the 30-something group, we are borrowing a good deal of this money from China. And this is what has happened since President Bush took over, Madam Speaker.

In 2000, we borrowed $62 billion from China, and in 2005 it grew exponentially to $257 billion that we borrowed from China. So this is significant in so many ways, as the gentlewoman from Chicago, from Illinois stated, that we are paying the interest on the debt. And that is money that is not going to education. That is money that is not going to homeland security. That is money that is not going for health care, veterans, whatever the case may be.

So that is bad enough, but we are borrowing it from China, so now we are paying them interest on money and they are taking that and putting it into their state-owned companies and hurting American manufacturing and a lot of American small businesses that I am sure are in your district, as they are in mine. And all we are saying is, this is a competitive global economy. We can't have this disadvantage here of where we are going to borrow the money and they are going to take the interest out of the American economy and pump it back in, so they are winning twice.

Ms. BEAN. I think you make a valid point. Americans are very uncomfortable with that foreign debt, particularly that ratio, because it minimizes our leverage in other areas and I think even has national security implications over the long term that make us all uncomfortable.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely.

We have another chart that we talk about. The amount of debt that has been racked up in just the last few years, just in the last 4 or 5 years is actually greater than all of the 42 administrations before this one. I mean, that is a truly astonishing statistic. I was really incredibly surprised about that.

We also try to boil down the difference between the debt and the deficit. The deficit is related to the fact that we spend more than we take in.

Ms. BEAN. More than we are bringing in, absolutely.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right. The debt is the amount of money we borrow from other countries in order to remain fiscally solvent. I mean, that is truly amazing that we have so much debt that is owned by foreign nations.

And I don't know if the gentleman from Florida is ready to jump in yet, but he has an amazing chart, as well, that shows the United States of America and the percentage of the debt that is owned by other nations.

Ms. BEAN. I have some of those figures in the meantime, while you get the chart. It is actually, four lenders currently hold a total of $2.174 trillion of our public debt. Compare this to only 23 billion in foreign holdings in 1993. The top 10 current lenders are Japan at $682 billion; China at $249 billion; the UK at $223 billion; Caribbean banking centers, $115 billion; Taiwan, 71 billion; and it goes on and on.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It is just, we have got to get a handle on this. We have to restore some fiscal sanity. We have to put on some brakes and we need a little tough mother love. Maybe it is just that we need to bring a few more moms into this Chamber and we will have a little more tough love, because apparently the folks here are either out of practice, or I don't know, maybe the discipline around their homes isn't, you know, is not so strong.

Ms. BEAN. That is absolutely true. When I talk to the seventh graders and the middle schoolers and I say to them, Well, what would happen if your parents spend more money than they have? And they said, We will get debt. And I said, Then what would happen? And they said, Well, then people would start taking our stuff and then we might even go bankrupt.

□ 2230

And, again, they understand that we have not demonstrated more responsibility as a Congress, which, as I know, is frustrating for the American people.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Actually this is a little bit of a leap, but you and I sit on the Financial Services Committee together, and I know that you have been very involved in the data security issue because, in addition to the concern that Americans have over our debt and our deficit, they are also very concerned, and I know my constituents talk to me about this all the time, about the financial information that is out there about them personally is being compromised on a regular basis. And I know that you have really been a leader in that effort, and it would good for you to talk about it.

Ms. BEAN. It has been a big issue for constituents of all ages. We initially focused pretty much on seniors in the suburban districts that I represent because they have very much been a target; so what was done was we tried to introduce the legislation that is now moving through from our Financial Services Committee that we both serve on which will require, in addition to financial institutions, those database brokers that hold that personal financial data to have to let consumers know if there is a breach of that security information. But what we have found is there are other Internet challenges beyond data security in that regard. And I mentioned the Internet safety issue, and that has been a big issue that I have also been focusing on with both parents with some evening forums that we have done in our district and also with students themselves.

As I mentioned, when I was with those middle schoolers and I asked them, How many of you communicate on the Internet, not only with friends but with strangers on sites like the myspace.com and others out there, 75 percent of the hands go up, and we are talking 12-year-olds. And then you ask them, Do you appreciate the dangers? Only half of those hands went back up. So we were there to remind them of the things they have to be careful about.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is something that, with my 6-year-olds and 2-year-old coming up behind them, my husband and I are already talking about how to safeguard the information that they have access to and make sure we are aware and keep them and their computer in close proximity to us because there is so much out there. The Internet is an amazing thing, but there is so much out there. And whether it is data security or the security of our kids, we really have to make sure that we strike a balance, which is what you have been fighting for, and I have as well and other Democratic members on our committee. We have to strike a balance between making sure that business has the ability to operate and function and that we not unnecessarily restrict commerce on the Internet.

Ms. BEAN. That we inform families how to protect themselves and their communities. So I know we are not the only ones doing forums. I know many communities and schools on their own are beginning to roll out those kinds of educational awareness programs, and we want to continue to support that, absolutely.

We should talk briefly about, since it is the end of Women's History Month, whom we just had dinner with.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You are absolutely right. One of the most amazing things about having the privilege that we have to represent our communities in Washington is the people that we get to meet and interact with. And you and I, along with the other members of the bipartisan Women's Caucus, had an opportunity tonight to have dinner with former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman ever to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

Ms. BEAN. It was such an honor.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It was incredible. And I mentioned to her that I was 13 when she was first nominated by then-President Reagan and that my parents raised me to believe that young women, young girls could grow up and truly be anything they wanted to be and that was my first memory that that was the most clear example of that being true. And it was just a thrill to be able to share that with her tonight.

Ms. BEAN. It was so inspiring to hear you talk about how it affected you and how it affected all of us, regardless of all our ages, all these women Members of Congress who were so inspired by Sandra Day O'Connor and her leadership, her professionalism, and her dignity with which she served on the Supreme Court and what an inspiration to women she was. I was excited too that my daughters, who you know are here, not in the House Chamber at the moment, but who are here during their spring break vacation to join Mom out here in Washington and get a chance to meet her as well. I know for them that is going to be something they will remember for the rest of their lives. It was so exciting.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely. And I think it is only 70 women that serve with us in the House of Representatives out of 435 Members. You boil that down even further, there is only a handful of us who are moms with young children. There are only four of us that are younger than 40 years old. The thing that sticks in my mind from the time that we were elected 1½ years ago now is that story that they shared with us when we were at our orientation initially. If you recall, there is a statistic that they described there. There have been a little less than 12,000 people in American history who have served in the United States House of Representatives in all the 230-year history. And of that number, only 211 of them have been women and 70 are serving now.

So as we close out Women's History Month, Madam Speaker, and you are one of those women members in the Women's Caucus, and I remember talking with you, Madam Speaker, actually about when we heard that information. It was really astonishing.

Ms. BEAN. It was a number that reached out and grabbed you. Out of 12,000 total, only 200-plus were women.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. 211 women out of almost 12,000 people.

Ms. BEAN. Even with all that progress, I know it sometimes is shocking to some of those high school and middle school students that we do civics classes with. I know you do as I do, and I will say to them just out of curiosity, What percentage of the Congress do you think are women? And usually they will say 40 percent or 35 percent, and they are shocked to find it is still only 14 percent.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It shows you that we have really come a long way, but it really demonstrates why we need to continue to have Women's History Month and how it is so important to show young girls who are coming up behind us that they have the opportunity. They have to reach out and grab it. And it is our responsibility to pull other young women up on the platform with us now that we have been able to have an opportunity like this, not to be discriminatory against our male colleagues whom we are sharing the Chamber with this evening.

And actually the gentleman from Florida is the dad of a young girl who is a wonderful young woman and works hard in school, and I know that especially since you are the son of one of the House of Representatives' most revered women, former Congresswoman Carrie Meek, that surely you have something to add at the end of Women's History Month.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. We definitely appreciate the contributions of women. If it weren't for women, there would be no men. And the way I look at it, being a mamma's boy, Madam Speaker, and I will admit to that even though I am a big rusty Congressman now, we appreciate all the contributions of women. And it is definitely good having women in the House, in this House, and in the U.S. Senate.

I think it is also important to reflect on the future, the opportunities. We talk about innovation here within our caucus. We look for a bipartisan way of approaching that to make sure that we can have more engineers. There are very few women engineers that are in higher education right now, and we have to make sure that they have access and opportunity. We do not want women or men to go overseas to work when we should have jobs here in the United States of America. So when I look at the opportunities and the success that women have had in the past, I know that in the future we still have to fight and make sure that we have inclusion, and that is important.

Madam Speaker, I am also proud to say that there are a number of individuals, younger girls, that are trying to develop themselves right now educationally, and we need to make sure that we provide them opportunities for the arts, opportunities in the area of physical education, and to allow a childhood to be broader than just taking a standardized test. And that creativity is going to be important.

But I am so glad you and Congresswoman BEAN were really getting heavy, and I wanted to just jump in a little bit because I grew up in a household with three women, my mother and my two sisters; and, of course, you know I have my wife and my daughter and my son. So we look forward to making this celebration even greater and greater every time, but also we have to be mindful as policymakers of making sure that we allow women and young girls to be able to have opportunities greater than women before them.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. How about the amazing experience we had 2 weeks ago with the President of Liberia, the first woman president of an African nation who addressed the joint session?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Words are inadequate to even describe the way she explained to us her struggle as a woman, and it is hard for Liberia and the United States to be able to reflect on what her life was all about. She was sharing with us here, Madam Speaker, that you see the glory; but let me share the story with you and how she still has one foot in on the uneducated woman in Liberia and Africa and the Harvard-educated woman one foot in the United States. And I think it is important for us to remember that we have to remember when we have the opportunity to lead. And I think she is grounded in that, and I think Liberia is going to be better because of it.

And she shared with us that she didn't want our pity, but she wanted to be able to receive our assistance because they will perform. She talked about the reforms she has made in her administration, making sure that she has accountability, making sure that she wipes out and stamps out cronyism, and to make sure that children can smile again, and that is important. It is important to build an environment in a community where children feel safe of where they live and where they go to school and all of their contributions.

So I was excited about her visit. I got down here a little early so that I would get a chance to shake her hand; and I look forward, Madam Speaker, hopefully, that we can help Liberia, one of the true allies of the United States of America, and has been so for a very long time. As you know, Liberia is one of the countries where slaves, once they were freed, went back to Liberia, and many of them have American last names because they brought them back from slavery. So we do have a connection with that country.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It was incredibly moving for all of us. And she didn't mention it during her speech, but it was very fitting that she spoke during Women's History Month. And I am not certain of this, but she is certainly one, if not the only, woman leader to ever address a joint session of Congress, unless Margaret Thatcher had previously addressed a joint session. I have not found anyone who actually could recall a woman addressing a joint session. So it was just really historic in so many different ways.

I really also thought about how we could take several pages from her lesson book because a lot of things that she talked about, making sure that you did not only look out for the privileged and making sure that you thought about the needs of young children and young girls in particular who needed to get an education and have hope and opportunity. In this country so often it appears as though the leadership in this body and in this country now has had a lot of disregard, quite a bit of disregard, for those things. And I am certainly hopeful that our colleagues were listening very carefully to her remarks and took them to heart.

Ms. BEAN. You remind me again of being back in the classroom with these kids and talking about that Preamble to the Constitution which talks also about the decisions we make for ourselves and our posterity and how they even understood that the decisions we make as Americans, whether in Congress or at home in our communities, affect generations of future Americans.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Just to shift gears a little bit, recently we have been talking about homeland security quite a bit, and I am not sure if you had a chance to talk about that with the seventh graders when you were in the classroom with them, but since we just came off a week, and, Mr. MEEK, I know that you spent some time talking to your constituents as well, I was really struck when I was home last week during our recess by how many more of my constituents appealed to me to come back to Washington and make sure that I continue to fight to improve our national security, that their confidence in this government's ability to keep them safe has really been shaken on so many levels, not just in terms of protecting them from terrorists and from outside actors, but just generally had their confidence shaken in their government's ability to function.

□ 2245

I mean, the culture of corruption that has been hanging over this institution, sadly, and this administration, really has shaken the confidence, I think, of our constituents to their core.

We really need to return to a time when we can restore that confidence, let them know that not all of the people in this government are in it for the wrong reasons, and that, in particular, we do put a very high priority on our national security.

Ms. BEAN. Absolutely.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And that the port deal that was recently proposed, and, seemingly, not had an

interest in even a 45-day security review with a country that had been implicated in some way, in the 9/11 attacks, that is the kind of thing I heard about when I went home.

I heard about how they are really deeply concerned about the lack of port security. I mean, we have invested now, we have third-party validators that we talk about here on this floor.

Mr. MEEK, when I went down to the port of Miami after the revelation came about the DPW port deal, the port personnel there, in our home port, talked to me about the $18 billion that has been spent since 9/11 improving airport security, which is a good thing, and they are happy about that, and the less than $700 million that has been spent to improve our port security, the less than 6 percent of U.S. cargo that comes through our ports that is physically inspected, 95 percent not inspected.

The general lack of confidence in our homeland security, in our government's ability to do the right thing on all fronts, is really, I think, at least from when I went home, something that is really disturbing them.

Ms. BEAN. Across the country, not just in Florida, but I think homeland security is a big issue across the board. I hear it in my town hall meetings and in the forums I had in my district as well.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, the way I look at this whole homeland security issue, and I am concerned, and I was over in the Senate, had an opportunity to sit down with some reporters, with Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer and also Senator SCHUMER from New York and some others, and I think it is important that we look at this for what it is.

The line is 95 percent of the containers that come into our ports are not checked. That is the real issue here. We can't really jump up and down about the 5, some say 6. I think it is important for us to remember, Madam Speaker, that this bipartisan effort that we should have as it relates to homeland security, I speak from the standpoint of being a member of the Homeland Security Committee, having the opportunity to serve on the oversight subcommittee and management and integration.

I can tell you right now, for us to go to 100 percent check is not a hard thing for us to do. But we have to set our priorities on what we want to do and how we want to do it, and when we want to do it.

I think the American people want to be protected, and I think it is important that we provide them that opportunity. As you know, we cry out for bipartisan support in this. I will tell you, Democrat, Republican, Independent, Green Party, you name it, any individual that is thinking about voting, I can tell you this right now. They believe in the security of our country. They don't care who brings about this security, who appropriates this money, they just want the job done.

We don't need a situation where a container is being shipped from the port of Mobile, Alabama, or through Illinois, what have you, and end up, God forbid, some sort of chemical agent is in this container because it was not checked.

Too many people in the world know that we don't check 95 percent of our containers, and that is dangerous on both sides of the ball. I think we are far beyond politics when we start talking about making sure that we increase our containers, container security and screening our containers. There are other countries that have 100 percent check.

I think that if other countries can do it, I know that the United States of America can do it. But it is all about our priorities. It is about how we set them, and it is about how we work together.

Unfortunately, we have some difficulty in that area right now, but hopefully we will be able to improve on that through pressure from the American people.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. MEEK, the thing that keeps coming to mind when I think about the comparison between the stress that has been put on airport security versus port security, if you ask, if you go out into the country and ask most Americans the difference that they have seen since 9/11 and in security in general, basically about the only thing that Americans could say that they could identify is they have to remove their shoes before they walk through a magnetometer at the airport.

I think most people really feel today that we should not be resting the sum total of our national security on taking your shoes off as you go through a metal detector. American people expect quite a bit more than that when it comes to homeland security, especially if you live near a port, like my district includes two, Port Everglades and the Port of Miami.

We have so many, so many potential openings around this country, and vulnerabilities. To focus all of our attention on only the ones that are most visible that provide the leadership here, the ability to say, see, we did that, we have taken care of that, and just provide surface reassurance about homeland security, that is the difference between words and action.

It is the difference between nice commentary in speeches and actually backing up those words with action.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If the gentlewoman would yield, I think the great example that we have used here a million times is Katrina.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Exactly.

Mr. RYAN of OHIO. You guys are from Florida. We are from the Midwest, so we don't have hurricanes.

Ms. BEAN. Absolutely.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We have a ton of snow, but no hurricanes. The fact that this government had days to prepare for Katrina and couldn't figure out how to do it. Now, we are talking about something that may happen that we will not have 5 days' notice to plan for it. It is difficult for us to understand, but this needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed immediately.

Because the fact of the matter is, the American people were counting on us. Our first obligation here is to make sure that we are protecting the American people and to have 95 percent of the cargo not inspected, I think, is a dereliction of duty on our part. I will be happy to yield to our friend.

Ms. BEAN. I think I am going to yield back the balance of my time, if that is okay. But I want to thank you, my colleagues, for letting me join you during this 30-something hour, my first time joining you even though you let an older Member join you.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Well, you have two beautiful young daughters waiting in the cloakroom for you.

Ms. BEAN. That is exactly right. That is why I am yielding back my time. I appreciate you letting me join you today, in the interest of not only my kids, but the seventh graders we talked about today. It has been very important.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It was wonderful to have you join us. I will see you at home.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. FOXX). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, this is 30-something Part 2 here. I am glad Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ and Ms. BEAN had the opportunity to claim the first hour. I see Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ is proudly wearing her Florida pin, her Gators pin.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Go Gators.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. They are in the money, and I believe Florida will be able to do some great things.

Let me just say, Madam Speaker, as you know, we come to the floor to talk about a number of things, talk about what we as Democratic Members here in the House have to offer the American people. We want to make sure that there is no secret about our plans, about our initiatives, and what we are trying to do to be able to make sure that this country gets back on fiscal discipline, track, be more physically, fiscally sound, I am sorry, I am trying to get it out, it is a little late, but also just to make sure we are accountable to the American people, not just accountable to the Democratic citizens of the United States of America, but to make sure that we are accountable to all Americans.

I think that is the approach that we are taking, through the polling that I am seeing and reading, not only in periodicals, but also that I am getting