American home, every American business, and every American community.

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

(Mr. MCHENRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. RAMSTAD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remark.)

COMMEMORATING MILITARY SERVICE OF FOUNDERS OF STATE OF GEORGIA AIR NATIONAL GUARD FIGHTER AIRCRAFT WING, 54TH FIGHTER WING.

Ms. MCKINNEY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to address the House out of order for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

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

Ms. MCKINNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend, celebrate and commemorate the military service of Brigadier General ''Big John'' Collins, Lieutenant General Cuthbert A. ''Bill'' Patillo, Major General Charles C. ''Buck'' Patillo and Major General Joel B. ''Bill'' Paris.

These four generals were, in the year 1946, founders of the first State of Georgia Air National Guard Fighter Aircraft Wing, the 54th Fighter Wing.

Big John Collins is a friend of mine. This friendship began when my efforts resulted in him getting his long overdue war medals. Big John had tried for 20 years to get his medals. And he was a pilot. Bill and Buck Patillo are identical twin brothers who, along with Bill Paris, flew Republic Aircraft Corporation P–47 Thunderbolt fighter aircraft. These four pilots formed a tight ''Diamond'' attack formation.

These four pilots were ordered to fly at air shows around the State of Georgia to boost enlistments in the Georgia National Guard. The idea was a great success; so successful, in fact, that the increase in Georgia enlistments came to the attention of the National Guard Bureau at the U.S. Air Force headquarters at the Pentagon. This work of these four pilots was the foundation upon which the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds Precision Flying Team was created to rank along with the Blue Angels Precision Flying Team of the U.S. Navy. Air Force Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg credited the Georgia Air National Guard with being the founders of the Air Force Thunderbirds Precision Flying Team.

All four of these pilots are alive today. They are healthy, and they are happy to have their service recognized in this way. Although the Patillo twins now live in Valrico, Florida, near McDill Air Force Base, I am proud to say that they were born in my district in Decatur, Georgia. Bill Paris was born in my home State and still lives in Georgia, in Alpharetta. Big John Collins, my friend, was born in Oklahoma, raised in Bradenton, Florida, but saw the light and found his way to Georgia where he has lived since 1939. I think he found our sweet Georgia peaches too irresistible to leave.

Bill Paris was a leading fighter pilot ace destroying nine Japanese aircraft. Bill Patillo destroyed a Japanese version of the German ME 262 rocket-powered fighter, one of only three of such fighters destroyed worldwide in World War II. Plus Bill destroyed five other Japanese aircraft. Buck Patillo destroyed five Japanese aircraft. And big John Collins, my constituent who has now become my friend, shot down three Japanese fighter aircraft. Sergeant James Campbell shot down two Japanese fighter aircraft. Sergeant Donald Schopp shot down one Japanese fighter, making a total of six enemy fighters downed on one mission. Plus one Japanese war ship exiting Simpson Harbor at full speed was destroyed. Big John Collins led an attack on Tobera Air Drome, destroying numerous Japanese aircraft on the ground.

Bill and Buck Patillo, Bill Paris and Big John Collins collectively received the following combat medals: 4 Silver Stars, 9 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 9 Legion of Merits, 36 Air Medals, 5 Distinguished Service Medals, 9 Presidential Unit Citations, 4 Government of the Philippines, 2 Croix de Guerre with Palm, US SWPA medal with 9 major campaign battle stars, 121 various noncombat service medals.

Sixty years after the conclusion of World War II, all Americans should renew and rededicate their honor for the noble sacrifices, valorous deeds and enduring accomplishments of military veterans of what has become known as the greatest generation.

I would also like to commend my sister colleague, Congresswoman MARCY KAPTUR, who just spoke, who fought hard to get a memorial on the Mall for them, the greatest generation, including for my four Georgia pilots.

Congratulations to them all for a job well done.

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

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. OWENS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. BLUMENAUER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Speaker, Members of the House, it is a pleasure to be here tonight as the 30-something Working Group takes the floor each night to talk about our concerns, both as it relates to our generation and our generation's perspective, and also as it relates to the issues that are important to America.

I can tell you that our thanks goes out to our minority leader, Ms. PELOSI and Mr. HOYER. We have been given the privilege to come to the floor and talk about the concerns of all Americans. And, boy, Mr. RYAN, who I am pleased that you have joined me once again tonight, we have been spending quite a bit of time together in the last 14 months since I joined you in the United States Congress, and it has truly been an honor and a pleasure.

There is sure a lot to talk about. We are facing so many different crises, so many different crises of the confidence of Americans, that it is hard to know where to begin sometimes when we take the floor each night. But I know that the thing that is most on the minds of at least the constituents that I represent, and I am certain the ones that you do, because no matter where we go now, particularly in the last 2 weeks when we were home, gas prices and the energy crisis, because there is no other term you can apply to it, that we are in right now is foremost on the minds of Americans. It is virtually impossible for many Americans to be able to afford to get themselves around their communities. Even when they have mass transit, we are literally stuck in the present. We are stuck in neutral, and it is time to shift into overdrive when it comes to looking towards the future and pursuing alternative energy sources.

I mean, when is there going to be some leadership on the Republican side of the aisle here? When is there going to be, instead of political scrambling at the last minute, which is what we have seen in the last several days when now we know they have reached the point of no return in terms of being forced to respond to what is going on with gas prices, when are we going to see some leadership step up? When are we going to see some backbone?

It is just astonishing to me that I guess our Republican colleagues are willing to ignore the concerns of their constituents, ignore the plight that they are facing. You can't turn on the news anywhere in this country and not see a reporter sticking a microphone in one of our constituents' faces and saying, you know, how are you able to afford to fill up your tank? It is mind-boggling.

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. So many of our constituents rely on travel to make a living. And I was talking to a gentleman last night who worked for a lab, who was doing a lot of traveling between the labs. And he is charging 30, 40 bucks a day, and that is just the cost of doing business. And trucking, you know, people in the trucking industry are having a difficult time. But average people, as you said, just trying to make a living and get to work, are having a difficult time.

I think this comes down to a couple of different issues, Madam Speaker. This comes down to leadership. And this comes down to, again, and I hate to say it, but the secretive way in which this administration and this Congress do business.

□ 1945

And the leadership, the President, here we are talking about alternative energies. How long have we been talking about figuring out how we are going to find alternative energy sources and what we are going to do and everything else? But yet this Republican majority has not been able to come up with any kind of vision. And the really terrible part was when the President was here for the State of the Union and he said we are going to come up with an alternative energy program that will cut in half by 2025.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. To end the addiction to oil

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. To end our addiction to oil by 2025, if we get around to it, and it will only be in half. And there is not the urgency that I think our constituents are feeling right now. Let us do something. You have the ability as President, especially after 9/11. He could have marshaled our country and put us in another direction to say we want to reduce our dependency on foreign oil, we want to reduce the cost of gas, and we want to move in another direction. He could have done that because we were all ready to do whatever he wanted us to do. We would have walked to work. We would have rode bikes. We would have done whatever the President asked us to do. But he did not challenge us to do anything.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And you sort of scratch your head and wonder who is it that he is listening to? Who is it that he is hearing? Because it is certainly not the average American.

I am a mini van mom, as you heard me say here on this floor. I drive a mini van and I am schlepping my kids all over the place, soccer and baseball and dance class and all that stuff, and let me tell you it is no less than $50 to fill up my minivan every single time I need to fill up. And fuel economy is one thing and one could argue, okay, DEBBIE, you should drive a smaller car, you should do what you can, take some ownership and some accountability and try to consume less gas. But when you have three kids, I have twin almost 7-year-olds and a 2½-year-old. There is only so small a vehicle that you can drive with all the stuff and getting your kids around and having to carpool and throw other kids in the car with you. I mean some of the external advice is just not doable. So when you need to drive a vehicle of a certain size, out of necessity, it is going to cost you $50.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I have a Pontiac Vibe. You could not handle your kids in the little Vibe because I barely fit in the thing myself. I have to sit in the back seat and drive from the back seat so my legs fit all right. But, yes, exactly. It is that kind of lack of compassion, lack of understanding of what average people go through, a total disconnect; kind of like when the Vice President said a few years ago, conservation, that is a good personal virtue to have, but as a Nation it is not really a good policy. Wait a minute. It is not maybe the be-all, end-all, but it is a piece of this puzzle that we need to put together to figure out how we are going to do this.

And I think it is important for us to share not only the costs that you have there, and I will let you show that, but then I want to talk a little bit about back to 2001 when this whole thing was concocted and all this was happening. So go ahead.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely. Let us do that. Because the thing that astonished me was that only yesterday did the President make a statement about doing something. And believe me, that statement was only a token statement. He laid out some four-point plan where he is going to try to hold suddenly the oil companies accountable. Holding them accountable? I mean, give me a break. It is a little late in the game now that we are 6 months from an election. Is that not convenient? Is that not nice?

I will tell you I have only been here about 14 months and I am less senior than you. You have been here for at least a couple of years before me. During the time that you have been here, that I have been here, where has the outrage been? Where has the outrage been?

We are only going back to 2002, but in 2002 the summer gas prices, the average price of a gallon of gas was $1.39. You could hear a pin drop, it was so quiet, the reaction from the administration. Okay. No outrage from $1.39 a gallon. Then $1.57 a gallon, a third more, just a summer later. No end in sight. No proposal. No initiative to ease the burden and head this problem off at the pass. A summer later, 2004, $1.90. Now we are approaching almost $2, almost, but one-and-a-half times the cost from the summer before that. No end in sight. No proposal to stem the tide. No proposal to urge the oil companies to diversify or pursue alternative energy sources.

Go to 2005, last summer. Now, last summer was when you really knew that the pressure began to rise. I mean, the boiling point was reached last summer. Last summer was when I really thought okay, there is no way that they can ignore this anymore; yet ignore they did. They reached $2.37 a gallon as the average price of a gallon of gas. And simultaneously last year, in my first year in Congress, two energy bills, two energy bills passed that gave 16 billion, with a ''b'', dollars away to the oil companies.

What we talked about last night I will reiterate again: The United States Government owns the areas in which we allow the oil companies to drill. Whether it is the drilling rights that we grant them in the gulf, in bodies of water, or on land, we own them. And they are supposed to pay us royalties and make tax payments to us in exchange for their being able to drill there. Those two bills that we passed last year, Mr. RYAN, forgave those taxes, essentially gave the oil companies those rights for free. And we have a chart that we will put up. Hopefully we will be able to get access to it. It is stuck in an office, but we will get that chart up here in the hour after next. RECORD profits, both individual quarterly profits that the oil companies made and historical record profits. We are giving tax breaks to companies that are making record profits and providing no relief, no assistance, no urgency to the American people who are struggling to get themselves to their jobs, to get their kids to school? Where is the outrage? It is just of the oil companies, for the oil companies, by the oil companies. That is the kind of policy that is made here.

And before I yield to you, to add insult to injury, on top of that legislation, forgiving the taxes, if you recall, one of those energy bills was one of the bills that the Republican leadership held open the vote for 40 minutes, twisting the arms of our Republican colleagues who knew that bill was the wrong thing to do, who knew we should be doing something about an energy policy, who had their arms wrenched behind their backs. And we watched our vote board that hangs above us, that lights up above us, the Christmas lights, red to green, green to red, all

over the map for 40 minutes until they got their way. Forty minutes. The rubber-stamp Republican Congress did the bidding of their leadership and the bidding of the President and the bidding of the oilmen in the White House. It is disgusting.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. When the average person hears that their tax dollars that they work hard to make and they send the Republican Congress down here to spend on Medicare and defense and all the other things, when they hear that $16 billion of that went to subsidize the oil companies when they have the highest profits that they have ever had, that is the outrage. And I think the American people are outraged. The Republican bobble-head Congress here who will say yes to whatever President Bush wants, I do not feel the outrage yet from them. And I think this is what our friend, former Speaker Newt Gingrich, said about the Republican Congress, that they are seen by the country as being in charge of a government that cannot function. This is what is happening here. When you have the leader of the Republican revolution that has turned into a devolution saying the government just cannot function, they do not know how to run the government, you are facing it every day at the pumps, Madam Speaker, and the American people are facing this every single day at the pumps.

I want to talk just for a second, because I thought it was interesting that the President said with great enthusiasm that he wants to hold the oil companies accountable. So, Madam Speaker, I have a suggestion. Now, let me share some information with our colleagues here. We have heard a lot about this too. When they were trying to decide what they were going to do for the energy bills years ago in 2001, the Vice President was having meetings that no one knew about, and he was having them with the oil executives, which should not surprise anybody, figuring out that the President and the Vice President both came out of the oil industry. So what has recently happened is that a White House document came out that showed that executives, and this is a third-party validator, this is the Washingtonpost.com, a great newspaper here in town. The White House document shows that executives from big oil companies met with the Vice President's energy task force in 2001, something long suspected by environmentalists but denied as recently as last week by industry officials.

Now, here is what the document says, just so we can get into it. Because this sounds just like Katrina, this sounds just like the war, this sounds just like the Medicare bill, this sounds just like every piece of legislation that has come out of this Congress that the President has pushed. It has been done under a cloud of deceit, Madam Speaker, misleading statements to not only the United States Congress and Members of the United States Congress, but to the American people, Mr. DELAHUNT. But to the American people.

And let me share, as recently as just last week, this document that came from the White House, obtained by the Washington Post, shows that officials from ExxonMobil, Conoco before its merger with Phillips, Shell Oil Company, and BP America, Incorporated, met in the White House complex with CHENEY's aides who were developing a national energy policy, part of which became law. So you would think, well, the Vice President's staff is meeting with BP Oil executives.

Last week in a joint hearing of the Senate Energy and Commerce Committee, the CEO of ExxonMobil, Chevron, and ConcocoPhillips said their firms did not participate, Mr. DELAHUNT, in the 2001 task force. We have got somebody telling us a falsehood, someone misleading us.

So if the President wants to hold the oil companies accountable, let me recommend, Madam Speaker, that people can be fined or imprisoned for up to 5 years for making ''any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or representation to Congress.'' So everyone denied they had anything to do with this meeting in front of a Senate panel of the Energy and Commerce Committee, and they were there, and we have got all these gas prices and we are wondering about price gouging and everything else, Madam Speaker, and the oil companies are saying, well, we are not price gouging. Well, you know what? Maybe we just do not believe you, because you have a track record here of misleading statements, secrecy. And it hurts me to say that people in Youngstown, Ohio are forced to foot the bill here.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I yield to Mr. DELAHUNT.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Well, I can assure you, Mr. RYAN and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, there will not be any oversight. There will be no investigation because this Congress simply will not do it.

If there is one theme that has characterized the 6 years of this administration and the 6 years of control of the House of Representatives and the United States Senate by the Republican Party, it is a lack of transparency, is secrecy, is a refusal to be held accountable. And much of the responsibility comes right here to this institution.

Now, let me just divert for one moment and cite the example of accountability and oversight in the case of the war in Iraq.

□ 2000

Both the decisionmaking process that led us to intervene militarily in Iraq and what has happened since the so-called major combat phase was announced.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. ''Mission accomplished.''

Mr. DELAHUNT. It was announced by President Bush as he flew in and landed on that aircraft carrier saying the mission was accomplished.

I happened to be the senior Democrat on a subcommittee of the International Relations Committee, that in that particular capacity I, along with other Members, Democratic Members, have requested again and again and again an opportunity to ask some questions about the whole array of issues, the fraud and the corruption that has absolutely gone wild. It is the Wild West. Everybody that has come back from Iraq that has been in a position to observe and witness the corruption by contractors, by Iraqis, by Americans, by other foreign nationals says it is unlike anything we have ever seen.

Well, you know how many hearings we have had? Let me rephrase that. Something unusual happened today, more than 3 years after the end of the so-called combat phase. The House International Relations Committee had a hearing on Iraq, and witnesses from the administration actually appeared and testified. I am not even going to comment on that hearing, but I would commend Members from both sides of the aisle to go and to read the transcript in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, because we had an opportunity to ask some questions. Clearly, clearly, at least on the Democratic side, no one was satisfied with the answers, but we had the opportunity.

Madam Speaker, this is 3 years after March and May of 2003; 3 years later.

Now, an effort was made by some of our colleagues saying, well, we have had hearings. Well, we have had hearings, but I don't know where we had them, because we certainly haven't had them in a room that the American people can observe what the answers were.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. If the gentleman would yield for 1 second, there is a little bit of irony here. Today is April 26, 2006, and we are about 6 months from the election. Isn't it interesting that today, suddenly 6 months before the election, as the heat is intensifying, and elections get closer, and the concern increases on the part of our Republican colleagues about the likelihood of their losing quite a few seats as a result of their not doing what they should have been doing, it becomes more and more of a likelihood and a reality that hearings are beginning to be held, the President is rolling out plans to address the energy crisis and gas prices?

You know, the American people are a little bit smarter than that. They get it. They get when scrambling is going on, when people are trying to, hmmm, I guess the best way to put it is to save their tuchases. That is a Yiddish term, for those of you that don't know what it means.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I think we know what it means.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But the reality of it is it isn't even the issues themselves, because they stonewalled on the 9/11

Commission until public pressure compelled them to agree to have an independent commission; they would not release the e-mails and other documents in terms of both before Katrina landed on the Gulf States and afterwards from the White House, and they refused to do an independent commission there; and in Iraq we have had no hearings until today.

I thought it was interesting that, like I said, some of the Republican Members said, well, we have had hearings. Well, the subcommittee that has jurisdiction, of course, is the Middle East Subcommittee, and the ranking member Mr. ACKERMAN went through his own records and looked all through the year 2003 to see how many hearings even peripherally might have been related to Iraq. None. None.

In 2004, in all of 2004, that particular subcommittee had one hearing related to Iraq, but it was about the United States and the Iraqi marshlands, an environmental response.

In June of 2005, the next year, there was a hearing on Iraq's transition to democracy. Nothing about all of the other obvious issues that were begging out to be addressed; the competence of the civilian leadership and the role of Secretary Rumsfeld and the disagreements with the military that have performed so well in terms of their service in Iraq.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I was just going to suggest that you put some of the comments from the generals up on the easel.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Do you know what? We really do have some heroes in this country, people who will speak out and tell the truth and who are not afraid of laying it on the line. If I could indulge you, Mr. RYAN, and you, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I think we have got to recognize what these nonpoliticians, who were leaders in Iraq, the men and women who served this country, had to say about the competence of Secretary Rumsfeld and the civilian leadership in the Department of Defense. If you would indulge me.

Back in March of this year, Major General Paul Eaton, who was responsible, by the way, for the training of the Iraqi security forces, had this to say in reference to the Defense Secretary. Now, these are his words; not my words, but his words. ''He has shown himself incompetent strategically, operationally and tactically, and is far more than anyone responsible for what has happened to our important mission in Iraq. Mr. Rumsfeld must step down.''

That was a Marine general, highly decorated, well-respected and regarded by his colleagues and peers, Paul Eaton.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. While you are putting up the other very damning commentary from the myriad of generals that have called for either Secretary Rumsfeld's resignation or for the President to ask for that resignation, I think it is important to point out that in the face of that unprecedented pressure and unprecedented nonpolitical motivation, because certainly the motives of retired generals could not be questioned, the status quo is being preserved, a steadfast, benign status quo, and that is just yet another example of the bobblehead, rubber-stamp Republicans.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Not a single hearing. I would think, Madam Speaker, if there was a genuine desire on the part of this House to examine in depth the truth of what is happening in Iraq and in the real world, we would have those generals, Madam Speaker, come before the appropriate committees of this House and inquire of them why they make these statements, such as the statement last Thursday by retired Army General John Batiste, again Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld. Again, I am quoting this American hero.

''We went to war with a flawed plan that didn't account for the hard work to build the peace after we took down the regime. We also served under a Secretary of Defense who didn't understand leadership, who was abusive, who was arrogant, who didn't build a strong team.''

Now, you know, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, that the Defense Secretary has come here on the floor of this House, Madam Speaker, in this well, and behind closed doors has briefed us, but we never hear from those generals. We never hear from the generals, Madam Speaker.

Why? Why can't we have a hearing and invite Paul Eaton, a former general in the United States Marine Corps, and Retired Army General John Batiste? Why can't we do that? Is that asking too much, Madam Speaker? Is that asking too much, to let the American people hear for themselves? If there is an answer to that, will someone please give it to me? We haven't had the exercise of any oversight on Iraq ever. Ever.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You know what else I noticed in the last 14 months since I have been here in my experience is that we haven't had a single Republican come to the defense of these generals or agree, step forward and agree with them. My belief in terms of our role here as public servants is that sometimes you can't be afraid to stand alone. You have to be willing to stand up for the courage of your convictions, even when no one is behind you, because you are the one that has to wake up and look at yourself in the mirror in the morning and know you have done the right thing, and you are only with yourself at the end of the day when you put your head on that pillow.

What I have noticed is not a single colleague of ours on the Republican side of the aisle has stepped forward and said, yes, it is time for Secretary Rumsfeld to resign; it is time for some fresh blood, for some new ideas, for some acknowledgment that it is not going in the right direction.

Why? Because this is what we have on the other side of the aisle in this Chamber. We have bobblehead Republicans. We have people who just shake their head up and down and up and down and are willing to just rubber-stamp whatever it is that they are asked to support, or oppose, for that matter. It is astonishing.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But don't we owe it to the American people, Madam Speaker, to hear directly in the United States Congress at a full committee hearing from General Paul Eaton, from Army Major General John Batiste, and also from Marine Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold? Again speaking about the leadership of Donald Rumsfeld, these are his words. ''My sincere view is that the commitment of our forces to this fight was done with a casualness and swagger that are the special province of those who never had to execute these missions or bury the results.''

□ 2015

Those are very, very powerful words. This is a very tragic and special moment in American history, Madam Speaker. We are at war. We have lost thousands of men and women in this war. The American taxpayers have spent hundreds of billions of dollars in this war.

And, Madam Speaker, why can't we hear from those generals in a public forum? Why? Well, I am not going to reach a conclusion as to what the answer is.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I know the answer. For the same reason that there has been no accountability, for nothing that Congress should have been exercising its role of oversight of this administration. Where were the independent hearings as far as Katrina? Where were the hearings for the culture of corruption? Where is the Ethics Committee and its total lack of operation in investigating case after case of Members on the other side of the aisle who have violated and been accused of violating the public trust? Where has the outrage been?

The answer is the same, Mr. DELAHUNT. They do not care, on the Republican side of the aisle, to exercise Congress' oversight role. They have ceded, willingly, the legislative branch's oversight role, ceded the authority to the executive branch.

And you know, I have been a legislator for 13 years, it is almost 14 years now. It is the thing that I believe we should most jealously guard, our oversight role, the system of checks and balances, our ability to hold the administration, the executive branch, accountable, even when it is our own administration.

I mean, there certainly was not any hesitation on the part of this Republican Congress to hold the administration accountable and have plenty of hearings from the most minute and unimportant to the significant when there was a Democratic President. But

oh, no, as soon as there is a Republican President, we do not need to ask him any questions, we are just going to let them do whatever they want.

Why? Because they are perfectly happy to be a rubber-stamp Republican Congress. I think the American people are sick and tired of not having people here that serve in the Congress that they send here to stand up and do the right thing, express outrage, understand what they are going through.

I mean, I do not know how some of the constituents, the citizens in America, are tolerating their Member that they have elected staying silent on all of these important issues. I do not get it.

Mr. DELAHUNT. You know, I think it is important to understand that in a democracy, if we are going to enjoy the full measures of citizenship, that those in power, those elected representatives of the people have to act in a transparent way and have to exercise that responsibility to hold accountable all those representatives of government transparency.

I mean, we can have disagreements, and we can do it in a very respectful fashion. But if we do not have the information, if we do not have the facts, if we never hear the truth, then we are doing a disservice to the American people, because we are denying them the opportunity to enjoy the full measure of being an American citizen.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Well, you know, it is getting ready to happen again tomorrow. We are going to watch them deliberately squander yet another opportunity.

Do you remember several months ago when the Jack Abramoff scandal broke, and he was exposed, and indicted and arrested, and decided to plead guilty and began implicating people who he worked with and who he collaborated with? There were calls from the Republican leadership that they were going to do something about this, make the process more transparent, restore ethics to undergird the American public's confidence in this system.

And that was all supposed to culminate in tomorrow's legislation that we will hear in this body, what the Republican version of lobbying and ethics reform is, Mr. DELAHUNT.

We are all about third-party validators in the 30-something Working Group. I have third-party validators just initially to compare Republican proposals on lobbying reform with the proposals that are coming out of the United States Senate, from the Republican leadership there versus the proposals coming out of the Republican House.

And this was on the front page of USA Today just a couple of days ago, on April 24, just on Monday, the two proposals coming out of the two Republican-led Chambers. Look at the differences, Mr. DELAHUNT, that we have here.

This is the difference between the lobbying legislation the Senate and the House of Representatives, the gift limits that are proposed in the legislation coming from the Senate.

And, again, this is right off the front page of USA Today. The Senate version of the bill would say that Members could receive no gifts from lobbyists to Members or their aides. None. A ban.

The House version of the bill tomorrow, we would have no change from the $50 limit that is current law. That is transparency? That is a restoration of America's confidence that Members are up here doing the job that they were elected to do? Status quo. That is the reform that we are going to consider tomorrow.

The lobbying ban. Right now, former Members have a 1-year ban before they can come and represent clients in front of Congress and contact their former colleagues and advocate on behalf of those clients. The Senate would double that time to 2 years, at least, so that there would be some distance between the time of service that a Member was here and the people that they served with.

And so the idea behind a 2-year ban, Mr. DELAHUNT, is that at least some of the issues that that Member was voting on, that the Members that they were working with, that there is some distance between that time, and that way hopefully you are not going to have undue influence occur. The Senate doubled that to 2 years.

In the House, again this is off the front page of USA Today, there would be no change. The current 1-year time limit would still remain in place.

Let us look at congressional travel. Travel sponsored by lobbyists, again off the front page, in that same graph on the front page of USA Today. The Senate legislation that deals with travel by Members sponsored by lobbyists would say that they have to have preapproval in order for a Senator to travel with lobbyists, on a lobbyist-sponsored trip. The Senate legislation said that that would have to be preapproved by their Ethics Committee.

You know, interesting proposal. There are several ways you can do it. We will go one step further in our proposal, which we will go through in a second. But the House version, this is funny; it is so sad that it is funny. The House proposal tomorrow that we are considering on travel says suspend travel until December 15.

What are they hoping, that we get past the election and people will forget? Or maybe we get past the election and it will not matter anymore and they can just go back to taking trips to Scotland and playing golf when they are supposed to be doing the people's business?

I am not sure who they are trying to kid. It is just truly unbelievable, Mr. DELAHUNT. Their nerve is amazing. So I just wanted to outline that is the difference between the Republican proposals.

Now, I want to just take a minute and go through what the Democrats would do. You know we hear so much that, you know, all the Democrats do is criticize and, you know, we do not have a plan for this, that, or the other thing, which of course we spend each night here trying to outline the plans that we do have, and debunk that oft-repeated myth, which is truly mythological, because we have numerous plans which we will continue to outline.

But let us look at the House Democrats' lobbying and ethics reform proposal, where we would truly crack down and get tough on the culture of corruption and cronyism that exists here. It is called the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act. If that is what we are considering tomorrow, which I truly wish we were, then the gift limits that Democrats proposed would be a ban on gifts including meals, tickets, entertainment, travel from lobbyists and nongovernmental organizations that retain or employ lobbyists. Because, you know, what we could debate, we could have a legitimate debate, I think, Mr. DELAHUNT, on whether or not particularly nongovernmental organizations should be able to sponsor Member travel, those educational trips that I have taken in the time I have been here, once or twice, that are truly helpful.

But, you know, unfortunately, you know that old expression where they talk about the one bad apple spoils it for the whole bunch. In order to restore Americans' confidence in their government, a change like we are proposing, just a total ban would do that. You got to go that far. But that is not what we are considering tomorrow. We are considering just holding off on travel until December 15, squeezing our eyes shut and hoping the problem goes away.

A lobbying ban. We House Democrats would propose, do propose, a 2-year ban for former lawmakers, executive branch officials and senior staff, that they could not represent clients and contact former colleagues for 2 years. It would eliminate floor and gym privileges for former Members who are now lobbyists.

It would require Members and senior staff to disclose outside job negotiations, because the K Street Project, the infamous K Street Project where you have the revolving door of negotiations going on, while staff, while Republican staff are still here working for the public, negotiating lucrative private deals to leave here and then, you know, within a year, representing clients and lobbying their former colleagues.

And the pressure that the K Street Project applies for those private firms to hire those Republican staffers, we would end that practice in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act.

And finally, these are just highlights. Actually this proposal is far more comprehensive than what is outlined here. Travel sponsored by lobbyists. We would prohibit lobbyists from planning or participating in congressional travel.

It would require Members to pay the full charter cost when using corporate jets for official travel and to disclose relevant costs in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. Literally, the piece of the legislation we are going to consider tomorrow, the only change, is corporate travel; in other words, when a Member is using the private plane provided by a lobbyist. Sometimes, you know, a Member needs to get somewhere quicker than commercial travel allows them to. The proposal tomorrow only prohibits the lobbyists from traveling with the Member on the plane.

They can still do it exactly as they do it now, but they cannot go with the Member. That is the accountability that is provided for in this bill. It is a joke.

You know the American people are not going to buy it. You know, the finger in the dike for the next 6 months and hoping that that gets them through. I mean, I am hopeful that that does not work. It appears that the American people finally get it and that they will be behind us in moving this country in a new direction. Sorry I took so long. That has been growing inside me.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you for that exposition. I just want to return to the original theme. We are connecting the dots, because I think really what is required is an openness that heretofore has been missing. And I honestly believe that the dreadfully low polling numbers for the institution would be changed dramatically.

□ 2030

In other words, rather than 23 percent of the American people approving the performance of Congress, 23 percent as opposed to two-thirds of the American people disapproving of the performance of Congress, can only change with transparency and aggressive oversight.

By aggressive oversight, we don't simply mean partisanship and partisan attacks. We mean putting it all out on the table, letting men like these three generals and many others. I think of the former AID director, the Agency for International Development, who is currently at Georgetown University doing a professorship, who recently made a statement saying that the reconstruction effort in Iraq is plagued by incompetence and turf battles within the administration. It would be healthy.

It would be healthy for us, for the institution, because you said something earlier about the confidence of the American people. If we are going to change those poll numbers, we have to come together, assume our responsibilities and become aggressive about holding the executive branch accountable, holding ourselves accountable, as you just pointed out, and reviewing the performance of the judiciary.

We could debate about it, but let the American people hear directly, without the filter of partisanship, whether it be Democratic or Republican. Let them hear directly as to the observations of those that are involved in whatever the issue is.

I mean, I would suggest that in the aftermath of the passage of the so-called prescription drug benefit program, that aggressive oversight would have entailed bringing before the appropriate committee of Congress those who are involved in hiding from the United States House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate what the estimates were in the administration of the cost of that particular plan.

We should have all been outraged. We should have demanded to hear from the participants, but we didn't. We failed, I would suggest. And know what we have today? We have the lowest rating, I believe, since I have been here, by the American people, according to a poll that I just saw before coming over here, of the performance of the United States Congress. We are a democracy. We have got to become institutionalist once more.

We have got to defend the prerogative of the Congress, whoever is in the White House.

I will tell you what I have learned, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, is that when one party controls all of the levers of power in a democracy, accountability just disappears. I am not saying that is peculiar to Republicans. Maybe it is innate just in human nature. We don't want to embarrass our President, if he is of the same party, but we have got to restore a sense of pride in the institution. That is not happening here today.

One hearing, one legitimate hearing on Iraq in 3 years? Meanwhile, thousands of military personnel have died, and we are spending close to $1 trillion already, and more in the pipeline. It is not right. That is why the American people are losing confidence in the U.S. Congress.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. There are lots of reasons, Mr. DELAHUNT, some of the ones you outlined, but many more reasons why the American people are losing confidence in our ability to make sure that we respond to their concerns. Here are some key facts that I pulled together that just might explain why people are so frustrated, aside from the major issues that we have been outlining here tonight.

Just for example, median income, median family income has dropped every year of the Bush administration. Median wages have dropped 6 percent from 2000 to 2004 according to the Federal Reserve Board. A typical middle-class family, and this is the 30-something Working Group, and we just want to provide some highlights of the things that this generation is struggling to deal with, the typical middle-class family is working longer than in 2001 just to pay the bills.

Health care costs have skyrocketed, with a typical family paying $632 more for health insurance, compared with 2000. The number of Americans without health insurance has increased by 6 million, while the number living in poverty has increased by 4.5 million since 2000. Gas prices are 62 percent higher than in 2001. Housing is the least affordable it has been in 14 years.

In my community alone, and I know your community is expensive as well, the average price of a house in south Florida is more than $300,000. Now how is a young couple, just starting out, who wants to reach the ability to buy their first home, going to afford that?

Come on, I am not that far from having bought my first home with my husband. Trust me, if the prices were like that in south Florida when we first started out, there is no way. We would be living in a shack, which many people in America are continuing to struggle to even be able to afford.

College tuition. Let us continue down the path of what young people are struggling with. College tuition has gone up about 40 percent, even if you take inflation into account, according to the college board in 2005. The number of employees in an employer-sponsored retirement plan dropped by more than 2.7 million from 2000 to 2004. That is Congressional Research Service, our objective Congressional Research Service that cited that statistic.

About 3.7 million employees have lost employer-provided health insurance since 2000. The median household debt has climbed 34 percent, to $55,300, from 2000 to 2004. The typical student graduates from college with about $17,500 in debt. While wages and salaries are at a record low as a share of national income, corporate profits are at a 60-year high.

Finally, the last statistic that I was able to pull together, just to outline what the average working family is struggling through, Mr. DELAHUNT, is that the number of U.S. billionaires reached a record of 793, which is up 15 percent from last year. It is no wonder that the American people are fed up with us and fed up with the lack of outrage, with the lack of leadership, and that the polling numbers, when you rate the Congress, are just hitting rock bottom.

Mr. DELAHUNT, I have really enjoyed the opportunity to spend some time here with you tonight. The last couple of minutes we will pull up our 30-something Working Group Web site, which we encourage the Members and anybody who is interested in getting the charts that we have outlined here tonight. They can access that on www.housedemocrats.gov/30something.

Madam Speaker, with that, we want to thank the Democratic leader for the opportunity to speak to our Members tonight, and we yield back the balance of our time.

BEST CHEAP THRILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. FOXX). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota