own capital city. Professor Viet Dinh, President Bush's former assistant attorney general for constitutional matters, has wiped away the major argument that because the District is not a state, its American citizens cannot vote in the House by detailing the many ways in which "since 1805 the Supreme Court has recognized that Congress has the authority to treat the District as a state and Congress has repeatedly exercised this authority." My favorite is the 16th amendment which requires only that citizens of states pay Federal income taxes. Why then have District residents continuously been taxed without representation?

There is a terrible racial stain that has been at the core of the denial of the rights of D.C. citizens. Congress required the same racial segregation in schools and public accommodations in D.C. and other parts of the South until the 1954 Brown decision. As one southern Senator put it, "The Negroes . . . flocked in . . . and there was only one way out . . . and that was to deny . . . suffrage entirely to every human being in the District."

Former Republican Senator Edward Brooke, a native Washingtonian and the Nation's first popularly elected black Senator wrote, "The experience of living in a segregated city and of serving in our segregated armed forces perhaps explains why my party's work on the Voting Rights Act reauthorization last year and on the pending D.C. House Voting Rights Act has been so important to me personally. The irony of course, is that I had to leave my hometown to get representation in Congress and to become a Member."

Today, on Tax Day, we need to move to abolish the irony and the tragedy of the many who have come to the Nation's capital seeking freedom for well over 200 years. It is on this day, that D.C. residents pay their Federal income taxes without a vote.

Presently, only three votes are needed for Senate passage of the D.C. Voting Rights Bill. I am a supporter of the bill in the House. I appeal to your conscience and ask for your vote so that finally there will be a vote for your fellow Americans here, who have paid for this precious right many times over in blood and tears. Support the voting rights bill today.

COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, thank you very much. It is true that today is the day that the American people have their obligation to pay taxes for the American government to continue to function. And obviously, there are many good things that the Federal Government does, and there are many not so good things that the Federal Government does.

But one of the things that I think is very important for us to focus attention on, especially as we deal with a challenging economy, is the need for us to ensure that, as stewards of those taxpayer dollars, those dollars fund this institution, the greatest deliberative body known to man, and we need to ensure that we put into place policies that will encourage strong, dynamic, economic growth and to make sure that there are opportunities for every single American. And Madam Speaker, we're going to talk about that this evening.

I have to say that my original intentions for this special order were a little different than they are going to end up being tonight. I'd planned to join tonight with several of my colleagues who have spent time in Colombia. I'd planned to talk about what I've personally witnessed there, and I'd invited many of my colleagues to do the same.

I'd hoped to make this a bipartisan endeavor, and I extended invitations to several of my Democratic colleagues to participate this evening. And I will say that I still do hope that we might have a chance to do that. And one of our Democratic colleagues did come up to me and say that he had hoped to participate.

I thought that this was very important, because I knew that when the President sent, a week ago today, when he sent the implementing legislation for the U.S/Colombia Free Trade Agreement, a 60-day clock, under trade promotion authority, would begin. We would have 60 legislative days to hold a vote on the agreement. This meant that the House of Representatives would face a vote on the U.S./Colombia Free Trade Agreement some time in probably late July. That would leave us 3 months for debate, discussion, education, and enlightenment about what this agreement would mean to the American people.

However, despite the ample time granted under trade promotion authority, I knew that many of my colleagues, particularly my Democratic colleagues, remained deeply ambivalent on the trade agreement itself. We certainly saw that as we had this debate last week.

For this reason, it was my hope that this special order this evening would be opening the 3-month discussion in a bipartisan way, and what I wanted to do was I wanted to shift the focus away from the free trade agreement, and I'd hoped that a group of Republicans and Democrats who've gone to Colombia could come together here on the House floor to simply share our experiences and describe what we've seen in Colombia, over the past year, or at least a half a year.

I knew that much of the free trade agreement debate would hinge on the current situation, as it exists in Colombia, what progress has been made, what steps has the Colombian government taken.

I wanted this debate to stay grounded in facts and a full understanding of the Colombia, of 2008, not a caricature of the Colombia past. I'd thought that bipartisan, firsthand testimony would further that goal of allowing the American people and our colleagues to understand the changes that have taken place in Colombia.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the landscape here in the House was drastically altered last week when my California colleague, Speaker PELOSI, took the unprecedented step, never before had this been done, but it was a step of changing the Rules of the House in order to block a vote on the free trade agreement.

In one fell swoop, she ended 3 months, what would be the beginning, and tonight would have been part of that, of substantive, bipartisan deliberation before it even had the chance to begin. Apparently, she didn't like her odds in what would clearly have been a fair fight, so she changed the rules in the middle of the game.

The condemnation from around the country came swiftly. Now, I have control of the floor now for an hour, and I could easily fill the entire 1 hour simply by reading the scathing editorials that have come about over the past week reproaching the Democratic leadership for their petulant act. The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Washington Post, hardly mouthpieces for Republicans or President Bush. And even Speaker PELOSI's hometown newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle. All, Madam Speaker, have had the harshest of words for the dangerous and unprecedented action that was taken here last week.

Now, I'll read just a few of those highlights. I mentioned Speaker PELOSI's hometown newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, a paper that I actually enjoy reading myself, but again, far from being a Republican mouthpiece. They accuse Speaker PELOSI of "pandering" and "playing politics."

It points out that the decision to block a vote on the agreement is especially egregious, considering that she represents a region that heavily depends on exports for its economic competitiveness and job creation, particularly through its ports.

My hometown paper, the Los Angeles Times, stated it very plainly, and I quote. "Halting the vote wasn't about the U.S. economy and wasn't about Colombia. It was about politics." That's what the Los Angeles Times, again, hardly a Republican mouthpiece, had to say.

It points out that the FTA creates quite a bind for the Democratic leadership because what is good for their party is bad for the United States of America.

It highlights the current imbalance in our trade relationship. We have an open market, yet face barriers in Colombia.

I'll say that again. And Los Angeles Times pointed that out, Madam Speaker. We allow the rest of the world, including Colombia now, under the ATPA, the Andean Trade Preference Agreement, we allow them access to the U.S. consumer market. All this agreement that we had hoped to be debating now, but the clock has stopped on that. All this agreement would do was level that playing field and allow

U.S. workers to have a chance to send their products into Colombia.

The New York Times, in its editorial, Madam Speaker, emphasizes not just the economic consequences but the foreign policy implications as well. It declares that last week's actions ''reduce the United States' credibility and leverage in Colombia and beyond,'' adding that it ''serves human rights in Colombia no good'' whatsoever. The cause of human rights, about which many of our colleagues rarely talk, and which we're all concerned about, would do no good by not proceeding with consideration.

The New York Times is certainly, as I said, no knee-jerk supporter of the agreement. Actually, they, last year, in the New York Times, proposed postponing the consideration. And that was last year. And yet this year they are strong proponents of our moving ahead with this.

The Washington Post, Madam Speaker, was the quickest of all the major papers to condemn Speaker PELOSI's decision, equating the move to telling Colombia to ''drop dead.'' That's what the Washington Post had to say, and calling into question the Democrats credibility and judgment.

The message from around the Nation has been clear and unequivocal. The unprecedented rule change was a grave mistake that should be corrected immediately by proceeding with a vote. The damage described in those editorials is twofold, economic and international. Now, I would add an additional level to that that really hasn't been pointed to in a lot of these editorials, the institutional damage that has been done.

Now, first the economic damage. As I said just a moment ago, the Andean Trade Preferences Act, which Congress renewed just a few weeks ago, allows all Colombian goods, virtually all Colombian goods to enter the United States duty free. They have full access to our market, and we don't get the same treatment today. American goods face an average of 14 percent tariff on goods that we are sending into the Colombian market, with agricultural products facing particularly steep barriers.

These preferences, like all of our preference system, have enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress. So Democrats and Republicans have come together to say that we should allow these Colombian goods to come into the United States, their products, whether it's coffee, cut flowers, bananas, it allows them to virtually tariff free come into United States. So Democrats and Republicans alike said that's good for our consumers.

And yet, this free trade agreement, which would end the imbalance and extend that same preferential treatment for American exports, is opposed by the Democratic leadership.

It's a bizarre quirk of American politics. The Democrats always support trade as charity. They'll gladly give away one-sided trade without a second thought. But as soon as we propose to make it reciprocal and create a direct benefit for our own workers as well, they cry foul. To add to the absurdity, they do it in the name of protecting American workers.

Now, we're in a time, as I said, today is Tax Day, April 15. We're dealing, unfortunately, with an economic slowdown, and there is a great deal of economic anxiety throughout the United States of America and in other parts of the world. You might think that we could finally put politics aside and make the rational, logical decision to give American workers equal treatment and to protect American exports by creating new markets for U.S. goods and services. But unfortunately, and bizarrely, that's apparently not the case. By blocking a vote on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, the Democratic leadership has blocked a clear win for our exports and the workers who produce those exports.

□ 2045

The second form of damage that has been done is in the international arena. Again, we wander into the absurd. Time and again, I hear my Democratic colleagues decry what they call our diminished standing in the world. President Bush has, in fact, diminished our standing and in fact is a big part of the presidential campaign.

They accuse the administration of unilateralism and a disregard for our allies. They say that that has hurt our leadership and our credibility in the international community. And in the presidential campaign, they promise, Senators CLINTON and OBAMA, they promise to restore our prestige.

And yet the Democratic leadership raced to sabotage our relationship with our best and closest ally in South America with what could only be described as reckless abandon. Following a mere 1 hour of debate, they chose to treat our close democratic friend in our very own hemisphere, a slap in the face is the way this was described by the Vice President of Colombia, or as the Las Vegas Review Journal put it, a stab in the back. That's how the action that was taken here last week has been characterized.

Colombian democracy has grown steadily stronger under the courageous leadership of President Uribe with whom I spoke today. His popularity has soared above 70 percent and stayed there because he took his country from the brink of a failed State and put it back on the path of peaceful and prosperous stability. He's strengthened democratic institutions, not least of which is a Justice Department that has aggressively tackled the culture of impunity for murderers.

Under Uribe's presidency, crime has plummeted, largely because he has aggressively pursued the eco-terrorist guerillas and the equally murderous paramilitaries. The former have been pushed from their stronghold, and the latter have been systematically dismantled and their leadership imprisoned. The rank-and-file are beginning the long and difficult process of rehabilitation and reintegration into society with the help of government-funded social programs. The same has been offered to rank-and-file guerrillas who wish to surrender their arms.

Now, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to witness the real-world implications of these demobilization efforts. When I was in Colombia last August, several of my colleagues and I had the chance to sit down with former paramilitary members. These are young men and women, and I do mean young, teenagers in most cases, who had heart-wrenching tales to share with us. We heard from one young man who described his parents' murder right before his eyes. In his grief and anger, he turned to vigilantism. Like so many Colombians spanning multiple generations, he experienced the horror of violence, and he turned to violence himself.

The leaders of these paramilitary groups, like their guerrilla counterparts, committed heinous acts of violence and are now paying their debt to society. As remarkable an achievement as that is, the much harder part is bringing these young men and women, like those who I met, back into society.

I met them at a vocational training facility where they are learning the skills that will allow them to provide for themselves and become responsible members of society. They're learning to leave their violent past behind them and contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Colombia.

These efforts undertaken by President Uribe's government are already serving as a model for other post-conflict countries that have faced similar challenges. The process, Madam Speaker, of demobilization and reconciliation is not easy. There is still a great deal of work that needs to be done. While most paramilitary groups have been dismantled, there are still vigilantes in the jungle. There are still violent leaders at large who must go to jail. The guerrilla groups have yet to lay down their arms. And even as demobilization goes forward, the work of reintegration will take years.

But, Madam Speaker, I saw firsthand, as I know my colleagues who are going to be participating in this Special Order have. Tough work is being done, and it is being done with great success.

At the same time this transformation is taking place, Colombia has also faced a formidable foe of democracy on its border. We all know very well. Hugo Chavez has long been working to dismantle democratic institutions and free markets in his country of Venezuela and to export his authoritarian designs throughout the region. He suppressed dissent, trashed the Venezuelan constitution and squashed free

enterprise. He's interfered with the elections of his neighbors and drawn Ecuador and Bolivia into his orbit.

He keeps company with Daniel Ortega, Fidel Castro, and Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. His anti-democratic institutions for this hemisphere are no secret, and he is as openly hostile to the region's bulwarks of democracy as he is to the United States of America. Just weeks ago, he sent troops to his border with Colombia in a naked act of hostility. Flush with oil money, we all know that Hugo Chavez poses a grave threat to Latin America.

President Uribe, facing enormous challenges within his own borders and on the front lines of this ideological battle, is standing up. Colombia, under his leadership, is actively countering the influence of Hugo Chavez by acting as a model of the great gains to be made in a free and transparent democracy.

With seemingly little thought for the cause of democracy or U.S. interests, the Democratic leadership has disregarded both with last week's vote. Only time will tell the extent of the damage to our relationship with Colombia or our struggle to rein in the influence of Hugo Chavez. The damage to our credibility may be even more durable, unfortunately.

We have now sent a clear message to our partners: our word at the negotiating table is cheap, and if we don't like how things are going, we will just change the rules in the middle of the process. The implications extend well beyond trade. The United States is engaged in a great many negotiations on a great many issues: Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, nuclear nonproliferation, regional diplomatic efforts for Iraq. If our word to our close friends can't be trusted, how will we effectively engage around the globe?

Our credibility, Madam Speaker, and our leadership in the international community can hardly endure when they are so casually disregarded by this body.

This was the main thrust of the criticism from editorial boards across the country. But to economic and foreign policy damage, I would add institutional damage. Ironically, the vote to kill the free trade agreement succeeded because the Democratic leadership effectively argued to its membership that it was in the House's interest, this institution's interest to do so. They appealed to that institutional and party pride. I have already discussed the issue of party pride, Madam Speaker, as the L.A. Times editorialized, it's no secret on this issue, Democratic party interests run counter to our Nation's interest.

But the claims of institutional prerogative are utterly specious. During the rule debate last week, I went through the administration's requirements under Trade Promotion Authority chapter and verse, and I won't belabor them here. Suffice it to say, the Trade Promotion Authority was not ambiguous in its demands. I was involved in the negotiations in putting trade promotion authorities together. It is very, very rigorous because I believe in the first branch of government, I'm a believer in this institution, and I believe that we have very important rights.

The requirements for any administration under Trade Promotion Authority are laid out very clearly, and as my colleagues who are here on the floor know, this administration followed those directives to the letter in both spirit and in letter. They followed it to a T. These requirements were designed to ensure that Congress is consulted at every single step of the way. This goal was demonstrably and unequivocally achieved.

But under Trade Promotion Authority, there are two sets of processes: There is the negotiating process, which closely involves Congress but is led by the administration, and there is the congressional process. Both processes are unambiguously defined by very strict timetables.

The first timeline was followed. The second timeline was abrogated. One side followed the rules in good faith; the other side cheated. The Charlottesville Daily Progress outlined the implications of these actions perfectly, and they said, ''If rules of procedure mean nothing, then the legislative process can be warped, and moreover, it can be warped at the discretion of a single powerful person. This is not the way democracy should work. The effort to change the rules after the process was under way dishonors Congress.''

Those are not my words. Those are the words of the editorial written in the Charlottesville Daily Progress.

Madam Speaker, so much for institutional pride. The message the Democratic leadership has sent is that the ends justify the means. And what lofty goal did they sacrifice institutional integrity for? Killing an agreement, killing an agreement that extends preferential treatment to American workers and strengthens a key democratic ally in our own hemisphere.

No wonder the condemnation came so swiftly, and my staff has done a great deal of research. We have yet to find an editorial that is in support of the actions of the Speaker. As I said, her hometown paper, the New York Times, the Washington Post, on and on and on, we're going to discuss some of those further in just a minute. It is not too late though, Madam Speaker, it is not too late to correct this.

We were supposed to have a 3-month process of debate and deliberations. We can still have it. We were supposed to have a vote at the end of that process. The Democratic leadership can still commit to do it.

I mentioned the fact that I spoke with President Uribe a few hours ago. He's patient and he's optimistic. Frankly, he has no choice other than to be patient and optimistic. Madam Speaker, I call on Speaker PELOSI and Majority Leader HOYER to make a commitment to hold a vote on this very important Colombia Free Trade Agreement prior to the August recess. I call on them to quit demagoging this issue and let their rank-and-file Members vote their conscience.

I will say that I completely disagree with the statement made by Speaker PELOSI here last week. She said that one of the reasons she didn't want this vote is that she was afraid it would go down to defeat. As I look at my colleagues who have joined me here, we've been working in a bipartisan way, and I'm not going to state the names of any of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle; but the fact of the matter is, in going through this 3-month process, I have every confidence that a bipartisan majority of this institution would recognize that helping American workers, strengthening a democratic ally, doing everything that we can for the word of this institution, would be the right thing to do. I know that because, frankly, more than a few Democrats have told me that they want to have a choice to vote for and support this measure.

Passage of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement is clearly in our economic and our foreign policy interest. Blocking it is clearly not. And changing the rules in the middle of the game because you're afraid of a fair fight is not defensible. It's time for us to exert true leadership as an institution and make sure that we pass this agreement.

So those are my prepared remarks, Madam Speaker. And I'm so proud that I have been joined by a number of my colleagues, all of whom have been great champions in this effort and have worked on the notion of expanding opportunities for U.S. goods and services to be sold all around the world.

And one of the great leaders who has been pursuing this, specifically in this hemisphere for many, many years and was a great champion of the Central American Free Trade Agreement and a wide range of other free trade initiatives, comes from a State, by the way, that is the headquarters for Caterpillar, and we know that by not passing this free trade agreement, we are preventing good, hardworking Caterpillar employees from having an opportunity to duty-free sell their very important equipment into Colombia. And I'm very happy at this time to yield to my very, very good friend who I'm saddened to say will not be joining us in the 111th Congress because he's chosen to retire to spend time with his wonderful, wonderful and very young family, but I'm happy to yield to my friend from Illinois (Mr. WELLER).

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. I want to thank the gentleman for yielding. I also want to thank Mr. DREIER for your leadership tonight as well as your continuous leadership on trade issues because, as you pointed out, the actions of this House last week have done a lot of damage to the reputation not only

to the House of Representatives but the reputation of the United States in Latin America.

President Uribe is a popular elected official. This Congress has an 18 percent approval rating. President Uribe enjoys an 80 percent approval rating because he's made such progress in addressing five decades of violence and civil problems in the democratic Republic of Colombia. And as a result, today, 73 percent of Colombians say they feel more secure because of President Uribe's leadership, but also they feel that he has brought security while respecting human rights.

□ 2100

Mr. DREIER. If I could reclaim my time, I would like to pose a question, if I might, to my friend.

As we hear this 73 percent support level in Colombia, we know that the opposition here in the United States to this is being led by the AFL–CIO and organized labor. Now, I'm sure that my friend has seen in Colombia, as I have, that the private sector unions in Colombia are strongly supportive of this agreement. Is that the case or not?

I would be happy to yield to my friend.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. I thank you for your generous time.

This past week, as we all know, there was a delegation of labor leaders from Colombia, including both the private sector and as well as public sector unions, and they made the point that the majority of industrial unions, private sector unions support the U.S.-Colombia Trade Agreement, but the opposition is coming from the government employees, who are not even impacted.

Mr. DREIER. In no way impacted by this agreement at all.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. That's correct. And one point you made earlier that I would like to—and I don't want to be greedy with the time, you've been very generous.

Mr. DREIER. I would just like to include our colleagues here with the discussion.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. But I would just like to comment on one point that you made.

You said Illinois is headquarters to Caterpillar, and people think of the yellow construction equipment. There is more to it than you think, and that's why this trade agreement is so important. I have 8,000 Caterpillar employees residing in the 11th Congressional District of Illinois. They're union members, every one of them. And Caterpillar, of course, would benefit from this, and that means their workers would as well. Half of their production in Illinois is dependent on exports.

Mr. DREIER. So maybe there would be more than 11,000 workers if this agreement were to go through.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. There would be. And their growth has come as a result of export.

But the point that really needs to be made is there is tremendous economic growth going on in the Andean region, which Colombia is leading, and a lot of that is in the energy and the mining and raw material sector, which means they're going to use construction equipment. And right now, the construction equipment that union workers make in the district I represent, places like Joliet, Aurora, Pontiac and Decatur, it faces a 15 percent tariff when exported to Colombia. Now, some would say, what does that mean? That's a 15 percent tax on the price of that bulldozer. So that makes U.S. products less competitive, say, than competing with Japan.

Mr. DREIER. If I could reclaim my time, I would say taxes are something very important today to discuss. I mean, we talk about that tax on April 15.

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. And of course these tariffs would be eliminated immediately upon implementation of the U.S-Colombia Trade Agreement. I yield back the time, but it is so important to point out, Illinois is a big winner, manufacturers as well as farmers.

Mr. DREIER. I thank my friend. I hope that you can stay for a few minutes because I know we would like to get in some other questions.

When my friend began discussing the fact that a delegation came from Colombia of union leaders to the United States, I thought that you were going to mention the fact that a delegation of Members of the United States Congress went last week to Colombia. One of those who went was the distinguished secretary of the Republican Conference, our very, very good friend, Judge John Carter, a gentleman from Texas. And I would love to hear his thoughts, having just been in Colombia a week ago, on his trip. And I am happy to yield to my friend.

Mr. CARTER. I thank you for yielding to me. My friend from California is gracious to do so.

Let me start off by telling you what happened when I decided I was going to Colombia. My daughter, who lives here in Washington, called me up and said, Daddy, I told you not to go down to Colombia. Didn't you see ''Clear and Present Danger?'' Didn't you see that movie? Have you lost your mind?

I want to point that out because I think that's a lot of what the American people think about Colombia when it comes to their mind, they think of that movie and that book. And I am pleased to say that I was very pleasantly surprised to find a very peaceable place where an awful lot of people have done an awful lot of hard work to get violent people out of their country and to get those people who joined defense bands and guerrilla bands to lay down their weapons.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my friend, did you have a chance to visit Medellin?

Mr. CARTER. I was in Medellin.

Mr. DREIER. Medellin was the murder capital of the world, clearly the most dangerous spot in the world. And now Medellin has a murder rate that is too high. We have a murder rate that is too high in the District of Columbia. We have a murder rate that is too high in the United States of America. But the transformation of Medellin under the great Mayor Sergio Fajardo, with whom I'm sure you met, has been so dramatic. His leadership and the leadership of President Uribe has just transformed that city. Is that what my friend found?

Mr. CARTER. Absolutely. Transformed it completely. It's a joy to be in Medellin, it really is. And, you know, the Medellin cartels are gone, and they are prospering.

And, you know, they talked to us and they said, look, we are trying to stand up for democracy and free enterprise, we believe in this system. And this trade agreement is the linchpin that holds it all together for this country that has worked so desperately to solve problems that, quite frankly, not very many countries in the world would have been able to solve. Getting 40,000 people to lay down their arms is a major project.

Mr. DREIER. And Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my friend if he, in fact, had the chance to meet with any of these young people who had been former paramilitaries, and I wonder if he has any anecdotes that he can share with us.

Mr. CARTER. We did. We divided into groups and met with an assortment of both male and female. And you're right—

Mr. DREIER. Share one of those stories.

Mr. CARTER. You know, the first question, they all started talking about how they joined the paramilitary unit. They told about families being slaughtered, being separated from their families, having to run and escape the guerrillas that came out of the woods. And they ran to escape, and then came back to find their families slaughtered, and so they joined a paramilitary group. And a question was asked, rather naively, I think, by us, you mean, you were carrying weapons? Absolutely. Every one of them, male and female, were carrying weapons. And now they are working in programs that are changing the culture of these people that joined the violent behavior. They have laid down their weapons. We asked them why. They said the comandantes said we have talked to the president, we lay down our weapons, and they did.

They are out studying. They're proud to say they're getting high school educations. They're proud to say they're going to trade schools. A few were proud to say they had received admission to university. These were jungle fighters just a short while ago, and now they are coming into society and working very hard because they see a future for Colombia. And this future rests upon a world of free enterprise and trade, and this agreement starts the

process that gives them many opportunities for free trade around the world.

Mr. DREIER. Absolutely. My friend is absolutely right. And I will tell you, these meetings are always, for me, I've participated in several of them, very emotional. As I said in my opening remarks, I remember very vividly seeing this young, I mean, a kid, he said he was 18 years old when he watched the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the FARC, which we all know that acronym, they came in and they murdered his mother and father right in front of him. And of course he was, like any of us would be, so angry and so bitter that he joined with the paramilitary and began being, as you said so well, Mr. CARTER, a guerrilla fighter. And he was able to become productive because of the trade schools that have been put into place.

And the patriotism that these young Colombians have for their country and their desire for a peaceful nation is so great. They were forced into this because these narcoterrorists in the FARC were resorting to murdering their parents. And so many others have been tragically murdered there. To see this take place and to hear those individual stories, they are very, very emotional. In fact, as you listen to these people, I mean, I'm getting emotional thinking about it because of the fact that these young people who have been forced into this are now becoming productive members of society. And the notion of our not doing what we can to bring about peace and stability in this hemisphere is, I think, very, very distressing.

I am happy to see that we're joined by the very distinguished ranking member of the Subcommittee on Trade of the Ways and Means Committee, my California colleague, Mr. HERGER. And I would be happy to yield for some comments to my very good friend.

Mr. HERGER. Well, I want to thank my good friend, Mr. DREIER, for setting this up this evening.

This is so incredibly important. It's important to our Nation, it's important to our workers at a time when we're seeing our economy dipping, when we need to be able to produce jobs. And we look at how we produce jobs. Since last year, some 27 percent of our increase in gross domestic product came from exports. It's projected that just this year of our increase in gross domestic product, some 40 percent will be again from exports.

And I wish it weren't true, but it seems like perhaps the best kept secret in our Nation today is that the United States is the largest trading nation in the world. We're the largest exporting nation in the world.

I represent, as my good friend knows, a very rich agricultural district north of Sacramento in northern California.

Mr. DREIER. Beautiful area.

Mr. HERGER. One of the richest agriculture areas in the world, second largest rice producing district. Some 60 percent of all the dried plums in the world, prunes, are grown there, walnuts, almonds, these specialty crops. And America cannot consume all that we produce. As a matter of fact, one-third of all that we produce we need to be able to export. And to be able to see, again, talking about Colombia, what this does for American workers, we just heard about Caterpillar from our good friend from Illinois (Mr. WELLER) just earlier in his district, the thousands that it affects. And so it affects in the district I represent.

Right now, because of our duty free status for the Andean nations, which we've gone in to try to help Colombia, Colombia was not always this great nation where some 42,000 former paramilitary, as we were talking about earlier, have gone from fighting the country to now being part of the country and supporting them. As we know, it wasn't always that way. And so some years ago we gave these Andean nations, including Colombia, Peru, Panama, and others, the ability to be able to export into the United States duty free, duty free, but yet we still have export duties, some as high as 60, 70 percent, going into their country.

And what this free trade agreement would do is it would be able to give us the same access to their markets that they currently have to ours, to our rice, to our walnuts, to our wheat, to our corn, to other commodities that are so very, very important.

So it is important what we're doing. It's important not only for, we were discussing the change in Colombia itself, which is our strongest ally in South America; we cannot turn our back on them, we cannot slap them in the face.

And Madam Speaker, I would like to place into the RECORD some of these editorials that you were speaking about, Mr. DREIER, for the RECORD.

[From the New York Times, Apr. 12, 2008]

TIME FOR THE COLOMBIAN TRADE PACT

American workers are understandably anxious. Their incomes went nowhere through six years of economic growth. Many are losing their jobs as the economy slips into recession. Yet concern about workers' plight should not lead Congressional Democrats to reject the trade agreement with Colombia. This deal would benefit the American economy and further the nation's broader interests in Latin America.

It is time for Congress to ratify it.

The trade pact would produce clear benefits for American businesses and their workers. Most Colombian exports are exempt from United States' tariffs. American exports, however, face high Colombian tariffs and would benefit as the so-called trade promotion agreement brought them down to zero.

The deal also would strengthen the institutional bonds tying the United States to Colombia, one of America's few allies in an important region that has become increasingly hostile to the United States' interests. Perhaps most important, the deal would provide a tool for Colombia's development, drawing investment and helping the nation extricate itself from the mire of poverty that provides sustenance to drug trafficking and a bloody insurgency.

Violence in Colombia is way too high. We remain very concerned over the killing of trade unionists by right-wing paramilitary groups. Last year, we advised Congress not to ratify the trade agreement until Colombia demonstrated progress in investigating the murders and prosecuting and convicting their perpetrators.

Though by no means ideal, the situation today has improved. Thirty-nine trade unionists were killed last year, down from 197 in 2001, the year before the government of Álvaro Uribe came to office. Prosecutors obtained 36 convictions for the murder of trade unionists—up from 11 in 2006 and only one in 2001. The budget of the prosecutor general's office has increased every year. Last year, it created a special unit to prosecute labor murders that has obtained 13 sentences.

Pressure from the United States Congress has contributed to this progress, nudging the Colombian government with its offer that gains on the human rights front would lead to ratification of the trade agreement. Washington must sustain the pressure to ensure the energetic prosecution of crimes by paramilitary thugs and further reduce violence against union members. It has a powerful tool to do so: about $600 million a year in mostly military aid for Colombia to combat drug trafficking. The money must be approved by Congress every year.

Rejecting or putting on ice the trade agreement would reduce the United States' credibility and leverage in Colombia and beyond. In a letter last year to Congressional Democrats, a group of Democratic heavyweights from the Clinton administration and previous Congresses wrote: ''Walking away from the Colombia trade agreement or postponing it until conditions are perfect would send an unambiguous signal to our friends and opponents alike that the United States is an unreliable partner without a vision for cooperation in our hemisphere.'' It would serve human rights in Colombia no good.

Unfortunately, the agreement has become entangled in political jockeying between the White House and Democrats. The Democrats are right to demand assistance for American workers, and the Bush administration should work with Congress to expand the safety net for workers displaced by globalization. But this should not stop the Colombian trade pact from coming to fruition.

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 10, 2008]

DROP DEAD, COLOMBIA

The year 2008 may enter history as the time when the Democratic Party lost its way on trade. Already, the party's presidential candidates have engaged in an unseemly contest to adopt the most protectionist posture, suggesting that, if elected, they might pull out of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Yesterday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared her intention to change the procedural rules governing the proposed trade promotion agreement with Colombia. President Bush submitted the pact to Congress on Tuesday for a vote within the next 90 legislative days, as required by the ''fast-track'' authority under which the U.S. negotiated the deal with Colombia. Ms. Pelosi says she'll ask the House to undo that rule.

The likely result is no vote on the agreement this year. Ms. Pelosi denies that her intent is to kill the bill, insisting yesterday that Congress simply needs more time to consider it ''in light of the economic uncertainty in our country.'' She claimed that she feared that, ''if brought to the floor immediately, [the pact] would lose. And what message would that send?'' But Ms. Pelosi's decision-making process also included a fair component of pure Washington pique: She accused Mr. Bush of ''usurp[ing] the discretion of the speaker of the House'' to schedule legislation.

That political turf-staking, and the Democrats' decreasingly credible claims of a death-squad campaign against Colombia's trade unionists, constitutes all that's left of the case against the agreement. Economically, it should be a no-brainer—especially at a time of rising U.S. joblessness. At the moment, Colombian exports to the United States already enjoy preferences. The trade agreement would make those permanent, but it would also give U.S. firms free access to Colombia for the first time, thus creating U.S. jobs. Politically, too, the agreement is in the American interest, as a reward to a friendly, democratic government that has made tremendous strides on human rights, despite harassment from Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

To be sure, President Bush provoked Ms. Pelosi. But he forced the issue only after months of inconclusive dickering convinced him that Democrats were determined to avoid a vote that would force them to accept accountability for opposing an agreement that is manifestly in America's interest. It turns out his suspicions were correct.

''I take this action with deep respect to the people of Colombia and will be sure that any message they receive is one of respect for their country, and the importance of the friendship between our two countries,'' Ms. Pelosi protested yesterday. Perhaps Colombia's government and people will understand. We don't.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, let me express my appreciation to my friend for pointing to these editorials because, as I said a few minutes ago, we've done a great deal of research. We've been trying desperately to find an editorial anywhere in this country that has been written in support of the egregious action taken by the Democratic leadership in this institution, undermining the ability to open up this very important new market for U.S. workers, agricultural products and manufactured goods. We hear from California and Illinois and other States as well. And I actually have, I think, about 15 of these editorials here with some incredible quotes that are pretty damning. And again, these come from publications that are hardly considered Republican mouth pieces.

You know, we had this very harsh criticism level at the President of the United States, and he somehow was trying to ram this thing through and rush it. We know that this agreement, the negotiation began 4 years ago, it was completed 2 years ago, and a year and a half ago it was signed. There have been constant attempts to bring this up; 27 meetings held with the Democratic leadership by this administration, and yet, as has been pointed out in these editorials, this terrible action was taken.

I'm very pleased that one of the great free traders in this institution who represents the very important port town of Houston, Texas, has joined us, another hardworking member of the Ways and Means—I guess we've got three members of the Ways and Means Committee here, so I'm particularly pleased to have members of that very, very important committee with us, including my good friend, as I said, from Houston, Mr. BRADY.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Thank you, Mr. DREIER. And thank you for your leadership. I'm glad to join all the Members here tonight on this important issue.

The reason this country is so dismayed by the action last week is that it was such a huge loss for American jobs, for security in our hemisphere, and a big loss for America's prestige around the world.

□ 2115

Colombia's a remarkable trading partner, as you have noted. They are a remarkable study and model in progress, in democracy, and human rights, pulling themselves up by their bootstraps by rule of law and freedom of speech and freedom of trade, all the American traits that you have to admire. They're in our backyard. They're in our hemisphere. A remarkable trading partner.

I think last week many in America wondered just what happened to this great country. Who could imagine that America, with the world's largest economy, would cower from Colombia behind walls of protectionism? Who could imagine the world's strongest democracy would be afraid to even debate, even consider this agreement? And who could imagine, by changing the rules after we had already shaken hands and signed an agreement, that we would send a signal to the rest of the world that we are no longer not even a reliable trade leader in this world but we are not even reliable negotiators, that our word, our bond, our agreements mean nothing?

And the loss in jobs, as you know, America is wide open, Mr. DREIER. As you know, we can buy anything from almost any country anywhere we want in our communities.

Mr. DREIER. And that's a good thing.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. But when we try to sell our goods and services around the world, we find too much of it blocked. As we have said before, it's not enough anymore to just buy American. We have to sell American. We have to sell our goods and services throughout the world. But when we do, we find so much of the world is closed off, locked away from us.

Colombia, a great partner, has been selling their goods and services into America since 1991, but we face real barriers when we try to do the same, and this trade agreement creates that two-way trade.

For Texas I know it's critical. We're the largest seller of goods to Colombia. We sell about a little over a billion dollars a year in chemicals, construction, equipment and machinery and computers. And under this agreement we would sell another billion dollars of not only that but grapefruit and beef and financial services. A number of services our small businesses could sell into Colombia, our neighbor in the backyard and in our hemisphere. So we lost jobs here in America.

Colombia lost jobs because they lost a guaranteed market because by not acting, by changing the rules, they are now coming at a disadvantage to their neighbors, in Peru and Central American countries. So they actually lost ground from a jobs perspective.

And, finally, to turn our back on what a tremendous ally, as you have noted over and over, who has made such great progress, who we deserve to engage more and be a stronger partner with, not to turn our back on, it's a huge loss.

Mr. DREIER. I thank my friend for his very thoughtful contribution, Madam Speaker.

And one of the issues that has come to the forefront, and I would be happy to yield to any of my colleagues who would like to comment on this, has been this notion that the Colombian Government is somehow murdering union leaders. We have continued to hear this. And it is true. In the past it's been absolutely outrageous to see the treatment.

But in the last several years under the leadership of President Uribe, very important steps have been taken to bring to justice any of those who have been responsible for the heinous act of murdering these union leaders. And the government has done something which is totally unprecedented. The government does not want to see union leaders killed; so what do they do? There are 1,500 union leaders who enjoy full security protection paid for by the Government of Colombia. And yet we continually hear arguments put forward by our friends at the AFL–CIO that ''the Colombian Government is murdering our brothers.'' I mean I've heard that chant over and over and over again. Because, of course, as these very thoughtful arguments that my colleagues have put forward are there, the only response that they can have is the Colombian Government is murdering, is murdering, our brothers.

I would be happy to further yield to my friend.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Very briefly, Judge Carter was with me and others here 2 weeks ago as we met with the general prosecutor, an independent prosecutor, for the country of Colombia.

Mr. DREIER. I believe he's called the Fiscalia.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Yes. And he told us straight out, because we asked him, he said there is no thread, no direct or indirect thread at all, between the Colombian Government and any murders of anyone, much less union leaders. And he said what you've said, that this government has not only sat down to prosecute those who would commit violent crimes against union leaders but provides protection. In fact, it is safer to be a union leader in Colombia than just the general population might be. That is such an effort they have made. That government is providing a lower level of violence, a safer country for all citizens.

So the argument that they are targeting or that they are allowing it or just looking the other way is exactly

wrong, and the unions themselves told us that.

Mr. DREIER. That's right because, as I pointed out earlier, the private sector unions, and Mr. WELLER and I had this exchange, are very supportive of this. And I suspect that on your trip, you had a chance to meet with a number of those union leaders.

Let me just say that one Member who is here that we haven't heard from is the distinguished gentleman from Iowa.

Madam Speaker, I would be very happy to yield to my friend from Iowa (Mr. KING).

Mr. KING of Iowa. I thank the gentleman from California for yielding, and I thank him especially for gathering us together here for this Special Order.

Being mindful of the clock, there are a few points I would like to make. And one of them is to address our trade deficit. We have had a trade deficit over the last several years that has grown an average of about 20 percent a year. Now, it's flattened out in this last year because the weaker dollar has shifted so that we have more exports in proportion. However, I believe the dollar needs to be shored up. And why would a nation that has a trade deficit refuse to allow a trade agreement that would open up a country to allow our goods to go in?

I'm astonished continually at the continuing shift on the part of the Democrats. And I looked through the trade agreements that we have dealt with here since I have been in this Congress, and I'm thinking of trade agreements like Singapore and Chile and Australia and Morocco, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, DR–CAFTA. All of those gave us opportunities that were advantageous to us. And the logic in this is just as clear and simple: If you market something or if you're doing business with people, where you buy it from is where the jobs are. That's where the production is. We have production in the United States. We need to market more goods overseas. If we shore up the dollar, and I think we should, we're going to need to be more aggressive marketing our goods overseas. Colombia's sitting there waiting to open that up.

I have to say a couple kind words about our pork producers. They sold $8.5 million worth of pork into Colombia last year, not a lot. They're losing money on every head today. They need to open up this market. It would be in multiples if we would simply allow that tariff that's in Colombia to disappear, which would happen immediately if we could sign into this free trade agreement. That's some of the components.

But I am also more concerned about our relationships in the Western hemisphere. And as we watch Hugo Chavez teaming up and picking up the legacy of Fidel Castro and watching the unrest that's being promoted or watching tanks roll up to the border, these things are taking place in our hemisphere. And this Monroe Doctrine, I think, calls upon us to be good diplomats, good stewards of the money, and good promoters of trade, taking care of American jobs and protecting our opportunity to compete in the rest of the world. All of this comes together in this Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

What happened here in this Congress was a shameful act. And Americans have to be viewed as having character, the kind of character that holds up when a business deal is a deal. We did more than shake hands on this. This Congress passed it. The President signed it. This agreement was negotiated under terms that said this trade agreement will come to the floor of this House and it will be brought forward for a vote, up or down, in 90 days. That's the deal. That's the deal it was negotiated under. That's the deal that it should have been brought to the floor of this House under.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I would like to reclaim my time so I could propound a question to my friend, and I don't mean to interrupt his very thoughtful statement.

But as I listened to the arguments that have been made by Speaker PELOSI and others against this, they said we have an economy that is weakening. We all know that is the case. Our economy is facing very serious challenges. Here again, this is Tax Day, April 15, and it is hard for people to make ends meet. It has become more difficult. So the argument has been made. I hear Speaker PELOSI regularly say we need to focus on American workers and their concerns rather than some kind of agreement, and so we should put off this agreement until our economy is stronger.

And I just don't quite understand that. And I wonder if my friend might enlighten me on exactly what the point of that statement is.

And I further yield.

Mr. KING of Iowa. If we took that position with every country on the globe, you could virtually guarantee our economy would collapse, not get stronger. We need to make every move that we can make to improve this economy. I'm really not as concerned as the pundits are, but it's prudent for us to open trade. Free trade, fair trade smart trade is a better code word for this, and it means jobs in America. The U.S. market is open to Colombia. They're saying, let's open our market to you. I'm happy to send Caterpillars down there. We buy them in my business. And I'm happy to send the pork down there that we produce and everything that we can compete with. This global market that we're involved in demands that we export, and the Western hemisphere demands that we lead. And that means we need to promote strong, strong relationships in the Western hemisphere. And as we watch the bullying tactics of Hugo Chavez, I think that cries out for us to shake hands with President Uribe and complete this Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. DREIER. So basically this would best be described as a win-win all the way around. It's a winner for the cause of democracy and freedom and the rule of law in South America, which we all know is very important. It's a winner when it comes to stopping those drug traffickers who are selling drugs, poisoning our children and grandchildren. And then we look at the opportunity created for the United States of America, our workers. They're greatly benefited by this.

And that's why I continue to try to figure out why it is that anyone would oppose this. I mean we use the term ''no brainer'' to describe this. It really is a no brainer. We used that in the debate last week. I know that the distinguished ranking member of the Ways and Means Committee, Mr. MCCRERY, and a couple of others have said this is a no brainer.

And these editorials that have been written, I think we probably should share some of the words of these publications that often criticize Republican policies who have come forward with this. I know a number of things have been put forward. But one thing just today, the Wall Street Journal had an editorial that was in strong support of a letter, an open letter, that came from former senior administration officials from the Clinton administration and Democratic Members of Congress, and it was signed by 35 of them, former colleagues of ours who are Democrats. And it includes people, by the way, just some of the signatories of this letter, the former Commerce Secretary William Daley, who is from Mr. WELLER's State that we talked about; Stuart Eizenstat, a very prominent brilliant economic mind; General Barry McCaffrey; our former colleague who was a Republican Senator but went on to be the Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, Bill Cohen, signed this. So a lot of people have signed this letter.

It says: ''We believe this agreement is in both our vital national security and economic interests. We feel that the treaty should be considered as soon as possible.'' I remind people it's not actually a treaty; it's an agreement. ''We feel that the treaty should be considered as soon as possible and that any obstacles be quickly and amicably resolved.''

The letter cites ''an overwhelming national security imperative'' and that ''President Uribe has been a strong and faithful ally. To turn our back on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement would be a severe blow to that relationship and would send a very negative message to our friends in a volatile region?

The letter praises Colombia for its ''dramatic improvement in security'' and for being ''a model of open market democracy that supports fundamental U.S. national interests'' and points out that these are ideals that many in the

region ''openly scorn,'' of course, referring, as my friend just said, to Hugo Chavez. The letter goes on to praise Uribe personally for his ''great personal courage'' in aggressively going on the offensive in fighting narcoterrorists and dramatically increasing drug interdiction and eradication of criminals to the United States, or extradition of criminals. Eradication of criminals too, we want to do that. It also praises his substantial progress in the issue of violence against trade unionists, pointing out that Uribe has provided special security protection to some 9,400 individuals. This number says including 1,900 trade unionists. I said 1,500, and this letter that these officials of the Clinton administration and former Democratic Members of the United States Congress said 1,900 trade unionists have been able to receive this kind of protection.

And that's why I implore my colleagues in the Democratic leadership to bring this up for a vote.

Mark my words, and I would ask any of my colleagues who are here if they disagree with my assessment, if after we go through these arguments, which we have begun talking about tonight and we talked a little bit about last week, is there any doubt that we would have strong bipartisan support with many Democrats joining with us in support of this?

□ 2130

I would be happy to yield to any of my colleagues who have any thoughts or comments on that at all. I suspect you might agree with me, but if you have any thoughts on it, I would be happy to.

Mr. BRADY, you look like you would like to cast your vote.

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Absolutely. There have been a number of Democrat colleagues who have traveled to Colombia to see that remarkable progress firsthand, who have assessed it themselves rather than playing the politics of it, and who have been both public and private in their support for this agreement. I think all they would like is an up-or-down vote, a fair chance to debate this issue and bring it to the floor. I am confident with it would pass. And I am confident we would send a completely different signal to our allies like Colombia and the rest of the world.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, my friend is absolutely right. And it is very interesting. We have heard the Speaker, Speaker PELOSI, talk about the need for trade adjustment assistance, a second stimulus package. And Madam Speaker, I would argue that the Colombia free-trade agreement, which will create an opportunity for more U.S. workers to sell their goods and agricultural products into Colombia is, in fact, trade adjustment assistance itself. And I would argue that this agreement, job creating, is in fact an economic stimulus package in and of itself. So if the commitment is to trade adjustment assistance and economic stimulus so that we can create more jobs in the United States of America, the answer is, pass the U.S.-Colombia free-trade agreement.

I would be happy to yield to my friend from Texas.

Mr. CARTER. I agree wholeheartedly that I think an up-or-down vote and we will have a Colombia free-trade agreement. I think that our Democratic colleagues will be reasonable and understand this. And I think we have the votes to get it done.

But I think Speaker PELOSI needs to release this and let us have a vote. That is the key thing. And you notice that letter you just read kept talking about national security. What we really have here, if you look at it closely, is a contest of two socialist—we used to call them Communist—a regime in Hugo Chavez, and we have Uribe who is trying to create a free democracy, and a free enterprise system. These are two, side-by-side competing systems that will influence that entire continent.

And that is why this is in our national security interest. It is not just a trade agreement which is going to benefit American workers. It is a security agreement that points to the direction that we stand up for what we believe in, democracy and free enterprise.

Mr. DREIER. My friend makes a very good and important point here. And I was talking to my colleague, Dan Lungren, who served here, I was pleased to serve with him during the 1980s when we were in the midst, and I know my friend from California came in 1986 to this institution. We have spent time, energy, resources and weapons in dealing with the expansion of Communism in Central America as we were providing resources to the Democratic resistance in Nicaragua known as the Contras. And we regularly hear criticism from Democrats that what we should be doing in Iraq is we shouldn't be using weapons, we should, in fact, be engaging and using trade and other things.

And what is it we have here? We have Democrats, the Democratic leadership, unfortunately, saying that as we seek to build a stronger relationship with a country that is standing up to narcoterrorists, that is standing up to the expansion of Hugo Chavez on their borders trying to extend into the country, and they are saying ''no'' to this. They are saying ''no'' to this because somehow they believe it is going to hurt U.S. workers.

To me it is absolutely outrageous that this has taken place. And Madam Speaker, let me express my appreciation to my colleagues for the time that they have spent here this evening. And I hope very much that Speaker PELOSI and the Democratic leadership will, in fact, schedule a vote on the U.S.-Colombia free-trade agreement before the August recess. Let's begin the process of debate and voting right now.

I thank again my colleagues, Madam Speaker, and with that I yield back the balance of my time.

IRAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 60 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material.

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

There was no objection.

Ms. WATERS. The subject of my Special Order is Iran.

Madam Speaker, at the time the war in Iraq began in March of 2003, who would have thought that we were being led into perhaps the worst foreign policy disaster in America's history? Many of us voted against the war authorization in the first place. But many more Members wish they had voted against it. We now know that this country was led into this war with faulty intelligence and a deafening war drum from the administration.

The question that we raise tonight is this: Could the Bush administration possibly be planning for a war with Iran? There isn't any empirical evidence to prove that the Bush administration is planning for war. But there are experts that are indeed worried that the same playbook that was used to bring this country into the Iraq war is now being used to toward Iran. The administration is pushing suspect intelligence. And it has severely increased and sharpened since their rhetoric first began toward Iran.

We come to the floor tonight to resist efforts by this administration to paint war with Iran as a necessary next step in our so-called war on terror. A vast majority of foreign policy and military experts agree that war with Iran would be a colossal error.

Allow me to spend a few minutes to explain why I feel that U.S. strikes against Iran are a real possibility. Let us look at some of the signs that we may be headed for war. The increased rhetoric. The administration is building the volume of inflammatory rhetoric toward Iran in a similar fashion to the run-up to the Iraq war. Strong statements about Iran's intervention in Iraq could set the stage for U.S. attack on Iranian military or nuclear facility.

Surrogates in the administration, including the President himself, have increasingly stressed a full range of negative Iranian behavior, including that Iran is killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq, supplying weapons, training and funding to special groups.

They also say that Iran is interfering with the peace process in the Middle