My colleagues and I also had the opportunity to meet Patrick Leahy, a young 25-year-old Maryland native who works in the office of Senator FRED THOMPSON. Patrick is afflicted with Leibers, one of the forms of retinitis pigmentosa.

Regardless of the debilitating effects of these groups of diseases that Patrick and Isaac are afflicted with, they are both successful young men who make us proud of their accomplishments and of their unwavering optimism.

I would like to thank Isaac, Doria, Ilana, Patrick and all Americans who are dealing every day with these diseases. We want to offer them additional hope for a future in which we can soon eradicate retinal degenerative diseases.

Research scientists at the Foundation Fighting Blindness are making significant and exciting advances in the fight against retinal degenerative diseases. The most solid advances have been in the discovery of several new genes whose mutations cause retinal degenerations. These discoveries are critical, because they allow us to come closer to understanding the causes of these diseases and how one day doctors will be able to repair these genetic mutations.

There have been significant discoveries in the areas of molecular engineering and gene therapy. There have been significant advances made in the lab with vectors which are modified viruses that transport normal replacement genes into cells to help them function. This past year, there was significant improvement in the new generation of vectors which have the potential of being safer and more effective.

In the area of retinal transplantations, animals tested in labs with pigment cell transplantation proved that such procedures can effectively delay the degenerative process.

These tests must now be taken to the clinical trial level where we can find out their effectiveness on humans. This is why it is very critical to promote educational research.

Our prayers are with the Lidsky family and with all of those who are similarly affected.

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

(Mr. SCARBOROUGH 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 gentlewoman from Washington (Mrs. LINDA SMITH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. LINDA SMITH of Washington addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

SPEAKER'S ACTION WITH RESPECT TO U.S. POLICY IN MIDDLE EAST COMES UNDER ATTACK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I have great reverence for this House and great respect for the office of the Speakership. It is, after all, the third highest office in the land, and despite partisan attachment, the Speaker, as the leader of the legislative branch of government, serves as a symbolic representative of every Member. The manner in which he fulfills that role reflects, like it or not, on all of us.

That is why I must express great regret about the recent action of Speaker GINGRICH with respect to U.S. policy in the Middle East. In my view, this represents the most reckless and destructive undermining of an American peace effort that I have ever seen.

Mr. Speaker, I have been closely involved with U.S. policy toward the Middle East since 1974, when I first began my service on the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the Committee on Appropriations. From 1984 until 1994, I chaired that subcommittee. I think it is fair to say that during that time, every effort by any American President to pull Arabs and Israel toward peace was supported on a bipartisan basis by our subcommittee and by the Congress as a whole.

When President Carter, at great political risk to himself, pressured both the Egyptian and Israeli Governments to reach an agreement at Camp David, the Congress supported his action. When President Reagan and Secretary Shultz withheld debt restructuring from Israel until its government adopted economic reforms that were a necessary precondition for bringing rampant inflation under control, the Congress supported that tough medicine in a bipartisan fashion, and that enabled us to provide some crucial help to stabilize Israel's economy.

When President Bush courageously withheld loan guarantees from Israel until Israeli policy on West Bank settlements no longer conflicted with long-standing American policy, those of us in positions of responsibility supported him, and the peace process moved forward.

The historic ceremony that celebrated the Oslo Accords reached between Mr. Arafat, representing the Palestinians, and Prime Minister Rabin, representing the State of Israel and hosted by President Clinton, would never have occurred if it had not been for President Bush's courage.

□ 1815

Since that time the road to peace in the Middle East has been harmed because of foot dragging by the Syrian government, because of vicious terrorist activities by Palestinian extremists, the sometimes disingenuous actions of the Palestinian leadership and, most of all, because of the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by a rabid anti-peace Israeli citizen. The collapse of that peace process would have grave implications for every party in the Middle East. It also would have grave consequences for the United States, for our security, for our world influence and even for the safety of our citizens at home and abroad.

Recognizing that fact after much patient hand holding with both sides, President Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Assistant Secretary Martin Indyk and our tireless Mideast negotiator, Ambassador Dennis Ross, presented to both sides their best assessment of what interim steps needed to be taken to keep the peace process from collapsing. At that point the Speaker of this House took a number of actions, the result of which clearly undercut and undermined U.S. peace making efforts in the region and raised the risk of catastrophe.

First, the Speaker described America's Secretary of State as being an agent of the Palestinians in negotiations. He then attacked President Clinton for turning America into a bully in the peace process because the President, acting as an honest broker between the parties, has courageously and frankly spelled out to both sides the best assessment by our negotiators of what minimum actions would be required to keep the Oslo process alive.

The United States is not today and has never been a bully in the Middle East process. Quite the contrary. It has been an incredibly generous benefactor. The United States has provided Israel with $75 billion in direct U.S. assistance and $10 billion in loan guarantees. Sixty-five billion dollars of that has been provided since 1977, and those numbers do not count various other packages of assistance that this Congress has provided through less direct and less obvious means. Under President Clinton alone Israel has received $18.7 billion in direct aid and $8 billion in loan guarantees plus a number of additional valuable items. For that kind of money the President has not just the right, but an obligation, to provide leadership toward a peace settlement especially when we have been invited by both sides to do so.

Now a letter from the Speaker alleges that the administration's, quote, strong-arm tactics send a clear symbol to supporters of terrorism that the murderous actions are an effective tool in forcing concessions from Israel, end quote. In my view that kind of rhetoric completely ignores the facts and in my view is the worst kind of excess. President Clinton's record in fighting terrorism is exquisitely clear, strong and consistent, especially in the Mideast. In 1996, after a horrible series of attacks in March, President Clinton traveled to Israel and along with 20 other world leaders vowed to renew the fight

against terrorism and pledged an additional $100 million to assist in that effort. To make matters worse, after the Speaker wrote his letter, he then traveled to Israel and gave Israeli leaders the clear message that in any disagreement between the Clinton administration and the Israeli government that they and not the President could count on the Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the Logan Act provides as follows:

Quote: Any citizen of the United States who carries on any intercourse with any foreign government with intent to influence its measure of conduct in relation to any dispute or controversies with the United States shall be fined or imprisoned not more than 3 years or both.

I will not suggest that the Speaker violated the Logan Act by imposing U.S. policy in conversations with the leaders of other governments, although he, in fact, years ago did accuse a previous Speaker, Speaker Wright, myself and a number of others of doing so. What raised Mr. GINGRICH's ire at the time was a much more limited action which consisted of our simply writing a letter to the then President of Nicaragua. In the letter we indicated that even though we were publicly known to be opponents of U.S. military aid to the Contras we nonetheless urged him to support the principle of open and fair elections in his country, and when he did, by the way, he was voted out of office.

No, I will not accuse the Speaker of that action although there is one clear difference between our actions and that case and the actions of the Speaker in this one. Our letter asks Mr. Ortega to do something that was fully consistent with U.S. policy, to support such elections. In contrast, Speaker GINGRICH's counsel to Israel was to feel free to resist U.S. policy.

When Mr. GINGRICH was attacking Mr. Wright, he told the House during the course of debate, quote, it is not the business of the legislative branch to be engaged in negotiations with foreign leaders, to be talking directly with people as though they were the executive branch. The history is clear over and over that that is precisely what they, the Founding Fathers, were terrified of because of the Articles of Confederation, end quote.

It should be noted that the letter that Mr. GINGRICH attempted to bring into question was consistent with this Nation's foreign policy not only with respect to what it requested of Nicaragua, but also with respect to other comments which it might have contained but did not. Unlike the Speaker's present actions, our letter made no criticism of any U.S. official, diplomat or negotiator representing our Government in the region. It certainly contained no offer or indication that the Congress, acting separately from the executive, would respond with any assistance or other incentive if its separate policy conditions were met. By contrast, Mr. GINGRICH is openly critical of the offers made and the positions taken by those whose responsibility it is to negotiate on behalf of the United States. He has virtually invited a foreign government not to take the deal that his own government has offered. His actions undercut the ability of the Secretary of State to pursue peace in the region.

Mr. Speaker, the actions and utterances of Speaker GINGRICH can produce downright dangerous results. If any of us contribute to the illusion that there can be any long term security for Israel or anyone else with interests in the region so long as there is no progress on the peace front, we invite tragedy.

As Tom Friedman, the respected Pulitzer Prize winning columnist from the New York Times, said recently, quote, believe it or not, there is still a Middle East. Out there pressure is mounting to bring Iraq back into the Arab fold. Saudi Arabia is trying to organize an Arab conference. It would probably freeze Israel-Arab relations as long as the peace process is frozen. The Hamas leader, Sheik Yassin, has just completed a triumphant money-raising tour of Arab capitals as part of his goal to wipe out Yasser Arafat, and then Israel, and Jordan is terrified that Mr. Netanyahu is going to reject the U.S. plan and make it impossible for Jordan to sustain its relationship with Israel. Mr. Friedman then goes on to say, we have seen this sort of pro-Israel muscle beach party before where everyone thinks that the only reality is U.S.-Israel politics and that everyone else is a paper tiger. It was 15 years ago when on May 17, 1983, the Reagan team in Israel's Likud government crammed down the throats of the Lebanese an unbalanced, totally pro-Israel plan for the withdrawal of most, but not all, Israeli troops from Lebanon. But the May 17th agreement was never implemented. The U.S. marine compound in Beirut was blown up 5 months after it was signed, and both the marines and Israel had to pull out of central Lebanon unilaterally at great cost and leaving an enormous mess.

Now, Mr. Speaker, both the Arab world and Israel have lost great leaders, have literally given their lives for peace. I remember talking to President Sadat in Egypt shortly after Camp David. In a long conversation I asked him if he thought that the new agreement at Camp David represented a separate peace between Israel and Egypt or whether it would be the first step in a comprehensive peace process that would address the Palestinian problem. I do not know, he replied, but if it is not the latter, I will be dead within 5 years. And he was.

The last time I saw Yitzhak Rabin, whom I had grown to love and respect over 20 years, he asked me two things. The first was to do my best to keep Congress from interjecting itself into relations between the executive branches of our two governments. He felt strongly, going back to the time of his negotiations with President Nixon, that negotiations should be between the two executives. The second was to prevent well meaning but misguided friends of Israel in the Congress from taking actions that would prevent the U.S. Government from dealing directly with the PLO. ''If you cannot deal with them,'' he said, ''you lose your unique position as the only party in the world who can serve as an honest broker in our neighborhood, and if you cannot deal with the PLO, then there is only Hamas, the extremist militant rejectionists, and that would be disaster.''

Shortly thereafter the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. HAMILTON), the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on International Relations, was exploring opportunities to obtain a unanimous consent agreement on the House floor to bring up legislation that would have renewed the authority for the U.S. Government to deal with the PLO. It was made clear by a junior Member on the Republican side of the aisle that an objection would be lodged if that request were offered. At that point I approached Mr. GINGRICH on the House floor, and I said, ''Newt, please. You can't let this happen. It will make it harder for Rabin to move the peace process forward.''

He looked at me and said, ''Dave, you have to understand. I am Likud.''

Shortly thereafter Rabin was assassinated. After that, the objections disappeared, and the legislation was passed, and some of the same politicians who on this floor blocked action before Rabin died scrambled to then climb on board after he died, and their action brought to mind, at least to me, Will Rogers' observation that nothing is quite as pitiful as the sight of a flock of politicians in full flight from their own responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, there are human lives on the line. Our taxpayers have invested countless billions and a major portion of our total storehouse of foreign-policy resources, military, economic, diplomatic toward the goal of preventing future wars in this region and alleviating the tensions that result on an almost weekly basis in deaths from terrorism and organized military action. At this particular moment that investment is seriously at risk. The last thing the United States needs is a loose cannon rummaging around the Middle East making an uncoordinated and unauthorized representation of U.S. policy or legislative policy. Mr. GINGRICH on this issue does not speak for the U.S. Government, he does not speak for the State Department, he does not speak for the United States Senate, and he does not speak for this House. He is certainly entitled to voice his views on foreign policy publicly, even if they are contrary to the policy of the U.S. Government. The Constitution gives every American, including Members of Congress, the right to be wrong. It even gives them the right to make fools of themselves.

□ 1830

However, Mr. Speaker, the Speaker of this House is not entitled to act unilaterally as an independent emissary representing his own personal foreign policy; he is not entitled to act like the Secretary of State in waiting. I would like to continue to believe that he is not putting domestic politics above the national interest.

Mr. Speaker, as Pat Holt, writing for the Christian Science Monitor wrote last week, quote, ''One of the so far unsurmountable difficulties is that neither most Jews nor most Palestinians are willing to admit that the other side has always suffered legitimate grievances. If either group could see their dispute through the eyes of each other, the peace process would take a giant leap forward.''

Instead, in my view, the Speaker's actions are likely to make that leap more difficult.

Mr. Speaker, U.S. Presidents have consistently exerted pressure on Israel as a friend and ally in the context of obtaining diplomatic solutions to complex problems. In 1973 under President Nixon, the United States threatened to reassess Israeli relations in order to secure withdrawals in the 1973 war. President Carter exercised his influence over Menachem Begin at Camp David to grant concessions on giving the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt. He also exercised his influence over Anwar Sadat to not insist on concessions beyond Camp David to the Palestinians. Both of those actions were necessary to move the process forward. President Bush took a courageous stand in 1991 to withhold support for U.S. loan guarantees to Israel until understandings on Israeli settlements were reached.

These were all tough actions taken by U.S. leaders to help a friend, and Israel is a friend, while at the same time protecting U.S. national interests. What the Speaker has done, in my view, is to make it more difficult for Israel to make tough decisions that it needs to think through and make for their own long-term interests.

That is no doubt why the column written about this episode by Thomas Friedman in The New York Times was headlined, ''Brainless in Gaza.'' It is also probably why Richard Cohen of the Washington Post wrote, quote, ''Whatever the case, the Speaker is playing with fire. Netanyahu is a notoriously unpredictable fellow who vacillates between accommodating the Palestinians and rebuffing them. He has an inflated view of his standing in Congress. (The Israeli press quoted him as vowing to 'burn down Washington' if Clinton publicly blamed him for scuttling the peace process), which GINGRICH has done precious little to correct. His political allies are some of the most reactionary and fanatical elements in Israeli society, zealots who want land more than peace. They know what God intends. Others, though, are less sure. In fact, a good many Israelis think there will be no security until Israel and the Palestinians reach an agreement about land. GINGRICH has now complicated that process, encouraging Netanyahu in his intransigence and Arab radicals in their bitterness.''

Mr. Speaker, I would add parenthetically, it also makes it easier for cynical Palestinian rejectionists to undercut any willingness displayed by the PLO leadership to live up to their promises.

Richard Cohen then concluded his column as follows: Quote, ''If the Nobel Committee gives a booby prize for peace, this year's winner is a foregone conclusion. NEWT, take a bow.''

Mr. Speaker, the world's Jews and Israelis in particular have paid a terrible price for the world's intermittent fits of insanity. Israel would not have been created without the actions of the United States 50 years ago in trying to create a place that would be a sanctuary for that insanity.

Because we helped create the State of Israel, we have a special obligation to stand by it and to assure its survival. But with that obligation comes a concurrent obligation to be frank and truthful with them and the world about what steps we believe are necessary to change the Middle East into a neighborhood that is safer for Israel's survival. For any American President to be silent in the face of Israeli indecision or miscalculation would be the ultimate failure of friendship. The President and our negotiators, who long ago have demonstrated their concern for Israel's future, have courageously recognized that.

Now, ultimately, the hard decisions that need to be made are Israeli and Palestinian decisions. The President and our negotiators have long ago demonstrated that they understand that too. Let them make those decisions in honest dialogue in partnership with the steady and knowledgeable American hands who have worked with them under Republican and Democratic administrations alike. Let them not be misled by new-to-the-scene kibitzers in Congress who, despite their bravado, do not really know the territory or the sensitivities and cross-currents and intricacies that shape it.

It may be popular for individual Members of Congress to issue pronouncements that tell our friends at home and abroad what they want to hear, but that is not what dangerous situations require. They require thoughtful, measured and judicious cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of government. That, unfortunately, has not been forthcoming from this congressional leadership on this issue. It is about time that it is.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2646, THE EDUCATION SAVINGS AND SCHOOL EXCELLENCE ACT OF 1998

Mr. HASTINGS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105–579) on the resolution (H. Res. 471) waiving points of order against the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 2646) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow tax-free expenditures from education individual retirement accounts for elementary and secondary school expenses, to increase the maximum annual amount of contributions to such accounts, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3097, THE TAX CODE TERMINATION ACT OF 1998

Mr. HASTINGS, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105–580) on the resolution (H. Res. 472) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3097) to terminate the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

NUCLEAR TESTS NOT A PRODUCT OF KASHMIR

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my concern over efforts to link Kashmir to the underground nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan.

As my colleagues know, India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests last month. The United States condemned the tests and immediately imposed economic sanctions on both countries. The United States has called for both India and Pakistan to stop further nuclear tests, not to weaponize their nuclear arsenal, sign nonproliferation treaties, and work towards easing tensions in South Asia. These are goals that I fully support.

However, there seems to be a growing movement to link Kashmir to the nuclear tests, a linkage which makes no sense, in my opinion.

Earlier this week, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated that the ''recent decisions by India and Pakistan to conduct nuclear tests reflect old thinking about national greatness and old fears stemming from a boundary dispute that goes back more than 5 decades.''

In the Senate, there has been talk of a resolution that would call for U.N. mediation in Kashmir through a U.N. Security Council resolution. The resolution would also ask the United