

Our government needs reforms, and we need to work to rebuild confidence in government, but we do not need a radical overhaul of our institutions.

Given the size and diversity of our country, and the number and complexity of the challenges we confront, it seems to me that representative democracy works reasonably well in America. The system may be—and at times is—slow, messy, cumbersome, complicated, and even unresponsive, but it has served us well for many years, and continues to do so.

Just think about the condition of our country today. In general I think America is a better place today than it was when I came to Congress almost four decades ago.

The Cold War is over, and we are at peace.

Our economy is thriving and is the envy of the world.

We have greatly improved the lot of older Americans with programs like Social Security and Medicare.

Women and minorities have had new doors opened to them as never before.

The Internet has brought a world of knowledge to the most remote classrooms and homes.

And, most important of all, this is still a land of opportunity where everyone has a chance, not an equal chance unfortunately, but still a chance to become the best they can be.

We must be doing something right.

As I look at the government today, I'm not cynical, pessimistic or discouraged. I'm optimistic about the institutions of government and about the country. I am confident that our government will continue to meet the important challenges we will face in the coming years.

This was indeed the most encouraging finding in the Council's poll this summer—that despite their distrust, Americans still believe that government has an important role to play in the next century, particularly in defense, education, helping senior citizens, medical research, reducing violence and cleaning up the environment. Americans still recognize the importance of government, and look to government to better their lives and our nation.

So the opportunity for improving the relationship between government and the people is clearly there for all of us to seize.

Thank you.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE OHIO VALLEY CHAPTER OF THE ASSOCIATED BUILDERS AND CONTRACTORS AND OSHA

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend the partnership the Ohio Valley Chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc. recently forged with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). These two groups have mutually recognized the importance of providing a safe work environment for our nation's construction workforce.

I am pleased to see the federal government and the private sector working so closely toward a common goal—worker safety and health. As part of this innovative partnership, participating contractors from the Ohio Valley chapter will voluntarily improve their current

safety and health programs and adhere to a more stringent set of standards. In return, OSHA will recognize contractors who have demonstrated exemplary safety records.

According to the agreement, ABC and OSHA will take positive steps together, such as: maintaining an open communications policy at the regional, chapter, and national levels; sharing knowledge of the best industry technology, innovations, and practices that improve safety; cooperating in the development and improvement of safety programs; ensuring that policies and practices are effective, consistent, and fair; and promoting the principles of good faith and fair dealings.

This agreement is good for ABC contractors, OSHA, and most importantly, workers on the job site. I firmly believe that commonsense partnerships such as these, characterized by cooperation and communication, will best serve those it was meant to help—the worker.

MOTHER NATURE WAITS ON NO ONE

HON. LOUISE McINTOSH SLAUGHTER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, oil prices have tripled since the end of 1998 and are higher than they have been in nearly a decade. Today in response, I am cosponsoring legislation that is an aggressive response to the reduction in oil produced by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nations. This legislation would direct the Administration to file a case with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against oil-producing countries. Article XI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) prohibits members of the WTO from setting quantitative restrictions on imports or exports. I believe oil-producing countries' production limits fall within this Article, therefore these countries have violated the rules of the WTO. With the majority of oil-producing nations already members of the WTO or in the process of applying for membership, a complaint filed by the United States would have an immediate impact on the current and future behavior of these countries.

This particular crisis has to be investigated. I consider these actions a shameful display of ingratitude on the part of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, after Americans put their lives on the line to safeguard the stability and oil fields of these nations in the Gulf War.

I was pleased with Secretary Richardson's efforts to meet with oil industry representatives and OPEC members, but I frankly think that the cautious approach that the White House is taking is still too little and too late. We know that actions will speak louder than words.

The people that I represent in Monroe County, New York, have the dubious distinction this year of having had more snow than any place else in the United States. My constituents were then especially hard hit by the high heating oil and diesel fuel costs this winter. Now, the rest of the country is being affected by the soaring cost of gasoline. These enormous oil price increases pose a significant threat to our nation's continued economic growth by increasing the likelihood of inflation and the costs of doing business.

So, on behalf of all my constituents today who are still shoveling snow, paying their heating oil bills and now paying these high gas prices, I want to say to my colleagues and to everyone in this Congress that quick action is needed now. Mother Nature waits on no one.

A TRIBUTE TO KRISTEN THALMAN—A DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVANT

HON. EDWARD R. ROYCE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize a distinguished American, Kristine Thalman.

She dedicated her career to public service in city government and she ensured that our local citizens received the services they expect from their municipalities.

She has been the Intergovernmental Relations Director for the City of Anaheim California, for the last thirteen years of her career. She retires this month. Her career at Anaheim has been admired by many of us here in Congress.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Kris for her assistance to me since I am pleased to have part of the City of Anaheim in my Congressional District.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that this Thursday is Kris' birthday and certainly greetings are also in order at this time.

THE ORDEAL OF ANDREI BABITSKY

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 14, 2000

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, a small bit of good news has emerged from the tortured region of Chechnya, where the Russian military is killing, looting, and terrorizing the population under the guise of an "anti-terrorism operation."

Andrei Babitsky, the Radio Liberty correspondent who had disappeared in Chechnya in early February after Russian authorities had "exchanged" him to unknown persons in return for some Russian prisoners of war, has emerged in Dagestan and is now in Moscow recuperating from his ordeal. Mr. Babitsky's courageous reporting from the besieged city of Grozny had infuriated Russian military authorities, and he was arrested in mid-January and charged with "participating in an unlawful armed formation."

Prior to his release, Mr. Babitsky had spent time in the notorious Chernokozovo "filtration" camp where the Russian military has been detaining and torturing Chechens suspected of aiding the resistance. Following his arrival in Moscow, Mr. Babitsky provided a harrowing account of his incarceration at the Chernokozovo prison, and especially the savage treatment of his fellow prisoners. It is another graphic reminder that for all the fine words and denials coming out of Moscow, the Russian military has been conducting a brutal