

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, just three weeks from the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the battle for Baghdad is drawing to a close. Less than 2 hours ago, amidst the cheers and grateful smiles of the newly freed people of Iraq, the 3rd Army met the 1st Marine expeditionary force at the Tigris River.

Thanks to U.S. and coalition courage and leadership, liberty has reached the center of Baghdad, darkened by tyranny for more than a quarter of a century.

Soon we will turn this body's attention to reconstruction, to interim governments, to the creation of a free and democratic Iraq, and as the President said in Belfast yesterday, the United Nations will play a vital role in helping to stand up our humanitarian efforts.

Despite the fondest wishes of the President of France, I would offer, Mr. Speaker, since the U.N. chose against being central to the war, the U.N. should not and will not be central to the peace.

AMERICA RX

(Mr. MICHAUD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, today, nearly 65 million Americans go without adequate prescription drug coverage, yet drug prices continue to rise, forcing more people to choose between medicine and food.

Today, I am introducing America RX, which uses the power of the free market to negotiate fairer drug prices for Americans. Like the law we passed in Maine, it is a fresh approach that will not cost the taxpayer a single dime. This approach is simple, it is fair and it works.

Everyone has heard of a volume discount. That is exactly what we are talking about when we are talking about America RX. More Americans can afford to buy prescription drugs, which means higher volume, low prices.

The time has come to lower drug prices so that more Americans are not forced to ride a bus to Canada.

I invite my colleagues to join me in moving this initiative forward.

CONGRATULATING MITCHELL HIGH SCHOOL LADY MOUNTAIN- EERS

(Mr. BALLENGER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BALLENGER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate North Carolina's 2A high school basketball champions, the Mitchell High School Lady Mountaineers. Led by Coach Bruce Woody, the Lady Mountaineers blazed victory's trail by winning their final 19 games of the season, knocking off the top three ranked teams in the State.

In spite of their winning streak going into the March 15 championship game in Chapel Hill, the Lady Mountaineers were considered underdogs against the previously undefeated and formidable Lady Red Devils of Red Springs High School, but the Lady Mountaineers knew they could win, and cheered on by over 1,100 loyal fans in purple, the Lady Mountaineers fought hard through five lead changes and three ties.

Defense was the name of the game, and every athlete in purple did her part. Coach Woody could not believe his eyes when the final buzzer rang and the score read 61 to 50, with the Lady Mountaineers winning.

North Carolina's 10th District salutes our Lady Mountaineers. We are all inspired by the team's tenacity and winning spirit. Congratulations, Mitchell High School Lady Mountaineers.

NATIONAL DAY OF SILENCE

(Mr. FARR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give voice to those who are silent: the many youth in our high schools who are afraid to speak of their place in our society because they are gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Today marks the National Day of Silence in which we celebrate the diversity of our population, but mourn the population's ignorance and intolerance toward that diversity.

I commend my colleague, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL), for introducing H. Con. Res. 86, which memorializes the National Day of Silence. This resolution encourages each State and local jurisdiction to adopt laws to prohibit discrimination and harassment against persons of alternative sexual orientation or gender identity. This is a goal I applaud and support.

It is hard to believe that in a country dedicated to the principles of freedom and individual liberty that some persons still experience out-and-out harassment because they are not heterosexual. This is especially true of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender youth who literally fear for their safety at school and on the street, where they are subjected to violence, hatred and taunts.

The National Day of Silence is a way to raise awareness of this issue and to work for the justice of those most vulnerable among us: our youth. I ask you all to support H. Con. Res. 86 and to support the National Day of Silence.

IS RUSSIA OUR ALLY?

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, right after September 11, Russia stood with us as an ally in the war on terrorism, but re-

cent weeks have shown that Russia may have another agenda.

Russian companies have sold military equipment to Iraq, equipment used to harm American soldiers. Russian officials were told about this in June of 2002, but did nothing.

The Russian Government continues to maintain friendly relations with Kim Jong Il of North Korea, a fact that only encourages this regime's dangerous actions.

Russia has also been involved in helping Iran develop two nuclear facilities that are part of a nuclear weapons program. This is in addition to building Iran a nuclear reactor and providing them with low-enriched uranium in 1995.

Russia is deeply involved in arming terrorist-sponsoring countries.

Arming rogue regimes cannot be compatible with being an American ally. We must make it clear that Russia cannot arm America's enemies and call itself an ally. If Russia wants to be an ally, it is time to start acting like one.

MINORITY HEALTH MONTH

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, last year with the help of Congressman J.C. Watts and many others, we passed a sense of Congress that April should be Minority Health Month.

There have already been many conferences, briefings and other activities to call attention to the poor health, the lack of access and the wide disparities in the health of this country's minority populations. Whether it is heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes or AIDS, just to name a few, African Americans in particular, but all people of color, die and are disabled in numbers far disproportionate to their representation in our country.

No country can achieve its full greatness when it continues to essentially ignore the plight of one-third of its citizens and residents, when the right of health care is denied to so many.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King said that "of all the forms of injustice, the denial of health care is the most shocking and inhumane." As we debate the budget, it would be shocking and inhumane to pass a tax cut of any size while almost 75 million people do not have full health insurance and while hundreds of people of color die every day prematurely from preventable causes.

We are a better country than this. Let us prove it before we go home to face our constituents and celebrate the most important holy days of the Christian and Jewish faith. In health, as in education, no one should be left behind.

HONORING CAPTAIN CHRIS WACHTER

(Mr. DREIER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1