

intelligence and on personal grudges. We must take careful and measured steps when putting lives on the line, something that the Bush administration has not done.

As we work to protect those who protect us, instead of throwing our money into an ill-advised war, we must commit first to keeping our troops well equipped with safety gear and modern equipment, and we must provide them with real and comprehensive health care, including mental health support services, when they come home.

Mr. Speaker, war has long-lasting effects on those who serve. Let us work to ensure that we limit those effects by using our troops only when we must and treating them with the dignity they deserve when they return.

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

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

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

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

CORRECTING AMERICAN FISCAL PROBLEMS AND PRESERVING SOCIAL SECURITY

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

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again, it is an honor to come before this House of Representatives. I can tell you that this 30-Something Working Group, Mr. Speaker, that our Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), has designated this time every week for the 30-Something Working Group to come to the floor to not only speak to the Members but also have an opportunity to share good information in general with the American people, and that is why we are here, to represent them, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say, in the last several weeks, we have been talking about the issue of Social Security. I can tell you that Social Security is not only at the forefront of the agenda in this Congress but also has been promoted throughout this Nation as being in a state of crisis, which it is not.

So, tonight, the 30-Something Working Group, we have asked a member of our caucus to come, the ranking member of the Committee on the Budget, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT), to come to talk to us a little bit about this double whammy

that the American people will be going through because of the push of privatization of Social Security and the irresponsible spending by the majority side and also by the present administration.

This whole debate is about helping future generations. This whole debate is about making sure that we keep our end of the deal to the American people. I can tell you, keeping our end of the deal to the American people is saying we are going to do what we said we are going to do from the beginning, Mr. Speaker, and it is important. But I believe when misinformation or inaccurate information is given to the American people and to some Members of this House, it jeopardizes our commitment to keeping our end of the deal.

What I mean by "our end of the deal," for those individuals that have paid into Social Security over the years, and they are looking forward to the security of Social Security being there for them at the benefit level to where it is now, I think it is very, very important that we do not let those Americans down.

I want to make sure that not only the Members of this House but everyone understands that Social Security will be solvent for the next 47 to 50 years at the present benefit level of where it is right now. Forty-eight million Americans who need the survivor benefits, retirees or individuals eligible for Social Security at this point will receive 100 percent of the benefits they are receiving now. On average, they receive \$955 of monthly benefits from Social Security. Thirty-three million Americans are retired that are in that 48 million, and a large number of those Americans would be living under the poverty line if it was not for Social Security. So when we start talking about privatization of Social Security, it is a very dangerous thing and something that we should not play around with at all.

I am proud that Democrats on this side of the aisle, and I would even say some of my Republican friends, believe in strengthening Social Security without slashing benefits that Americans have earned and making sure that private accounts are not a part of the Social Security debate or reality, because there is strong evidence, not hearsay, strong evidence of major benefit cuts to Americans that are counting on Social Security.

I think it is also important, Mr. Speaker, that the Members understand that, once we can get to the point that we stop insisting on private accounts, when it really does not add up for the individual that is receiving Social Security or that will receive Social Security, I think we can get on to not only a serious discussion but action in dealing with the question of Social Security.

We should not increase the debt by some \$5 trillion and gamble on the future of Social Security. I think the American people deserve better. I

think the American people demand better, and I think the American people will continue to pay very close attention to what is being said and what is not being said in this discussion about Social Security.

I do not believe that Members of this House or the other body will take a vote where they are going to make a career decision on a gamble on Social Security privatization. It is not at that point to where one has to gamble with the retirement of so many Americans. Social Security is there to make sure that it is a guarantee for men and women that have worked in this country.

So, tonight, we are going to talk about the budget, the \$26,000-plus that every American owes to the Federal debt, and tonight, we are going to, if I could use the word, cross-pollinate, Mr. Speaker, Social Security privatization philosophy and the reality of the ever-growing deficit, that it seems that this Congress is out of control of continuing to add on to the debt without any plan whatsoever, no real realistic plan, in making sure that we take down the debt for future generations. So I think that is very, very important.

Now, some individuals will say, Well, what is the Democratic plan? Well, I would like to know what is the Republican plan? Some of my good friends in this Chamber are Republicans and want to know the Republican plan.

I would say, the Republican leadership plan, because I do not want to generalize, because I feel there are Members in this Chamber that have a genuine argument and concern when they see statistics that are given by notable organizations and even by some of our Federal Government organizations that are saying that there going to be major benefit cuts if we go to privatization, to the point that where even individuals who do not enroll in private accounts are going to receive cuts. That is not fair.

So that is the reason why we come to this floor, week after week, the 30-Something Working Group, along with others, to be able to talk about this issue.

Now, tonight only are we going to have the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), who is always here, Mr. Speaker, and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, and we have one of our 30-Something Working Group members, the gentleman from the Great State of Alabama (Mr. DAVIS), who will come before this great House to be a part of this discussion, along with our ranking member on the Committee on the Budget, the Democratic ranking member of the Committee on the Budget and a part of the Democratic leadership team in dealing with the issue of the deficit and the budget and responsible spending and also making sure that we do the right thing.

I would like to yield some time to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT). As you go to the well there, I want to just let you know how