

years into the Iraq war, the Bush administration has seen fit to share with the American people their war plan.

The bad news is that there is no “there” there. The “national strategy for victory” shared with the American people last week is barely worth the paper it is printed on.

It is essentially the same old warmed-over rhetoric that we have become accustomed to and frustrated with: the enemy is bad; we are good; we will never back down; we will achieve total victory.

To the extent that this strategy for victory contains specifics, they are completely divorced from reality.

In last week’s speech, the President mentioned that Haifa Street, formerly called Purple Heart Boulevard because of all of the U.S. attacks incurred there, is now safely under the control of Iraq’s security forces, but taking control of Haifa Street in Baghdad does not make Iraqi forces self-sustaining. Taking the battle to the enemy, as the President likes to put it, has not thwarted terrorism but, instead, made Iraq a hotbed of terrorism.

The President insists that fighting the terrorists “over there” means that we are not fighting them at home. I doubt the people who call London, Madrid, or Bali their home would agree with that assessment. Who is to say that next time it will not be Chicago, Las Vegas, or San Francisco? There is no evidence that we are any more secure at home because of the war in Iraq.

Iraqi democracy is anything but a certainty. We are undermining our own stated goal of advancing freedom when we torture prisoners and when we spend millions of dollars to spread propaganda in the Iraqi press.

When the White House’s statements are not divorced from reality, they contradict everything they once said about the war. Like this one, from the supposed “victory strategy” document: “It is not realistic to expect a fully functioning democracy, able to defeat its enemies and peacefully reconcile generational grievances, to be in place less than 3 years after Saddam was finally removed from power.”

Now they tell us. So much for “Mission Accomplished.” We have sure come a long way from the confident assertion that we would be greeted by grateful Iraqis throwing flowers at our feet, that we would be in and out in a flash, that all we had to do was depose Saddam and democracy would instantly take hold.

The President’s speech last week demonstrates his inability to recognize the intensity of people’s anxiety about this war. Americans are not looking for the administration to do the same thing but just do it a little bit better and to put it in a glossy booklet.

They want to see a fundamental shift in direction, like the plan outlined in a letter I wrote to the President, which was cosigned by 61 other House Members: one, engage in greater multilat-

eral cooperation with our allies; two, pursue diplomatic, nonmilitary initiatives; three, prepare for a robust postconflict reconciliation process; and, four, and most importantly of all, bring our troops home.

I wish this administration would step out of its bubble. They should break away from the yes men and listen to the American people who do not understand the cause for which more than 2,100 and countless thousands of Iraqis have died.

It is not just the American people that the administration is ignoring. It is the Iraqis also. Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni leaders agree on practically nothing except that there needs to be a clear timetable for our troops to leave Iraq.

The President wants to have it both ways on Iraq. He will not change his underlying approach, an open-ended military commitment that will last as long as he deems it appropriate, but he can read the polls. So he wants to be perceived as doing something new and something different in order to rescue his administration from political oblivion; but, Mr. Speaker, repackaging a Twinkie does not improve its nutritional value, and the same goes for the Bush Iraq policy.

#### REBUILDING CASINOS IN THE GULF COAST REGION

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

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my strong opposition to the inclusion of any tax breaks to rebuild the gulf coast gambling industry in the tax package, which may reach the House floor in the near future. I believe that it is an extraordinarily controversial and improper measure to support the casino industry with tax incentives paid by other Americans. I would like to commend the distinguished gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for his active role in bringing attention to this important issue.

I certainly understand the need to provide general economic incentives for businesses to rebuild in the gulf region, which was so heavily devastated by the hurricanes earlier this year. I support efforts to encourage economic development and restore infrastructure in the area. However, I cannot support allowing casinos to access Federal tax breaks while at the same time we are proposing to achieve savings from a host of other governmental programs.

If Americans were given a choice, I believe that they would prefer not to use limited resources to support the casinos. Prudent use of hard-earned taxpayer money demands that we stay focused on concerns such as the defense of our Nation, education of our children, health care for veterans, and subsistence for the poor.

My constituents are aware of the proposal to potentially provide assistance

to gambling interests and have let me know of their opposition to such an effort. Nebraskans, and Americans generally, are generous people, willing to help others in need. Congress, however, has a responsibility not to abuse this generosity by providing tax breaks to wealthy gambling operations which have already signaled their intention to rebuild in the gulf region. In fact, even without the tax breaks, the gambling industry has announced its plan to come back “bigger and better” in the area.

Government is an instrument of societal order, establishing priorities for how we choose to live. For instance, we have worked to reduce the marriage penalty in the tax code. We provide tax incentives to save for retirement. We provide tax benefits for health care, and there is certainly a precedent for targeting incentives toward certain businesses while restricting the use of tax breaks for others.

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In fact, it would be unusual, I contend, if the government did not restrict these tax breaks and exclude casinos.

As a Gulf Opportunity Zone package was under consideration, Alberto Lopez, Director of Strategic Communication For Harrah Entertainment, Incorporated, was recently quoted in The Washington Post as saying, “We are actually scratching our heads. We can’t ever remember an instance of being offered a tax credit. Ever.”

In another telling comment in the same Washington Post article, a gambling company official, who wished to remain anonymous, stated “Anything that the Federal Government can provide, obviously we’ll take advantage of it.” Unfortunately, these gambling conglomerates would be taking advantage not only of tax breaks but the generosity of American taxpayers as well.

Why should all Americans be forced to prioritize casinos in the Tax Code? How can Congress consider providing such incentives to the multi-billion dollar gambling industry when there are so many unmet needs in this Nation? Why should these incentives be considered when the gambling industry already plans to rebuild the casinos? To what extent were these casinos covered by insurance? These are a few of the questions that must be addressed before tax legislation reaches the House floor.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to join me in expressing opposition to the inclusion of any tax breaks for gambling interests. Do not let the casino interests hit the jackpot through the Tax Code.

#### THE LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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