

religious parties, has led to incredible corruption.

"Political position in Iraq has become a way to steal money and then leave the country," says one official in the defense ministry, where tens of millions of dollars vanished. With few exceptions, the new crop of ministers, also picked by party, does not appear much better than the old.

This system has made many Iraqis sour on democracy quickly. They are hungry for strong leadership. Over and over, I've heard Iraqis say Hussein could have restored order in two weeks.

This is why it is so crucial for Maliki to be able to act as a national leader who stands above the interests of sectarian parties. But it isn't easy for Maliki to make that leap. For one thing, he has virtually no experienced staff; much of what he does have is limited to his Shiite religious party, the Dawa.

I asked one of the bright lights in the new government, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, what was to be done. Salih, a Kurd whom I met over a kebab feast in his garden with his peshmerga (Kurdish militia) guards, manages to combine ethnic loyalty with a commitment to building an Iraq for all its people.

"Prime Minister Maliki says he wants to transcend his Shia affiliation and act as a national leader," Salih said. "It is incumbent on all of us in Iraq and Iraq's friends in the international community to help us realize that objective."

It is unclear how or if that can be done. But the prospects for Iraq and for U.S. troop withdrawals depend on whether Maliki can lead.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MACK). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

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ALTERNATIVE FUELS RESEARCH

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

Mr. GOODE. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to tell the House and the United States that leading edge research into the development of alternative fuels is happening as we speak in the Fifth District of Virginia at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, Virginia. The institute is a mission of Virginia's land grant institution, Virginia Tech. The institute anchors the technology economy of southside Virginia, and one of its research initiatives focus on sustainable and renewable resources.

In particular, the scientists working in this field are directing their efforts toward generating alternative energy from renewable resources such as switchgrass and hybrid poplars. The scientists believe that these renewable resources can be used in biofuels, biodiesels and bioenergy. The research being conducted at the institute is not

just laboratory work, it is applied research. In that light, the institute has formed a partnership with Wendy Acres Nursery in Gretna, Virginia, also in the Fifth District. At Wendy Acres, they are growing species of switchgrass and hybrid poplar which have a low ash content when processed. This characteristic makes these plants better suited for bioenergy and biofuels. These species are being bred and investigated for use in short-rotation woody plant species and herbaceous perennials as feedstocks by the Institute for Sustainable and Renewable Resources to determine the most efficient production of bioenergy and biofuels.

Mr. Speaker, I have here a container of wood chips. I also have a container of switchgrass. What the scientists have come up with is this biofuel. This is just steps away from being able to be utilized in vehicles all across this Nation. I look forward to the day when we have no dependence on Venezuela and Mr. Chavez for our oil needs. I look forward to the day when we have no dependence on the Middle East and sheiks there for our oil needs. I look forward to the day when we are free of foreign fossil fuel. And I hope all across America we can do as they are doing in Danville and other places, making our own fuel and giving us energy independence.

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

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

AMERICA'S AGRICULTURE

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Arkansas is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor tonight deeply concerned about the future of our Nation's farm economy and the well-being of our farmers and ranchers. America's farm families provide the most safe, reliable and abundant source of food and fiber in the world. The security of our Nation's domestic food supply is critically important to the security of our homeland. We must continue to provide our farm families with the tools and resources necessary to continue producing our food and fiber to ensure we never become as dependent on foreign countries for our food as we are for our oil today.

I was extremely disappointed in this Republican Congress and their decision to cut agriculture disaster funding during conference committee negotiations of the emergency supplemental appropriations bill last week. I was also struck by the fact that the administra-

tion even weighed in by threatening its first veto ever of this supplemental if it contained disaster assistance for our farm families. Making these cuts on the backs of our farmers and ranchers when they are struggling to make ends meet is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, it is about priorities, and the decision made by this Republican Congress and administration does not reflect the commonsense priorities and values that many Arkansans and I were raised on and still believe in.

Agriculture is Arkansas' largest industry and ranks among the top 10 States in the production of rice, poultry, cotton, catfish and baitfish. In fact, one in every five Arkansas jobs is directly related to agriculture. According to a forecast by USDA's Economic Research Service, farm income is estimated to decline by \$16.5 billion in 2006 as a result of increased production costs and reductions in market assistance. Reduction in farm income, combined with the hardships experienced during the 2005 crop year, will lead our Nation's farm economy into the worst decline of the 21st century.

As you can see from the poster here, Mr. Speaker, the red line, the top line, indicates the amount of money that it costs our farmers to grow crops. The bottom line demonstrates the amount of money they have received. They are losing money. In 1985, farmers spent anywhere from \$80,000 to \$85,000 on a new tractor. Today, a farmer will spend anywhere from \$140,000 to \$150,000 on a new tractor.

As the chart shows, our farm families have seen a steady increase in the cost to produce their crops, while at the same time the prices they receive for their crops remain the same and are lower than they were 10 years ago. In fact, in 1980, cotton was going for 60 cents a pound. Today, it is 42 cents a pound. Rice was going for \$11.50 per hundred weight. Today, it is \$7 per hundred weight. Soybeans, in 1980, \$5.71 a bushel. Today, just a slight increase, at \$6.09 a bushel.

In 2005, our Nation's farm families faced severe droughts, hurricane damaging winds and other natural events causing damage and devastation to their crops and livestock. Americans have been hit hard by the drastic increase in gasoline, diesel and natural gas prices. Our Nation's farm sector relies heavily on diesel fueled farm equipment to plant, harvest and transport their products to market. Increased fuel, fertilizer and other record high input costs have pushed many farmers out of business altogether, forcing them to auction off their family farms.

I have been urging this Republican Congress and administration to pass disaster assistance for our farm families since September of last year. I stand here tonight holding this binder, a binder recently presented to me by Ken Shea of Dumas, Arkansas. It is filled with farm auction after farm auction, fliers, notices of bankrupt