sense of the House of Representatives on the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks launched against the United States on September 11, 2001.'' No problem with that.

''Whereas on the morning of September 11, 2001, while Americans were attending their daily routines, terrorists hijacked four civilian aircraft, crashing two of them into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and a third into the Pentagon outside Washington.''

No problem there.

It talks about the nearly 3,000 lives that were lost and about how it was al Qaeda who declared war on us, which is all in the news and everybody agrees. Why was it controversial? It was controversial because the resolution talks about what the Republicans have accomplished to respond to the terrorist threat.

''Congress passed and the President signed numerous laws to assist victims, combat the forces of terrorism, protect the homeland and support members of the Armed Forces who defend American interests at home and abroad, including the U.S. PATRIOT Act of 2001 and its 2006 reauthorization, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2004, the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.''

Now the Democrats don't want the people in America to be reminded that Republicans have responded to the threat and passed good legislation which has become effective and now is making a difference. It is hard to argue with success. We have not had a successful attack in the United States of America since September 11, 2001.

I have heard it said on the floor, we are not safer than we were before September 11, 2001. I say we are safer than we were before September 11, 2001. Thanks to the Republican leadership and the President of the United States, thanks to the young men and women in uniform who have taken the fight to the terrorists.

This battle is going to be fought somewhere. The al Qaeda membership tells us that on their Web sites, in their interviews, and when we catch their data off laptops or printed material. They are going to bring this fight to us.

I observed an interview in Guantanamo Bay at the facility there. I heard through an interpreter what one al Qaeda member said while sipping tea while being interviewed. He said, ''When I get out of here,'' not if, but when, ''it is death to America, death to America, death to America.''

Now there are many people here that think we are going to be safe, these guys are just criminals. We don't need to be in Iraq. I have to tell you, for one, I hope that this war is fought over there where the terrorists are, where every American carries a gun instead of fighting it on the streets of Washington, D.C., or New York City or Wichita, Kansas. For us to get out of the Iraq early would be a horrible mistake.

The stated goals of al Qaeda and Al Zawahiri, the spiritual leader for bin Laden, he said our stated goal is to get the Americans out of Iraq. They could declare victory if we took the policies that the Democrats have been reporting of leaving Iraq and getting out. We have to complete this job.

There will be a time to leave Iraq when the country is a safe democracy, when it is controlling its own borders, when it is controlling its own criminals, when it has a government that continues to be effective as a democracy. That is when it is time for us to get out. We cannot afford to allow a safe haven for al Qaeda, and that is their stated goal. By pulling out early it would simply give them a victory and make us less safe.

This battle needs to be fought where every American carries a gun. That is what the 9/11 resolution was leading to. I supported this, but it was opposed on the floor by the Democratic leadership and the Democrats. But when the chips were down and everyone thought about November 7, a majority voted for this resolution.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. Osama bin Laden said the center of the war on terror is in Iraq, yet we hear Democrats asserting Iraq has no connection to the war on terror. Osama bin Laden declared that, and that is why we need to understand it is important that we succeed in Iraq against the terrorists.

Mr. TIAHRT. The policy of Howard Dean and many of the liberals in the Democratic Party has been, let's not fight them, let's not capture them, let's not interrogate them, let's not bother them. If we leave them alone, they will leave us alone. We knew, going back into the 1970s when we were leaving them alone, that they were going to come after us. They came after us in Lebanon in the 1980s and they killed 241 of our Marines. They went after our embassies in Africa, they went after the USS *Cole*, they went after the World Trade Center in 1993, and came back in 2001. And since then, even though this country has not been attacked on its home soil, there have been attempts.

Thanks to our police force, the United States Government, the CIA, the FBI, those who try to protect us, the President and his leadership, we have not had a successful attack by terrorists on American soil since September 11, 2001.

The policies proposed by the liberal Democrats are dangerous for America. The Republican policies will lead to a bright future where this country is safe, where the economy is strong, and where every American will have an opportunity to make their dreams come true. That is the stated goal of the Republican House. It was the very goal that we read, our vision for the future. I would like to close with that.

The vision statement is, ''We will promote the dignity and future of every individual by building a free society under a limited, accountable government that protects our liberty, security and prosperity for a brighter American dream.'' That is what the Republican Party is about. That is what the Republican-controlled House is about.

We are pleased that we can talk to the American public and the Speaker tonight about what we have been doing to show the contrast and carry out the possibility for every American to pursue their dream successfully.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

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.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House once again. As you know, the 30-Something Working Group has been coming to the floor for 3½ years with great intensity in the last 2 years because a lot has been happening to America versus for America as it relates to national policy in the area of health care, education, economic development, helping small businesses and large businesses provide health care insurance for their workers.

We can go from as large a company as General Motors having to cut back on their employee workforce and having to make major cutbacks at U.S. companies because of a lack of a policy dealing with health care. You can go all of the way down to the small business that only has 5 or 6 employees that are encouraging their employees to get on Medicaid because they can't afford to give them a package that is affordable for those individuals to provide health care insurance for their families.

Those of us in the 30-Something Working Group, we don't come to the floor to say Republicans, Democrats, Independents, what have you. We come to the floor to give the American people the straight talk and also Members of Congress straight talk about what they are not doing for their constituents and Americans in general.

We are the leader of the free world as it relates to a democracy, but our democracy and economy is suffering because of a lack of oversight, a lack of adhering to Article I, section 1, of the U.S. Constitution that says we are supposed to be the legislative body.

Mr. Speaker, I must say there are a number of Republican Members that are coming down to the floor because I can tell you, if I was on the majority side, I would be quite nervous right now. When the election is 50-some-odd days away and the American people are looking around and saying, why don't we have the essentials, such as a health care policy?

Why do we have a number of red and blue States suing the Federal Government over lack of funding for Leave No Child Behind?

Why do small businesses have to tell their employees to get on Medicaid, a government program, when they could provide health care insurance for their employees?

Why do we have veterans that are going to see a specialist at a VA hospital and have to wait over 3 weeks, in some instances 2 months, to see that specialist when they have a problem? Those individuals shed blood and watched their friends and colleagues and comrades die. Those individuals come here to the Washington Mall, right down the street from this Capitol, to see the names and sometimes visualize the faces of those individuals who lost their lives. These are individuals that may not have legs or arms. Some are living the memory of what they went through, but yet they have to stand in line.

If I was a part of the Republican majority, I would have an issue as relates to the wrong direction that they have led this country.

□ 2045

I wouldn't say the Republican majority has led the country in the wrong direction. They have followed the President in a rubber stamp atmosphere. They haven't stood up to the President and said Article I, section 1 of the U.S. Constitution says we have to legislate, we have to have oversight. So shall it be written, so shall it be done, by the President of the United States, and now we find ourselves in a situation that we have never been in the history of the United States of America. This is not political rhetoric, this is the fact. This is a fact.

Now we have a President that is running around here saying that he wants to privatize Social Security, if he has a Congress that would deliver it, a majority, in the next Congress. Now, I can tell you, the President came in, he had privatization, he had 2 privatization commissions that went out and tried to find information on how they can privatize Social Security.

We spent a lot of time in the first half of the of the 109th Congress last year trying out how we could please the President, the majority, how we could please the President by privatizing Social Security that would cut benefits for survivors, that would cut benefits for retirees and cut benefits for individuals that became disabled at the time of war.

The only winners in the privatization of Social Security would have been Wall Street to the tune of $530 billion. I can speak boldly here today. I don't have to look at notes, because I already know this. Those of us on the 30-Something Working Group had well over 1,000 townhall meetings throughout the country with a coalition of Americans, Democrats and Republicans to push back the President and the rubber stamp Congress and not allowing seniors not to have that security that they signed up for.

So I must say that this is not rhetoric, this is fact.

I just want to mention something, since I am joined here with my friend, Congresswoman DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ and the 30–Something Working Group. We don't have to quote what Democrats have said about this Republican majority. We can quote the past Speaker of this House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich. There is not a day that you pick up the paper and he says he doesn't understand what is going on in Congress right now.

This is an individual, that led the quote, unquote, Republican revolution that took place. They were supposed to balance the budget, they were supposed to make sure that they have accountability, they were to make sure that they have maximum oversight. None of that has happened.

If I can just take, about, maybe 4 minutes, and just kind of go down the line, because I know the previous speakers kind of painted this picture that the Democrats are stopping something great from happening.

Well, I just want to break this down for the Members in case we don't understand the majority and minority rule here. We can't bring a bill to the floor, not that we don't have the desire to do so, it is because we are in the minority. The bottom line we are in the minority, especially in this partisan House of Representatives, because only the majority can allow bipartisanship, true bipartisanship. We have already said, if given the opportunity within a little bit over 50 days, that we would work in a bipartisan way starting in January, tackling the major issues.

Now, here are the facts, the only party in this House that has balanced the U.S. budget, the Democratic majority at that time, without one Republican vote. We balanced the budget. We were not borrowing from foreign nations. If someone wants to ask a question, why don't we have a true coalition in the war on Iraq? We don't we have the cooperation that we need to be able to go after Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan where poppy plants, I must say, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, is the main funder of the al Qaeda network in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, we have troops and coalition forces that are saying that we need help, and we cannot respond. The reason why we cannot respond, because we have this war of choice in Iraq. Over 2,000 Americans have lost their lives, the second largest coalition there outside of, without looking at notes, without looking at notes, the largest coalition that is there outside of the U.S. forces are, what, U.S. contractors, at the tune of over $300 billion that has already been spent on the war, as far as I can see.

Republicans on the majority side are saying, the super majority of Republicans, because I do believe a few of them have spoken out on the fact that we need a plan in Iraq. The plan is, is what the President has said, stay the course. If I was a CEO of a company, and we overspend, mismanagement, scandals as it relates to U.S. stockholders, I would say to the U.S. taxpayers in our case that have lost money, report after report, attacks are up in Iraq.

We have the President of Iran and the Prime Minister of Iraq, look at this right here. It is not a handshake, this is embracing. These two countries were at war. I have been to Iraq.

I have gone in the parade stadium that Saddam Hussein had where the helmets are embedded in the ground there as you march into that parade stadium, stepping on the helmets of Iranian soldiers, that they defeated Iran in past conflicts, and, look. This is the Prime Minister of Iraq that came and spoke at that podium, here, that the U.S. taxpayers paid for, democracy over 224 years, came there and spoke to this U.S. Congress in a joint session.

I was sitting right there. I remember it vividly. He had very disparaging comments to say as it relates to Israel, and he has gone on to Iran. What happened at that meeting, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ? He said, we have a bond, we have cooperation, and we are going to work together as it relates to defense for the region.

Here is a man, the President of Iran, that has said, I want to debate the U.S. President. Not only do I want to debate the U.S. President, we are willing to do everything that we have to do, and he has nuclear weapons right now that are in development that are pointed at our allies in the Middle East and could be a threat to the United States of America.

When we started talking about the facts, we have a notebook of facts. As a matter of fact, we have a whole milk carton here of facts. The fact is that the Republican majority can't come when they have full control. It couldn't be better. It could not be better. How can you have the majority in the Senate, a majority in the U.S. House, the presidency of the United States of America, all of the cabinet secretaries are on board, and it is a streamline. It is a streamline of rubber stamping.

The President sits in the Oval Office, and we have evidence that the private sector is welcome to the Oval Office, those individuals, special interests, I wouldn't say private sector, I say special interests that are sitting at the table, that are taking out their pens and writing policy, and they send it to Capitol Hill.

When they send it to Capitol Hill, they are met at the front door. The Republican leadership says, Mr. President, if you say that this is the right thing to do, without a hearing, if a hearing even takes place, because we have had bills that have come through the door of the U.S. Capitol, and have been on the floor by the afternoon, this brings a whole new meaning, Members,

to that old cartoon that says, I am just a bill on Capitol Hill, and it goes through a process.

Guess what, that whole cartoon has to change now, because that is not the case. It talks about the House and the Senate, and it says it goes to the President, the President vetoes it, it comes back to the House and Senate, they want an override, and it becomes law.

But in this new version on Capitol Hill, first of all it starts with the writing of the bill of a special interest here in Washington, D.C. The special interests write the bill and someone over in the White House says, oh, would you, okay. That is fine. This is good. Okay, done. That is not a democracy. It comes here, and it goes through the process, and it starts with a special interest. So we have to rewrite that cartoon.

I look forward to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You said tonight you wanted to talk a little bit about the homeland. You ran out of time last night as to some of the facts.

I also have some other facts over here, but I think it is very, very important, as we start looking at www.HouseDemocrats.gov/30Something, our whole plan as it relates to moving America in a new direction versus the wrong direction. Like I said at the beginning, I would be very nervous if I was a Member of the majority side. I would be very nervous, and I would run down to the floor and take every minute that I can take, every hour that I can take on the floor, trying to come up with the words of how they explain why things are not what they should be in the war in Iraq, in Afghanistan as it relates to, you know, Osama bin Laden releasing audiotapes and members of his regime, audiotapes constantly, videotapes, why we don't have health care in America, why do we have a number of red and blue States suing the government, lack of Federal education funding, why small businesses can't provide health care, why we have an out-of-control deficit.

Why don't we have bipartisanship here in the U.S. House of Representatives that the American people have asked for? Why do we have veterans that are waiting for weeks, months sometimes, for health care?

Why, in our own words, why aren't we dealing with meaningful legislation in the last 8 days of this Congress?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you very much to my good friend, Mr. MEEK from Florida, friend and neighbor. It is funny, before we started this hour for our 30-Something Working Group, we had an opportunity to listen to our good friends on the other side of the aisle, and their rhetoric.

I was reminded of the Doug Flutie ''Hail Mary'' pass. I think Mr. Flutie played for the New England Patriots in that game, and it was that ''Hail Mary'' pass that was pretty darn memorable.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Actually it was Boston College, and it was with the University of Miami.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You are right. I stand corrected. You are probably a little bit more accurate on your football knowledge than I am. But I do remember the Doug Flutie ''Hail Mary'' pass.

That is what our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are engaged in at this point, they are out of options. They are trying the tired path of scare tactics to try to convince the American people that they are actually the ones who are strongest on national security and homeland security.

There is just too much evidence mounted against them that is transparent and apparent to the American people, that they see it every single day. All anyone has to do is turn on the news, any channel, any hour that the news is on, to see that things aren't going so well and ''stay the course.'' All ''stay the course'' amounts to is a slogan, not a strategy.

If ''stay the course'' is their strategy, then I feel incredibly confident about what will happen 54 days from now. Everywhere I go, and I have been all over the country, so have you in recent weeks and months, people, even the most conservative individuals who I have had an opportunity to talk to, are dumbfounded that the Republicans have led us down this path, and are trying to lead people in America to believe that they are moving us in the right direction on protecting our Homeland.

Monday was the 5-year anniversary, as you mentioned, of September 11. I was home, and I mentioned the last couple of nights that I was home with our first responders commemorating that tragic set of events. One of the most disturbing things, what we did was we actually did a roundtable with our first responders and sat down and asked them, where are we 5 years later? Are all the things that we said and identified that were problems in the aftermath of 9/11, have they been addressed, are we working on them, what do you still need?

We really have to listen, that is our job, because we need to listen to our first responders and find out from them what is really going on the ground. I remember, I am sure you do too, that one of the most significant problems that was identified that has been talked about across this country is the interoperability, which is a word that is difficult to understand. That means the inability for the first responders on 9/11 to communicate with each other while the event was unfolding.

That was one of the major, major recommendations of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission that we had to fund and improve the interoperability so that across all of the jurisdiction, all of the intelligence and law enforcement jurisdictions, that there could be communication.

□ 2100

The FBI couldn't talk to the firefighters, couldn't talk to the police officers. And today, 5 years later, that is still not in place. Even though it was a recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. And it boils down to funding. You have to fund it. There is no way around it, there is no other way to accomplish it.

But what are we doing instead? What are we spending our money on? Let's look at what the war in Iraq currently costs.

Currently we are spending $8.4 billion with a B a month. We are spending $1.9 billion per week in Iraq on this war, $275 million per day, $11.5 million per hour.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. We are going to lay this on the table here, so the U.S. taxpayers know what they are paying for and also the Members know what they are paying for.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Let's remember this picture. We have funded this relationship. We have made this relationship between the Prime Minister of Iraq and the President of Iran, we have made that happen. These were sworn enemies. During our formative years Mr. MEEK, Iraq and Iran were at war, bitter locked-horns war. If you recall, it was the Sunnis led by Saddam Hussein in Iraq versus the Shiites in Iran.

What has occurred is that we have done by our actions in Iraq what thousands of years could not accomplish. We have basically upended the stability that existed there and brought the Shiites into control, and basically created a hotbed of chaos and terrorism that didn't exist before.

Now, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle and President Bush would like very much to lead the American people and the international community to believe that the war on terror actually exists in Iraq. But every international expert that has weighed in on this insists that that is not the case; that the chaos that exists there now was created and that the war on terror doesn't need to be fought in Iraq. The way we fight the war on terror is making sure that the homeland is secure. But we can't do that, because our priorities are in the wrong place and we are spending this kind of money in Iraq.

I could stand here and make these claims all day long, but nobody would identify me as an expert on terrorism or on the conflict, the war in Iraq. I am a Member of Congress, elected to represent my constituents.

So let's turn to the people that we did ask to identify the problems in the aftermath of 9/11 and the war on terror and the things we needed to do to protect our homeland, The bipartisan 9/11 Commission, which was chaired by former Governor Tom Kean of New Jersey, a very well respected Republican, and former Member of Congress Lee Hamilton, a very well respected former

Member of Congress. All the commissioners on there were chosen for their expertise.

Let me just go through what they said on Monday. They wrote a public opinion piece, an op-ed that was published in the Boston Globe and I know many other papers, and what they said this:

''As we mark the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks, Americans ask, are we safer? Two years ago the 9/11 Commission found that our government failed in its duty to protect us. The commission, which the two of us led, made 41 recommendations to ensure that this Nation does everything possible to protect its people. Many of our recommendations, including those to reorganize the intelligence community, were written into law, yet no law is self-executing. Implementation is often the harder step.''

And, boy do we know that, because it is the Congress' job to implement. All the recommendations in the world can come down from experts, but if Congress doesn't pass a law, like you said, the schoolhouse rock explanation of it has to go through the legislative process, it has to pass the committees, it has to pass both houses in the same form and go up to the President and he has to sign it, that hasn't happened.

What they said is, ''We issued a report card on our recommendations in December. It included 10 C's, 12 D's and 4 F's. What we argued then is still true now, Americans are safer, but we are not yet safe.''

That was the one question that I got the most often on Monday, Mr. MEEK, was, ''DEBBIE, are we safer?'' I got asked that question by the press, I got asked that question by constituents, and the answer from the people that would know, the chairs of the 9/11 Commission, was we are safer, but we are not yet safe. Now, that is not a ringing endorsement over our efforts in the last 5 years.

So they asked, what do we need to do, because that is what people want to know.

''First, homeland security dollars must be allocated wisely. Right now those funds are spread around like revenue sharing projects.''

We had our friends on the other side of the aisle claim that they passed this remarkable earmark reform legislation today, which essentially only identifies a few individuals and ties them to the projects that they proposed. But basically what the 9/11 Commission is saying is that there are a bunch of little projects that Members have been able to insert into the process, but no regional or comprehensive approach to appropriating homeland security dollars so that you can get the really big, significant projects accomplished, like interoperability.

''Until Congress passes a law to allocate funding on the basis of risks and vulnerabilities, scarce dollars will continue to be squandered.'' This is Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton's words, not ours.

''Second, States and localities need to have emergency response plans and practice them regularly. Hurricane Katrina taught us a lesson that we should have learned from September 11: From the moment disaster strikes, all first responders need to know what to do and who is in charge.'' And if the directions were coming down from the Department of Homeland Security and Secretary Chertoff and there was a plan in place and we had our priorities right, then they would know that. But there isn't.

''Third, we called on Congress to give first responders a slice of the broadcast spectrum ideal for emergency communications.'' Again, the interpretability so they could communicate with each other.

''Those frequencies, which easily carry messages through concrete and steel, are now held by TV broadcasters and will not be turned over to first responders until 2009.'' What are we waiting for? They ask, ''Why should public safety wait another 3 years?''

''Fourth, progress on information sharing among government agencies is still lagging. Because of failures in this area, we missed many chances to disrupt the September 11 plot. The Federal Government is doing a better job, but there are still turf fights and gaps in information sharing, especially with State and local authorities.''

Mr. MEEK, that was one of the things that was the most striking to me on Monday when I sat with our first responders in South Florida. What they said was that only 15 percent of their funding for homeland security comes from us, from the Federal Government. Eight-five percent of what they were able to accomplish in the last 5 years was only due to the fact that our sheriff's office and our county have been very cooperative and stepped up to the plate and gotten what they needed to do done. But there is a long way for them to go, and there is no excuse for only 15 percent of the funding coming from the Federal Government to secure our homeland, except that we have billions of dollars going over to Iraq.

''Fifth, FBI reform is moving in the right direction, but far too slowly. Problems continue to plague the Bureau. Inadequate information technology, deficiencies in analytical capabilities and too much turnover in the workforce and Bureau leadership. The bureau still struggles.

''Sixth, we have taken a special interest in the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which we recommended and the Congress created. The importance of a second opinion before the executive branch goes ahead with controversial information gathering measures is essential.''

That just has not occurred. In fact, the majority is moving in the opposite direction.

''Seventh, we still do not screen passengers against a comprehensive terrorism watch list before they get on airplanes. The sensible answer is for the government to do the name checking. Right now, airlines screen passengers against an incomplete list.''

How is that possible? What I have noticed and what Americans really, if they were asked, if we went out of this Chamber and walked down the street and we asked most Americans what they can identify as the most tangible thing we have done to improve our homeland security, they would probably answer that they have to remove their shoes before they walk through a metal detector and they have to check their Coke at the door.

We cannot rest our homeland security, the sum total of it, on taking off your shoes and not taking your Coke on the plane. We have to go much further than that. We don't check the cargo that goes in the belly of the airplane, we check less than 5 percent of the containers that go through our ports, and we have some graphical depictions of that as well.

Look at this. Less than 6 percent of U.S. cargo is physically inspected; 95 percent is not inspected.

Let's take a look at some other statistics. This Republican Congress has shortchanged port security by more than $6 billion. The Coast Guard indicated after 9/11 when they talked about how much they needed for the Maritime Transportation Security Act that they needed more than $7 billion. We have appropriated $900 million, Mr. MEEK. The facts are all there. The words are spoken on the other side, but the facts just don't back it up.

I am going to go through the last couple of items, because this is so damning. And this isn't coming from Democrats, this is coming from the bipartisan chairs of the 9/11 Commission, and they wrote this Monday.

''Eighth, security is not just a question of airplane procedures,'' like I was just saying. ''The fundamental problem is radicalization in the Muslim world. The enduring threat is not Osama bin Laden, but young Muslims without jobs or hope who are angry with their governments, who don't like the war in Iraq or U.S. foreign policy. We need to do a better job reaching out to the Muslim world so that America is seen as a source of hope and opportunity, not despair.''

Now, one of the worst things that has happened since our invasion of Iraq is the decline in the perception of America's standing in the world. We have so degraded our relationships with foreign nations and world leaders and the perception of America has so badly deteriorated that you have young Muslims and young individuals across the globe who have a view of America that is the opposite of what kids worldwide and individuals worldwide looked at America when President Kennedy, President Johnson, President Reagan were in office.

What this administration and this President have done to the perception of America internationally is abominable.

''Ninth, Congress needs to reform itself.'' Now, this is very interesting. This is one of the most particularly damming recommendations and criticisms coming from the 9/11 Commission chairs.

''Congress has provided powerful powers to the executive branch in order to protect the Nation. To protect our freedoms, it now needs to be an effective check on the executive. Because so much information is classified, Congress is the only source of independent oversight on intelligence and homeland security issues. The oversight committees need stronger powers over budgets and jurisdiction.''

That says it all right there, Mr. MEEK. The leadership of this Congress, the Republican leadership of this Congress, has ceded the Congress's oversight authority to the executive branch. They have thrown up their hands and given up and said, you do whatever you want, because what are they, Mr. MEEK? They are a rubber stamp Republican Congress and they do whatever the administration wants. They lay down and do whatever they ask. And it even shocks the conscience of the chairs of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission.

When the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they wrote it so that there would be a system of checks and balances, so that we are a coequal branch of government. Only this administration and this leadership in this Congress don't seem to want to adhere to that.

''Finally,'' they say in this piece, ''preventing terrorists from gaining access to nuclear weapons must be elevated against all other problems of national security.'' Just like you were referring to a few minutes ago.

They ignore North Korea, they ignore Iran. They are doing a lot of handwringing over Iran because we are spread so thin militarily, and, Mr. MEEK, you are on the Homeland Security Committee, you would know better than anybody else, that we are spread so thin militarily that we don't even have all the tools in our arsenal available to us, because we are all over the place worldwide militarily.

''Nuclear terrorism would have a devastating impact. The commission called for a maximum effort against this threat, including stepped up efforts to secure loose nuclear materials abroad, and our current efforts fall far short.''

They close by saying, ''We will surely face more terrorist attacks, yet our sense of national urgency is lacking. Our elected leaders need to act now to provide for the common defense, because the terrorists will not wait.''

If that isn't a damning indictment of our efforts in homeland security and the Republicans' inaction, then I don't know what is.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I think it is important for me to just share some information with the Members, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that what Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ has just gone through is not only factual, it wasn't written by the Democratic minority, it wasn't written by some person over at the Democratic National Committee. This is from the 9/11 Commission, and they just recently released it, a bipartisan commission.

Number two, it is almost not fair, Mr. Speaker, for us to share this information, not only with the Members, but with others, because it is so accurate and it is unfortunate that it is accurate. At no other time in the history of this country have we found ourselves in this posture.

□ 2115

Now, Members can come to the floor and start talking about what we are going to do with other countries. We owe other countries money. We are borrowing from other countries like we have never borrowed before in the history of the Republic, and that is the reason why we feel encouraged to come to the floor night after night, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and put it on printed paper in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. So when historians look at this time and wonder where was the U.S. Congress when all this was happening, I believe that historians are going to look back on this time and say the American people rose up, Democrats, Republicans, independents, those that could not vote that made themselves eligible to vote to stop this from happening.

Now, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ mentioned something about military preparedness and the fact that we cannot even respond to other issues that may happen in the world. I am on the Armed Services Committee, and we come to the floor to conduct serious business. This is not some sort of news show where someone asks you a question, some sort of trick question, and you try to respond within 3 minutes. This is the U.S. Congress. This is not a 501(c)(3). I talked about that last night.

What we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a rubber stamp Congress that is willing to rubber stamp anything that the President sends to Capitol Hill. It is very unfortunate that this is the case. And because of that, we have ourselves in this situation.

Under the leadership of the President and the Secretary Rumsfeld, U.S. military readiness has dropped to historic lows. The U.S. Army readiness, in particular, has dropped to levels not seen since 1970 and will continue to be stressed by combat in Iraq which falls most heavily on the Army and Marine Corps. Two-thirds of army operating force, active and reserve, is now reporting in as unready, and there is not a single nondeployment of an army brigade combat team in the United States of America that is ready to be deployed.

What is the reference point here? It is not the Democratic National Committee. It is not even the Democratic Caucus. It is the National Security Advisory Group. When? August 1 of 2006. These are individuals that are supposed to be the watchdog of national security. That is with what they are saying.

How did this happen, Mr. Speaker? It didn't happen because the Army and Marines said, Hey, we want to overextend ourselves and we want to put ourselves in a position to where every brigade has been deployed to Iraq. This is the situation that we are in when we go alone.

Now, let us just put Iraq aside just for a second. When you look at the testimony and those retired generals that are now free to say whatever they want to say since they are no longer in the Department of Defense, and, Mr. Speaker, I must say for the record, Secretary Rumsfeld just said recently, the last couple of days, anyone who comes to him about the issue of redeployment within the Department of Defense can go find another job, in so many words. Was there a chairperson of a subcommittee in Armed Services or the Appropriations Committee as it relates to armed services, the Department of Defense? Was there the Chair of the full Committee on Appropriations in the U.S. House? Was there a Chair of the Armed Services Committee that said wait a minute, hold it, I am sorry? Is this the same administration and the same Secretary of Defense that said we take our lead from the commanders in the field and from those experts that wear the uniform that have made a statement such as that? If I was a four-star general, a three-star general, or want to be a three-star general, a two-star general or a brigadier general or a colonel that wants to one day become a colonel, I think I may step back and say, well, one of two things. Either I am going to be quiet in the Department of Defense in this democracy that we call the United States of America or I am going to retire. Guess what. These generals have retired and they are talking, and they are talking about their frustration. These heroes for our country are now taking it upon themselves because they allowed us to this point to salute one flag, and they said they will give up their careers and they will step out of the Department of Defense to be able to let the American people know what is going on.

Look at these generals. Look at them. You would have some Members of Congress who say why are they speaking against the Department of Defense? Why aren't they still in the fight? Well, they are in a fight for democracy and the truth. They are in a fight to make sure that the American people know exactly what is going on. They are in a fight for the very reason why people have fought and died for this country to allow the American people to know better.

Now, let me just mention something very quickly because I want to make

sure that all of the Members know exactly what they need to know as it relates to the national security plan. Real Security, housedemocrats.gov/30something. You can go on there and get the Real Security plan.

Energy independence. Folks talk about Saudi Arabia. We, the Democratic Caucus here in this House, want to invest in the Midwest versus the Middle East. We want to use our natural resources. We want to use coal. We want to use E–85, which can be made out of corn and what have here in the United States of America. Energizing America. Go on housedemocrats.gov.

You want to talk about innovation? You want to talk about education? You want to talk about domestic issues? You want to even see quotes from CEOs, Democrats, Republicans, and independents, that are trying to find a workforce innovating America? You want broadband access throughout America? We are nowhere close to where the Republican majority and the White House have said we are going to be as it relates to broadband. Right here: Innovation Agenda.

We have six points, Mr. Speaker, in 2006 to make sure that American people know that we have the will and the desire to lead this country in a new direction versus the wrong direction. This is not talk. This is action. There are bills right now filed in the 109th Congress in this second session that will deal with the issue of education, health care, national security, the war in Iraq.

We have a plan for the war in Iraq. What is the Republican majority plan? Stay the course? That is one line. Stay the course. Stay the course what? What is your plan? Where is the coalition? You are in control. It is almost like someone driving a car and you are a passenger in the car. You are trying to grab the wheel, but meanwhile someone is there hitting your arm, saying, ''You can't grab the wheel because we are in charge. We paid for this car. We are moving this car in this direction, and this is what we are going to do.'' And the bottom line is that may be okay in a trip from Washington, D.C. to Richmond, Virginia, but it is not okay when you are talking about the United States of America and protecting America.

You want to talk about what we want to do as it relates to homeland security? We want to implement what Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ talked about, the bipartisan commission, the full 9/11 recommendations. What are they? Well, we have got individuals going to the plane, giving up hand sanitizers, guzzling down water, taking off shoes, belts, and what have you, having to leave a picture frame or something there at the Transportation Security Agency, TSA, there at the gate. Meanwhile a container comes in on a truck, a cargo container, goes right in the belly of the plane. It could be packed full of explosives. We will never know.

But it does not satisfy me in any way to come to the floor after a terrorist attack happens to say I told you so. That is not what the point is here. The point is it is protecting America by doing what the 9/11 Commission called for.

What else did they call for? Something very simple. Other countries are doing it. A 100 percent container check on cargo ships that are coming into the ports of the United States of America. Oh, wow, that is something simple. That are then loaded on trucks and that are going out to the United States of America in towns and cities and counties and urban areas throughout America. The terrorists are patient, very patient. 9/11 took a long time to plan. Why should we wait to learn what the terrorists' new plan may be?

There are Members on this floor that are making personal attacks on other Members of Congress. What are those personal attacks? Well, you know, we feel that the Democrats are holding us back and are they for the terrorists or are they for the United States of America? That is silly. I am just going to go ahead and say that is silly. I won't even go so far as saying that the Republican majority is helping the terrorists. I wouldn't say anything like that. But that is what happens, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, when you are gasping for air. When it is desperation.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Doug Flutie.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you. A Doug Flutie Hail Mary pass when the clock has now hit almost 0:00 and trying to sensationalize a speech or just saying that, well, I will just say this even though it is not true. I know it is not true. And we even have Republican leaders that have made those kinds of statements and have been asked by the press about them and then said, well, I didn't really mean that, but they thought it was important for them to say it here in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD in the House of Representatives for several generations to see beyond this one.

So I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, that we talk about the facts. And if I can for just a moment, the fact is this: We borrow from foreign countries like we have never borrowed before. And I think it is important that I pull this chart out.

This Republican Congress and President Bush, and he couldn't do it by himself, borrowed in 4 years $1.05 trillion; versus 42 Presidents, 224 years in the history of this country, have been only able to borrow 1.01. I will say that until the 109th Congress and beyond because in the 110th Congress, if the American people will see fit, we will pull this chart out again and we will talk about our guarantee to knock this number down. Forty-two Presidents, 224 years, World War I, World War II, other conflicts, the Great Depression, you name it, it has been a part of the history of this country. One the President, one Congress, $1.05 trillion, and counting, borrowing from foreign nations.

Mr. Speaker, where did we get these numbers from? Why don't we start with the U.S. Department of Treasury. Who are the countries? Let us look at this: Japan, coming in at a whopping $682.8 billion. China, coming in at $249.8 billion.

We have Members coming to the floor talking about we are going to be the superpower and economic power of the world. Guess what. We owe these people money. How could we go to them with a straight face and say this is what we are going to do and this is how we are going to do it because we are the United States of America? First of all, you need to let go of the money that you owe me as a country. You owe us. That is almost like going to your next-door neighbor and borrowing $300 and then coming to them and telling them about what kind of plants they should be planting in front of their house. How can you tell them, Mr. Speaker, when you owe them money? First of all, you can't even get into the conversation about what they should do and how they should do it as a country and working in whatever cooperation it may be. It could be a G–8 summit. It could be an issue dealing with the environment. They are going to say, First of all, before you even get that out, now that you are finished, when are you going to pay back this $682.8 billion you owe me as a country and my people?

So the Republican majority, with the White House, has placed us in a situation that we have never been in before. This is a rubber stamp. The Republican majority knows it. It is on the floor every night. Just like this mike is here, this Republican rubber stamp is here.

Mr. Speaker, one guarantee. When the Democrats take control of this House, we are going to have a ceremony maybe about 150 yards away from the Capitol building so that we can burn this rubber stamp, so that we can then hold up the Constitution, so that we can hold up article I, section 1 of the U.S. Constitution and say we will legislate. We will have oversight. We will not have Katrina contractors running away with U.S. tax dollars. We will not have a farm field full of trailers and meanwhile we have people in Mississippi and Louisiana homeless. This will not happen. We will not wait, as the Federal Government, for 3 to 4 days and watch people suffer on international television and then come back to Washington, DC, saying that we are sending blankets and ice and we just started.

□ 2130

We will be there for the American people. This Constitution here, Article I, section 1, of this Constitution says that we have the legislative powers of this country and it lands here in the Congress, the Congress that consists of

the House and the Senate. But we cannot do it in a rubber-stamp atmosphere. If there is a Republican, Independent, Green Party, Democrat, somebody that is thinking about voting, somebody that is about to turn 18, they have to have a problem, Mr. Speaker, in the way this country is being operated.

Now, I am going to turn this over to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ in a minute, but let's talk about dollars and cents, if we can talk a little bit about the whole domestic piece, the priorities.

There are some people that would love for us to talk about the war in Iraq. Well, guess what, there is pain and suffering that is going on right here in the United States of America every day from community to community, need it be a parish or a county, need it be a city or a town, or need it be a suburb, they are going through real issues.

Talk about the minimum wage. Here is a sheet right here, Mr. Speaker. This year alone, nine attempts by the Democratic Caucus to raise the minimum wage in America that has not been raised since 1997. Since 1997, $5.15 an hour. You know, it is very, very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that that is the fact. The Democratic plan that we have been pushing for a very long time is to move it from that number up to $7.25.

But look what happened, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. You would think these are minimum wage increases. Oh, no, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Mr. Speaker. These are Members of Congress. Oh, yes. We are starting to buy a couple of new suits, a couple of St. Johns.

I am not calling anyone out, I am just saying that is what it is. And the bottom line is that since 1997, the Republican majority has been in control, they have been getting paid, and I mean paid, every year. And I am going to tell you, as a Member of Congress that has to keep a home in Miami and one here in Washington, D.C., it is a strain on Members of Congress.

And you know something, I don't think the American people have a real huge problem with the issue of Members of Congress being able to support their families, this, that, and the other. But when we don't support them, when we don't have their back, then that is the problem.

And I know, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, you are dying to get in on this, but let me just mention this. 1998, $3,100 for Members of Congress, zero for the American people. $4,600 for U.S. Members of Congress, zero for the American people. $3,800, zero for the American people. $4,900, zero for the American people. 2003 on to 2006, you see the numbers. 2006, $3,100, zero for the American people.

Now, let me just make sure I am factual, Mr. Speaker, because that is what we do in the 30-Something Working Group, because this is not about dancing in the end zone. The Republican Congress brought up a bill talking about the minimum wage, and they put together a bill that would not see the light of day in the U.S. Senate, would never see the desk of the President of the United States. But just to say that we passed a bill off the floor, that is what they wanted to do. Well, we called it the Potomac Two-Step.

And the bottom line is this, Mr. Speaker. The American people, they don't want slogans, they don't want talk; they want action. And this Republican Congress has not put forth the action.

Now, to let you know in very blunt terms as I yield to Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, we are going to go 5 minutes and 5 minutes. I am into almost my fifth minute here, but I am going to turn it over to you.

Let me just say this. Within the first 100 days of a House majority by the Democrats, the minimum wage will be raised, period. Not a lot of talking, not a lot of dancing around. The bill is already filed in this Congress. But, guess what, the Republican majority doesn't have the will or the desire to pass it.

And this is what it means for salaried workers: If the minimum wage moves up to 7.25, then you will see workers that are on salary that are making over the minimum wage, their wages will nine times out of ten go up. Because to be able to get a workforce to what businesses need, they need to pay their workers; that will then help hopefully pay for the cost of health care that they have to pay. Some folks have to make the decision, am I going to have health care or am I going to live? And that is very, very unfortunate. But what has happened in this situation is that the Republican majority has guaranteed that the minimum wage will never be raised, will never deal with the issue of health care because there won't be any dollars to deal with it.

So I think it is important, Mr. Speaker, to know exactly where we stand. Homeland security, fully implementing the 9/11 recommendations. Border security agents, the President sent to this Capitol Hill 216 in his budget; we ask for 2,000 border agents to be able to protect our borders just like the 9/11 Commission called for. If they were to implement the Democratic amendments that came to this floor that were voted down in a partisan way, the majority took over, we would have 6,000 new border agents working now on the U.S. border.

So when Members come to the floor on the majority side, on the Republican side and start talking about, oh, we are tough because we say we are tough. And the Democrats, they are holding us back. They are in the majority; that is not true.

I will go ahead and say it: That is not true, Mr. Speaker. And the bottom line is that, the fact is that we have come to this floor to bring about real security in this country; and we will in a new Congress if the Democrats are in control.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. MEEK. And I didn't ask the gentleman to yield because you were on such a roll, and you did such an incredible job of laying out the difference between what their priorities are and continuing to run in place, or where we would take us, which is a new direction for America.

The bottom line is that on every measure, on homeland security, on the economy and jobs and the energy crisis, because there is no other way to describe when you have to spend more than $50 to fill up the average tank of gas, there is no other way to describe it except as a crisis. When you have that situation facing you, when you have 46 million Americans who lack health insurance, which means when they are sick they can't go to the doctor; when you have a President who is hell bent on privatizing Social Security and yanking the rug out from under seniors who have worked their entire lives so that they have a floor of dignity holding them, so that they don't have to worry about choosing between medicine and meals, then we have got to make sure that we come to this floor every night and that we talk about the direction that we would take them and that we would take this country.

Because we would invest in new alternative energy, we would invest our resources in new alternative energy research. We would make sure that the rhetoric that the President issued to us during the State of the Union, where he said we have to end America's addiction on foreign oil, that was just words with no action, that we will actually make that investment and invest in the Midwest, in ethanol and corn production and in our State and other States across the country that produce sugar so that we can really make a commitment to disconnecting ourselves from our dependence on foreign oil; so that we can actually make sure that we pass a prescription drug plan and change the one that the Republicans wrote for the pharmaceutical industry as opposed to the senior citizens that desperately needed the assistance, that we rewrite that plan so that seniors have the ability to pay for their drugs, so that there is no doughnut hole that on September 22 our constituents are going to be falling through and having an unbelievably difficult time climbing out of. Those are the things that we would do.

After November 7, the new direction for America that we will take this country in will restore that dignity to senior citizens, will make sure that we create a prescription drug program that provides them with the prescription drug assistance that they need, that will invest in the Midwest, that will expand access to health care, that will make sure that we can pass stem cell research into law, and restore the accountability that this Congress should have been exercising and the oversight that we should have been exercising.

I mean, really, why have a Congress? The way it has been operating since I have been here, Mr. MEEK, and I have been here almost 2 full years now, why have a legislative branch? The rubber stamp, the rubber stamp that is used here by the Republicans and their leadership, you know, it makes having a Congress essentially unnecessary because they just do whatever the administration wants anyway.

Listen, I could go home and spend a lot more time with my family than come here and waste our time on naming post offices and banning horse slaughtering. And not that those things aren't important; they are important to some people, but they are not the priorities of this country. They are not the priorities of the people when we go walking down the street in our communities and when I go and take my kids to their soccer game and to dance class, when I get in my car and drive my minivan around town.

The people that I talk to, they don't get it. They are scratching their heads, and they don't understand the rhetoric that is coming out of here without any action, and they are yearning and begging us to give them a new direction. We have got to provide them with that new direction.

Mr. MEEK, we come to this floor every night as the 30-something Working Group, and I know we are about to wrap up here as we approach the end of our 60 minutes. We really appreciate the opportunity that Leader PELOSI gives us every night. And I want to direct our colleagues to our Web site, our 30-something Web site, www.housedemocrats.gov/30something. All of the charts that we have had out here are available on that Web site, and we encourage folks to e-mail us with comments and our colleagues to e-mail us with comments.

Mr. MEEK, I yield to you.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

I want to thank the 30-Something Working Group for all the hard work. And we will be back next week, Mr. Speaker. We would like to thank the Democratic leader for allowing us to have the time.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the privilege and the honor of addressing you here on the floor of the House of Representatives.

I was listening to the presentation by the 30-Something Group here over the last hour, and quite often it redirects the message that I intend to come down to this floor to discuss, and of course this evening is no different.

Being a proud and committed member of the Republican Party, and when I hear continually the message, rubber-stamp Congress, rubber-stamp Congress come out over here, and in the same breath the question, the President wants to privatize Social Security.

I don't know anybody that has advocated for the privatization of Social Security. I don't think you can find any seated Member of the Republican Congress or the President himself that has said, I want to privatize Social Security. So that is a scare tactic that is designed to spook people, but it surely is not something that is an objective revelation of the truth.

The President did, though, invest significant capital in reform of Social Security. It was the centerpiece in his second inaugural address. And after his second inaugural address, with great optimism and enthusiasm, the President went out and invested month after month after month in an effort to reform a Social Security program that will ultimately collapse, reform it for, not for the senior citizens. There was nothing in his proposal for the people who were 55 years old and up. There is not a way that we can make the actuarial numbers change that.

We keep our faith and keep our sacred covenant with the senior citizens. That is something that is clear throughout everybody in this Republican Conference and all the people that are involved in this policy that I know of: Keep the faith with the senior citizens.

I represent perhaps the most senior congressional district in America. Iowa has the largest percentage of its population over the age of 85 of any of the States in the Union, and in the congressional district that I represent, the 32 counties in western Iowa, I have 10 of the 12 most senior counties in Iowa. So I will argue that I represent a higher percentage of seniors perhaps than anyone else in the country. And yet they understand that we will keep our sacred covenant with the seniors. We will hold those benefits together.

There was nothing proposed by the President, nothing introduced by any member of this Republican Conference that would have reduced by a single dime, one single benefit to any senior citizen.

What was proposed was that a portion of young people's contributions to Social Security could go into a personal retirement account, a controlled account, the kind of an account that would be an approved account that would be the same thing as the Federal Retirement Investment Funds that many of us are part of, many Federal employees are a part of. In fact, all of them that have the ability to direct some of their funds into retirement do invest into that.

It was a wise and a prudent proposal. It was something that looked downrange. We know that Social Security starts to go into the red in about 2016, 2017. There is $1.7 trillion in the Social Security trust fund. It is only a promise; they are only IOUs in a filing cabinet in Parkersburg, West Virginia. That money will have to be paid back out of the labor of our children someday.

But the surplus growth stops in 2017 and it begins to decline until about 2042, where it is gone.

□ 2145

At that point, something has to happen. The President's looking downrange. A lot of us have looked downrange. We didn't get to change the Social Security program as much as we would have liked to, we didn't propose to for our senior citizens, because you simply cannot do that because there is not time to grow funds.

So the proposal was for whom? Mr. Speaker, I will submit the proposal that the President burned up so much precious political capital on was for the 30-something group, and the 20-something group, and the teen-something group, and the younger-than-teen-something group, and for all generations yet to be born in America to be able to own a part of their own future, to be able to invest that and to be able to count on the same type of returns we have guaranteed as a sacred covenant to our seniors. That is what that is about.

And that is why it is so ironic that the 30-something group has rejected the very thing that is designed for their generation and mischaracterized it in a very cynical fashion and called it the privatization of Social Security. It is anything but. But it would be and it is still the best and only legitimate policy that has been offered before this Congress that can bring us out of almost certain bankruptcy of Social Security downrange, at a point where it will not be a factor to our senior citizens but for the 30-something group who have rejected it and decided to scare everyone in America for cynical political reasons.

The statement was also made by the gentleman from Florida that the only party that has balanced the budget is the Democratic Party, and that was without a single Republican vote. How can a statement like that be passed off here on the floor and not be challenged? We know when the budget was balanced. It was balanced after and only after Republicans took the majority in the United States Congress. And that happened in 1994.

I will say that the young people that came in here in this Congress and took over the majority in 1994 were committed, fiscally responsible people that came here to make a difference, and they did. They squeezed that budget down, Mr. Speaker. They challenged President Clinton, Mr. Speaker, and they took this thing down to the point where President Clinton refused to allow a continuing resolution that would have kept the government operating. The government was shut down not because Republicans spent too much money, Mr. Speaker, but because they hadn't spent enough money. And so the challenge laid. Government was shut down. Who would have to give in?