regime in Tehran. Iran's rulers oppress a good and talented people. And wherever freedom advances in the Middle East, it seems the Iranian regime is there to oppose it. Iran is funding and training militia groups in Iraq, supporting Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon, and backing Hamas' efforts to undermine peace in the Holy Land. Tehran is also developing ballistic missiles of increasing range and continues to develop its capability to enrich uranium, which could be used to create a nuclear weapon. Our message to the people of Iran is clear: We have no quarrel with you, we respect your traditions and your history, and we look forward to the day when you have your freedom. Our message to the leaders of Iran is also clear: Verifiably suspend your nuclear enrichment, so negotiations can begin. And to rejoin the community of nations, come clean about your nuclear intention and past actions, stop your oppression at home, and cease your support for terror abroad. But above all, know this: America will confront those who threaten our troops, we will stand by our allies, and we will defend our vital interests in the Persian Gulf.

On the homefront, we will continue to take every lawful and effective measure to protect our country. This is our most solemn duty. We are grateful that there has not been another attack on our soil since 9/11. This is not for a lack of desire or effort on the part of the enemy. In the past 6 years, we have stopped numerous attacks, including a plot to fly a plane into the tallest building in Los Angeles, and another to blow up passenger jets bound for America over the Atlantic. Dedicated men and women in our government toil day and night to stop the terrorists from carrying out their plans. These good citizens are saving American lives, and everyone in this Chamber owes them our thanks. And we owe them something more: We owe them the tools they need to keep our people safe.

One of the most important tools we can give them is the ability to monitor terrorist communications. To protect America, we need to know who the terrorists are talking to, what they are saying, and what they are planning. Last year, the Congress passed legislation to help us do that. Unfortunately, the Congress set the legislation to expire on February 1. This means that if you don't act by Friday, our ability to track terrorists' threats would be weakened and our citizens will be in greater danger. The Congress must ensure the flow of vital intelligence is not disrupted. The Congress must pass liability protection for companies believed to have assisted in the efforts to defend America. We have had ample time for debate. The time to act is now.

Protecting our Nation from the dangers of a new century requires more than good intelligence and a strong military. It also requires changing the conditions that breed resentment and allow extremists to prey on despair. So America is using its influence to build a freer, more hopeful, and more compassionate world. This is a reflection of our national interest and the calling of our conscience.

America opposes genocide in Sudan. We support freedom in countries from Cuba and Zimbabwe to Belarus and Burma. America is leading the fight against global poverty, with strong education initiatives and humanitarian assistance. We have also changed the way we deliver aid by launching the Millennium Challenge Account. This program strengthens democracy, transparency, and the rule of law in developing nations, and I ask you to fully fund this important initiative.

America is leading the fight against global hunger. Today, more than half the world's food aid comes from the United States. And tonight, I ask the Congress to support an innovative proposal to provide food assistance by purchasing crops directly from farmers in the developing world, so we can build up local agriculture and help break the cycle of famine.

America is leading the fight against disease. With your help, we are working to cut by half the number of malaria-related deaths in 15 African nations. And our emergency plan for AIDS relief is treating 1.4 million people. We can bring healing and hope to many more. So I ask you to maintain the principles that have changed behavior and made this program a success. And I call on you to double our initial commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS by approving an additional $30 billion over the next 5 years.

America is a force for hope in the world because we are a compassionate people, and some of the most compassionate Americans are those who have stepped forward to protect us. We must keep faith with all who have risked life and limb so that we might live in freedom and peace. Over the past 7 years, we have increased funding for veterans by more than 95 percent. And as we increase funding, we must also reform our veterans' system to meet the needs of a new war and a new generation. I call on the Congress to enact the reforms recommended by Senator Bob Dole and Secretary Donna Shalala, so we can improve the system of care for our wounded warriors and help them build lives of hope, promise, and dignity.

Our military families also sacrifice for America. They endure sleepless nights and the daily struggle of providing for children while a loved one is serving far from home. We have a responsibility to provide for them. So I ask you to join me in expanding their access to child care, creating new hiring preferences for military spouses across the Federal Government, and allowing our troops to transfer their unused education benefits to their spouses or children. Our military families serve our Nation, they inspire our Nation, and tonight our Nation honors them.

The secret of our strength, the miracle of America, is that our greatness lies not in our government, but in the spirit and determination of our people. When the Federal Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787, our Nation was bound by the Articles of Confederation, which began with the words, ''We the undersigned delegates.'' When Gouverneur Morris was asked to draft the preamble to our new Constitution, he offered an important revision and opened with words that changed the course of our Nation and the history of the world: ''We the people.''

By trusting the people, our Founders wagered that a great and noble Nation could be built on the liberty that resides in the hearts of all men and women. By trusting the people, succeeding generations transformed our fragile young democracy into the most powerful Nation on Earth and a beacon of hope for millions. And so long as we continue to trust the people, our Nation will prosper, our liberty will be secure, and the state of our Union will remain strong. So tonight, with confidence in freedom's power, and trust in the people, let us set forth to do their business.

God bless America.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

At 10 o'clock and 5 minutes p.m., the President of the United States, accompanied by the committee of escort, retired from the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The Majority Floor Services Chief escorted the invited guests from the Chamber in the following order:

The members of the President's Cabinet; Chief Justice of the United States and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court; the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

JOINT SESSION DISSOLVED

The SPEAKER. The Chair declares the joint session of the two Houses now dissolved.

Accordingly, at 10 o'clock and 11 minutes p.m., the joint session of the two Houses was dissolved.

The Members of the Senate retired to their Chamber.

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE ON THE STATE OF THE UNION

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, I move that the message of the President be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed.

The motion was agreed to.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. COSTA (at the request of Mr. HOYER) for today on account of a death in the family.