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THE FUTURE FOR AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to shine a light on U.S. foreign policy, specifically our military presence in Afghanistan.

President Obama did not ask for this war. He inherited it, along with Iraq, a destabilized Middle East and a weakened American reputation overseas.

Mr. Speaker, President Obama is doing exactly what he said he would. He has called on his top military and diplomatic leaders to develop a plan for the future of Afghanistan. Already he has reached out to Congress to get our input.

That's why this week Congresswomen BARBARA LEE and MAXINE WATERS and I sent a letter to the President outlining congressional priorities regarding Afghanistan. We applauded the President for his strong leadership on an intelligent foreign policy and national security strategy, particularly his emphasis on diplomacy and international partnerships.

We pledged to work with him and work with his administration to implement a foreign policy that stresses cooperation, conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance.

We expressed our support and pleasure over his commitment to bring our troops home from Iraq in 16 months.

Mr. Speaker, this administration has called Afghanistan the central front in the fight against terrorism. So, in an effort to promote better cooperation in our Nation's diplomatic development and military involvement in Afghanistan, our letter to President Obama outlined policy benchmarks which many of us in Congress support and, by the way, most Americans. These benchmarks include a clear authorization of the use of military force be established. Defined goals and objectives and benefits of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan.

We asked that he determine the human and financial resources necessary to carry out the administration's plan and provide us with a time line for the redeployment of troops and military contractors.

The role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO; the United Nations, the U.N.; and other international partners must also be clearly delineated.

The immediate humanitarian and economic needs of Afghan people must also be met, we told him.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as our national policy for Afghanistan is established, Members of Congress and all Americans anticipate an honest and open discussion about the challenges that lie ahead. And with that, we look forward to working with this administration to advance a responsible and a smart strategy through the Middle East and Central Asia, a path to real peace, and a path to economic security worldwide.

KEEP THE GOVERNMENT OUT OF MEDICAL TREATMENT DECISIONS

(Mr. HERGER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HERGER. Mr. Speaker, we just voted on this so-called stimulus bill that wasn't even available for us to see until late last night. It should come as no surprise that in this monumental piece of legislation, there are items in it that could not have survived careful scrutiny in the light of day.

Many of my colleagues have pointed out the wildly extravagant spending and the lack of real job creation and economic recovery in this bill. I fully share those concerns, but I also want to call to attention a little-known provision tucked six pages deep inside this 1,100 page bill. The Democrats are spending \$1.1 billion on a new Federal board to conduct health care research. Sounds innocent enough, right?

Unfortunately, this provision is the camel's nose under the tent in the Democrats' quest to have the Federal Government push doctors aside and put Washington in charge of patients' health treatment options. This board, the Federal coordinating Council on Comparative Effectiveness Research, will be comprised of 15 Federal bureaucrats, all appointed by the President. Not a single practicing physician or patient advocate will be allowed to sit on this board.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first step of government-run health care. Despite numerous requests from patient groups, this bill does not include a single protection to ensure that this research will not be used by Medicare, Medicaid, VA, DOD or private health insurance to deny access to needed treatments. The goal of this board is to conduct research that will allow the Federal Government to deny needed health care. Physician groups are very concerned that this board and its research will significantly harm the patient/doctor relationship.

Other governments have been using this research to deny medically necessary care for years. The British Government currently uses similar research to restrict treatment using a formula that divides the cost of the treatment by the number of years the patient is likely to live. Treatments for younger patients are more often approved than treatments for diseases

that affect the elderly. For example, in 2006, the British Government used comparative effective research to say that elderly patients with macular degeneration had to wait until they went blind in one eye before they could get a new drug to save the other eye. It took almost 3 years of public protest before the board reversed its decision.

Mr. Speaker, Americans expect better and deserve more. Physicians and patients, not faceless Federal bureaucrats, should be in charge of health care decisions.

Republicans will continue to fight to keep this Federal Government out of our American's medicine cabinets. In the very near future I'll be introducing legislation to protect patients from the misuse of comparative effective research and ensure that seniors continue to have access to medically necessary treatments.

Mr. Speaker, I urge every Member of this House to join me in this effort.

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THE STIMULUS BILL—A LOST OPPORTUNITY

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

Mr. DEFAZIO. There has been a lot of talk in Washington, D.C. over the last few years about the bridge to nowhere in the last highway bill, an anomaly from a lot of good investment that was in that bill.

But what we have with the passage of this bill today are a lot of tax cuts to nowhere. I never met a tax cut that could build a bridge or that could rebuild 160,000 bridges in our National Highway System that need rebuilding. They are crumbling or falling or they are functionally obsolete. I never met a tax cut that could even fill in a pothole. I never met a tax cut that could build a school.

I went to elementary school in a new post-World War II school. It is still there today, serving future generations of kids. That was money borrowed and money well spent. Money borrowed for tax cuts, ephemeral tax cuts—very small tax cuts—for the average family are not going to rebuild our economy, put us on the path to prosperity and put people back to work.

Three Republican Senators insisted on a lot more tax cuts. They hijacked the bill because of the arcane, obsolete and, in fact, discretionary rules of the Senate. It did not need to be that way. Let's just look at a couple of things they cut.

We had an amendment here on the floor of the House to add \$3 billion back to transit. That would have provided for thousands of jobs. Twelve thousand buses are obsolete. There are backlogs of orders for buses sitting on the shelf. There are options that are not funded. That would have put American workers to work in building the