whose achievement can be imagined, but just barley?

The hawks tell us that now, more than ever, we must stay the course—that finally, after Obama nearly tripled U.S. troop levels, we are winning. I want to be fair to this argument, so let me quote Crocker's explanation at length:

''What we've seen with the additional forces and the effort to carry the fight into enemy strongholds is, I think, tangible progress in security on the ground in the South and the West. This has to transition—and again, we're seeing a transition of seven provinces an districts to Afghan control—to sustainable Afghan control. So I think you can already see what we're trying to do—in province by province, district by district, establish the conditions where the Afghan government can take over and hold ground.''

Sen. Jim Webb, D–Va., a Vietnam veteran and former secretary of the Navy, pointed out the obvious flaw in this province-by-province strategy. ''International terrorism—and guerrilla warfare in general—is intrinsically mobile,'' he said. ''So securing one particular area . . . doesn't necessarily guarantee that you have reduced the capability of those kinds of forces. They are mobile; they move.''

It would require far more than 100,000 U.S. troops to securely occupy the entire country. As Webb pointed out, this means we can end up ''playing whack-a-mole'' as the enemy pops back up in areas that have already been pacified.

If our intention, as Crocker said, is to leave behind ''governance that is good enough to ensure that the country doesn't degenerate back into a safe haven for al-Qaida,'' then there are two possibilities: Either we'll never cross the goal line, or we already have.

According to Obama's timetable, all U.S. troops are supposed to be out of Afghanistan by 2014. Will the deeply corrupt, frustratingly erratic Afghan government be ''good enough'' three years from now? Will Afghan society have banished the poverty, illiteracy and distrust of central authority that inevitably sap legitimacy from any regime in Kabul? Will the Afghan military, whatever its capabilities, blindly pursue U.S. objectives? Or will the country's civilian and military leaders determine their self-interest and act accordingly?

The fact is that in 2014 there will be no guarantees. Perhaps we will believe it incrementally less likely that the Taliban could regain power and invite al-Qaida back. But that small increment of security does not justify the blood and treasure that we will expend now and then.

I take a different view. We should declare victory and leave.

We wanted to depose the Taliban regime, and we did. We wanted to install a new government that answers to its constituents at the polls, and we did. We wanted to smash al-Qaida's infrastructure of training camps and safe havens, and we did. We wanted to kill or capture Osama bin Laden, and we did.

Even so, say the hawks, we have to stay in Afghanistan because of the dangerous instability across the border in nuclear-armed Pakistan. But does anyone believe the war in Afghanistan has made Pakistan more stable? Perhaps it is useful to have a U.S. military presence in the region. This could be accomplished, however, with a lot fewer than 100,000 troops—and they wouldn't be scattered across the Afghan countryside, engaged in a dubious attempt at nation-building.

The threat from Afghanistan is gone. Bring the troops home.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Ms. Wanda Evans, one of his secretaries.

DEBT LIMIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, in March of 2006, then-Senator Obama was on the Senate floor and this is what he said: ''The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that 'the buck stops here.' Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better.''

But now, Mr. Speaker, a few short years later, President Obama now takes the opposite approach, calling for an increase in the debt limit and threatening doom otherwise. President Obama has failed to send to Congress a budget that would realistically solve our Nation's financial problems. He calls for plans that spend too much and borrow too much and tax too much. When Congress reasonably rejected his plan and proposed a budget with responsible cuts, he turned to political rhetoric rather than meaningful discussions. So, at a time when our Nation must address a fiscal crisis, our President has offered no real solution and has politicized the issue. What we have today more than ever before is a sign of leadership failure, back to his original speech when he was a Senator. America deserves better.

So today, with the debt ceiling already $5.3 trillion higher, higher, than the level President Obama objected to raising 5 years ago, he now asks us to raise it again for the 81st time since 1940. We all know this famous quote that defines insanity as doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. If we actually want to solve today's problems, we must depart from the insane 70-year tradition of just continuing to spend. If we do not delve into the real spending problems today, we will have this same debate a year later, 3, 5, 10 years later from now, and will again be urged to raise the debt limit or face a financial catastrophe.

The United States Government already owes more than $14 trillion. Less talked about is the Federal Government faces another $114 trillion in unfunded liabilities for Social Security and for Medicare. An estimate by the Congressional Budget Office reveals that by the year 2025, the government will spend 100 percent of every dollar in revenue on entitlements. And Federal debt aside, State and local governments face a combined $3 trillion coupled with their own unfunded liabilities in the form of pensions.

Forcing the government to live within its means is the only solution. Just as a family household does it when it reaches its spending limits, we must begin to closely scrutinize our bills and decide where there is unnecessary waste. When families seek to decrease their utility bills, they remember to turn off lights when they leave a room. We must begin doing this as well. Wasteful, fraudulent programs must be turned off and long-term programs such as Medicare and Social Security must be addressed seriously today. Debt must be paid down instead of piled on.

Although the President, the Senate leader, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury believe the worst thing that could happen to all of us is that we default on August 2, I believe that the worst thing that could happen for Congress to do is to fail to couple the increased debt limit with meaningful spending cuts. Once again, the private sector has affirmed this. On June 11, 2011, 150 economists called for immediate spending cuts to help support job growth in a letter to Speaker JOHN BOEHNER, which I would like to have placed in the RECORD.

A DEBT LIMIT INCREASE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT SPENDING CUTS AND BUDGET REFORMS WILL DESTROY AMERICAN JOBS

An increase in the national debt limit that is not accompanied by significant spending cuts and budget reforms to address our government's spending addiction will harm private-sector job creation in America. It is critical that any debt limit legislation enacted by Congress include spending cuts and reforms that are greater than the accompanying increase in debt authority being granted to the president. We will not succeed in balancing the federal budget and overcoming the challenges of our debt until we succeed in committing ourselves to government policies that allow our economy to grow. An increase in the national debt limit that is not accompanied by significant spending cuts and budget reforms would harm private-sector job growth and represent a tremendous setback in the effort to deal with our national debt.

Ryan C. Amacher, University of Texas at Arlington; Michael Applegate, Oklahoma State University; King Banaian, St. Cloud State University; Stacie Beck, University of Delaware; John Bethune, Barton College; Scott Bradford, Brigham Young University; Phillip J. Bryson, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Oral Capps, Jr., Texas A&M University; James E. Carter, Emerson Electric Co.; Robert E. Chatfield, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Kenneth W. Clarkson, University of Miami; John P. Cochran, Metropolitan State College of Denver; Charles W. Baird, California State University, East Bay; Bruce Bender, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Donald R. Booth, Chapman University; Michael Boskin, Stanford University; David A. Brat, Randolph-Macon College; David P. Brown, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Todd G. Buchholz, Two Oceans Management; Samantha Carrington, California State University.

Don Chance, Louisiana State University; Candice Clark, Economic Consultant; R. Morris Coats, Nicholls State University; John F. Cogan, Hoover Institution; Robert