western areas of the United States have been greatly affected by weather as well.

Mr. Speaker, I would much rather be standing here before you with the news that the drought has broken and that the rains have returned. I would love to describe the positive effects of crop revenues working their way through the local economy. This economic activity would energize struggling small businesses and, more importantly, restore hope in the faces and the lives of farmers and ranchers. But that is not the case.

It is difficult for many to understand the severity of this continuing drought and its effect on rural America. Beside me is a picture reminiscent of the 1930's dust bowl, where producers were uprooted from their farms while their precious topsoil blew away. But this picture was not taken in the ''dirty '30s,'' but rather in the drought of 2004.

The severity of these dust storms is evident in this picture, but there are tremendous costs elsewhere as well. Each year I travel through the counties of my district, 69 of them, and I meet with Kansans. There are many issues that threaten our way of life, including rising health care costs, the aging population and the general outmigration of farm families. The average age of a Kansas farmer is 58½ years old, and in many communities no young people are returning to farming because no money can be made.

Despite this, Kansas and other residents of the plains are resilient people who believe that hard work and persistence can overcome almost any obstacle. The people of my State take pride in being self-reliant and overcoming adversity on their own. However, assistance is needed today. By no means will these producers realize profits, but at least this assistance may allow some to stay in farming long enough to experience a good harvest. In the words of one of my farmers who contacted me, ''I just need to hold on that long. It can't stay dry forever.''

Talking about weather is not just polite conversation in Kansas, it is our way of life. Our farmers and ranchers risk their entire operations hoping for timely moisture. Unfortunately, many areas have not received these rains or have received them at the wrong time.

By looking at the U.S. drought monitor map we can see that much of the central plains and western region of our country have been in a severe drought. While conditions could be improving for our fall crops, the damage of multiyear drought has been done.

According to Kansas State University research, Kansas alone lost $1.1 billion to its economy in 2001 and 2002. In 2003, it is estimated that $275 million was lost by our producers; and in 2004, wheat producers lost another $150 million. The majority of those losses, $82 million, occurred in northwest Kansas, which has had a drought for a solid 5 years.

These losses do not even begin to cover the cost to local business and other community organizations. Agriculture is the foundation of each rural community, and a bad harvest affects everyone from the car dealer to the home builder to Main Street grocery stores.

This drought has not gone unnoticed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. By the end of 2003 and for most of 2004, every county in Kansas was designated either as a primary or secondary disaster county.

During my tenure on the Committee on Agriculture, we have worked to see that farmers and ranchers are treated fairly and that the U.S. can continue to provide enough food and fiber to be self-reliant.

As the chairman of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I have worked to approve the availability and benefits of crop insurance, and I will continue this effort. But as of now, there is no insurance solution for multiyear losses.

I urge my colleagues in the House to support some form of disaster assistance. This funding will assist producers who have suffered yet another year of drought or other weather-related disasters. The timing of this assistance is crucial. Many producers simply will not survive one more crop disaster.

Rural America is the backbone of our country and provides many of the essential components to the economy. We have the opportunity to keep their dreams from being carried away by the Kansas winds.

HONORING THE SACRIFICE OF JUAN CALDERON, JR., TOMAS GARCES AND MARK ANTHONY ZAPATA

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

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to come before the House of Representatives to pay tribute to fallen heroes. My south Texas district is again mourning the loss of three more such heroes, Sergeant Juan Calderon, Jr., Specialist Tomas Garces, and Specialist Mark Anthony Zapata.

My district has now lost six brave men. The Rio Grande Valley of south Texas as a whole has lost one soldier in Afghanistan and 10 in Iraq. This represents more than 1 percent of the total lives lost in the war in Iraq.

Sergeant Juan Calderon, Jr., was a 26-year-old rifleman in the 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, based in Camp Pendleton, California. Although he was born and raised in Weslaco, Texas, many of his family live in the Minnesota district of my good friend, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT), who is joining me tonight.

Juan had been a Marine for more than 3 years and had received numerous awards and medals. An avid football player, he and his wife, Ana Maria, were anxiously awaiting the birth of their first child this month.

Juan was killed on August 2 conducting security and stability operations in Anbar Province in Iraq. He will never see his son, who will bear his name, Juan Andres Calderon.

Red, white and blue streamers still decorate the Garces family home, where only a few weeks ago Army Specialist Tomas Garces had come from Iraq for a brief visit. Tomas was a recent graduate of Weslaco High School, where he was a star wrestler.

He joined the 1836th Transportation Company of the Texas National Guard not just to serve his country, but also to help his family financially. He dreamed of one day becoming a wrestling coach to train others in the sport he loved. But, instead, on a road south of Baghdad, his convoy was ambushed by enemy forces, and Tomas became the first member of the Texas National Guard to die in combat since World War II.

This past Saturday, I joined the community of Weslaco at his funeral. Tomas has been recommended for a posthumous Bronze Star for his bravery during the ambush.

Army Specialist Mark Zapata came from a family with a strong military tradition. His father Daniel is a retired Army sergeant, and Mark lived on military bases as a child. The 27-year-old was a graduate of Edinburg North High School and loved music. He was the third soldier from this small community to lose his life in Iraq. He was a musician who liked to DJ and play the trumpet and keyboard. He was also proud to be a volunteer firefighter and loved nothing more than visiting local schools to teach children about fire safety. He even trained his dog Rollie to be a search and rescue dog.

Mark joined the Army 6 years ago and was a tank gunner stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. He was killed on August 15 in Najaf, Iraq.

When you hear the stories that friends and families tell about Juan, Tomas and Mark, you understand just how special all three of these young men were. They were role models to their peers, devoted sons, loving husbands, loyal friends and active in their communities.

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All could have chosen to use their talents in other career paths, yet they chose the path of military service.

South Texas has sent generations of its sons and daughters into military service and, in this most recent conflict, has lost a disproportionate number of its young people and its future leaders.

Yes, Juan, Tomas and Mark volunteered to defend this country and protect our freedom, all the while knowing it might cost them their lives. They are true heroes, and we owe them more than we can ever repay.

For their friends and families left behind, we offer our prayers and the comfort of knowing that the sacrifices of

these young lives will not be forgotten. To those still on the front lines, we pledge our unity, our support and our prayers for their safety and speedy return back home.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Utah). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

SPECIAL TRIBUTE FOR AMERICAN HEROES

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

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise with my friend from Texas tonight to pay a special tribute to some genuine American heroes and one in particular. Last week, I met with the mother, Maria, the mother of Sergeant Juan Calderon, Jr., and I must tell my colleagues, those were very, very difficult times. And they are very difficult times for her, and it was not easy for me.

In the book of John, the good shepherd says, ''Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'' Sergeant Juan Calderon did exactly that on Monday, August 2. He died in a military hospital while fighting and doing operations in Iraq.

Sergeant Calderon was a native of Weslaco, Texas, as the gentleman just preceding me said. He was a resident of Camp Pendleton, California. I had the opportunity to meet with his mother, Maria, who lives in Alden, Minnesota. He has many friends and relatives in the Alden and Albert Lee area. His father, Juan, Sr., still resides in Texas. Calderon's wife of 3 years lives at Camp Pendleton in California and, I regret to say, is expecting their first child.

Calderon's awards include the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon.

Juan Calderon's sister said recently in an interview with the Albert Lee Tribune, ''Juan, Jr., was a big comedian. He was full of life. He was excited to actually go to Iraq and serve his country. He was always proud to serve and proud of what he was doing.''

Calderon's father recently received a letter, and reported in the Associated Press was an account where his son had written to him where he said, ''Don't worry about me. You raised me for 19 years. Now it is time for me to do something to repay you.''

I would like to repeat a story, though, because I think sometimes we need to be reminded that what we are doing there is important. Recently, in a story about an Iraqi translator, a woman whose children were taken away from her more than 6 months ago, her husband beat her. Her brother threatened her life while holding a gun to her head, and her own father contracted for her death with a $500,000 reward. All of this because she was assisting the American coalition. She said, ''You, the soldiers and marines, come from America to help my country. I must help you help my people. I see these soldiers that lose their lives for Iraqis. They come into our country and die for us. We must appreciate these guys. I appreciate the Army and the Marines. I love them.''

Ronald Reagan used to say, those who say that we are in a time where there are no heroes, well, they just don't know where to look. On August 2, we lost several heroes. One of them, Sergeant Juan Calderon, Jr., will be mourned. He will be missed. He will not be forgotten.

Sergeant Calderon did not die in vain. Freedom must prevail. May Almighty God have mercy on this good and faithful servant. May He continue to bless this country and all who defend her.

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

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

A PROMINENT POLITICIAN'S PLAN FOR IRAQ

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

Mr. MCCOTTER. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues may recall, I previously asked to see a plan for the reconstruction and the future for Iraq, and that has happened. And I would like to examine what I will refer to as a prominent politician's plan for Iraq. It is a four-point plan.

The first part is that, ''The President has to get the promise of international support so our men and women in uniform don't have to go it alone.''

I would like to point out that this is one more insult to the 30 countries whose troops are fighting and risking their lives next to ours, including Hungary, whose speaker was here today.

The prominent politician then went on to say that the United Nations Resolution 1546, which urged other countries to come and wage the peace in Iraq, he at least then pointed out ''that 3 months later, not a single country has answered that call.''

My concern is that the best way he can come up with to solve that problem is to do what Washington always does. He wants to call a meeting, and he wants to invite to that meeting the major powers of the world and Iraq's neighbors to figure out how to work the security. Now, I for one do not suggest that anyone here hold their breath while we wait for France, let alone Syria and Iran, to RSVP to that meeting.

He then goes on to talk about what we have to do to get more allies is to let them ''help develop the oil resources in Iraq.''

Now, it seems to me odd that someone who has accused the people who are fighting with us, next to us, in Iraq are being bought, bribed, coerced, extorted, et cetera, that he now believes that, like Saddam proved in the Oil For Food scandal, that the way to the U.N.'s heart is paved with black gold because to build a new alliance, you insult our old allies, our current allies and then offer them the resources of the Iraqi people through their oil. It speaks for itself.

We also hear that somehow this multilateralism is our fault, which I find fascinating. But the reality remains that it is not our fault.

This four-point plan then goes on to talk about rebuilding Iraq's security forces and talks about how the President ''must get serious about training Iraqi security forces.''

Well, I have news for the prominent politician. The President is serious about rebuilding Iraq's internal security forces and its army. Unfortunately, the terrorists are just as serious about killing them before they get started. Unfortunately, nowhere does this plan reference that reality on the ground in Iraq.

It is then pointed out, something which I agree with, that the Iraqi people must feel a more palpable result of this reconstruction. I have agreed with that since last fall when I started saying that, and I have continued to say it. The problem is that the plan then goes into a top-down change in the contracting process, to emphasize ''a few on a list of high-visibility, quick-impact projects'' for ''an Iraqi where the job is less likely to shoot at our soldiers.''

My problem with this is this is not an Iraqi empowerment plan, it is a PR campaign. For the Record, the militia is not fighting for a public works project, and Zarqawi is not an Iraqi. He is a Jordanian. The true empowerment in Iraq's reconstruction must come from the grassroots, through allowing tribal leaders, through allowing town councils, through allowing the national government and religious leaders to make the decisions on what projects are important and giving them the resources to implement them and build their own stake in their free future.

Finally, there is the intriguing argument that somehow the goal in Iraq is