giving everyone in the world, including Iraqis, a chance at freedom. He felt that was really an important part of his mission.

She, also like Robert, felt that we should continue until we had had some measure of finality to the struggle.

So I guess, as the funeral concluded, I was reminded of the words of a young captain that I met over in Kuwait in 2002. This captain had been in Iraq for a year, and he said this; he said, if we pull out prematurely, three things will happen: Number one, those who have died will have died in vain, and that is very true. I think that is one of the things that the family of Jeff were trying to get across.

Secondly, he said, we will have gone back on our word to the Iraqis, and you may recall that that happened in the first Gulf War. We cannot afford to do that.

Then, thirdly, we will have indicated to terrorists everywhere that terrorism works, it is effective, and if they hang in there long enough, eventually, we will back down, and terrorism will only multiply.

I believe that strongly, and I think the family of Jeff Hanson feels that very strongly. I know we are involved in a great debate. There are many people who do not agree with that point of view. So, before long, we will have 300,000 Iraqis trained and equipped sometime late this fall, and that has been the target. At some point, we obviously have to turn it over to them and say, it is your ball, you run with it, now let us see what you can get done with it.

So we do not know how it is going to end up, but I do feel that we need to honor the feelings of so many who have sacrificed so greatly and think this national debate through very carefully before we make any preemptive or presumptive move that may be contrary to the wishes of so many who have suffered.

I thank the Speaker for this opportunity to reflect on the life of Jeff Hanson and his family, and we hope that Jeff and his fellow soldiers can see this through to a successful solution.

NATIONAL INSTANT CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. McCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. McCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking on the 109th Congress. There is not much time left to pass commonsense gun legislation that will keep guns out of the hands of criminals without infringing on anyone's second amendment rights.

When it comes to commonsense gun laws, the Congress has a dismal record. Thus far, this Congress has given corrupt and incompetent gun dealers immunity from negligence lawsuits. This Congress will make it a crime for two police departments to share information from ATF's ballistics database. This Congress has tied the hands of law enforcement dealing with gun-wielding mobs during times of disaster, and it has made it possible for guns to be brought into hurricane shelters.

But now this Congress has a chance to redeem itself a little bit. Last spring, the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security approved H.R. 1415, the NICS Improvement Act, and the full committee markup is scheduled for tomorrow.

This is a bill that would increase the effectiveness of the existing National Instant Criminal Background Check System, the database used to check firearms buyers for any criminal record or any disqualifying criteria.

Overall, NICS has been a success. Since 1994, more than 1.2 million individuals have been denied a gun because of a failed background check. NICS also provides the vast majority of honest gun sellers with peace of mind in knowing that they are selling their products to citizens who will use their guns legally.

However, the NICS system is only as good as the information that the States provide, and unfortunately, many States do not have the resources necessary to enter all of their disqualifying criteria into the NICS system.

The end result is that felons and others who are not permitted by existing law to buy guns are passing background checks and buying guns through legitimate means.

In fact, 28 States have automated less than 75 percent of their criminal record history. In 15 States, domestic violence restraining orders are not accessible through NICS. Those and other loopholes have cost countless people their lives. It is only a matter of time before the system's failings provoke more tragedies.

We must improve the NICS system and allow it to do what it was designed to do. The responsibility for accuracy and effectiveness of the NICS system ultimately belongs to the States. However, many State budgets are already overburdened.

This legislation would provide grants to States to update the NICS system. States would be able to update their system, their database, to include felons, domestic abusers and others not legally qualified to buy a gun.

The bill's goal is to have all 50 States enter at least 90 percent of their disqualifying information into the NICS system.

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States that don't comply or fall short of these goals will be penalized with a 5 percent reduction of their Federal Department of Justice grant allocations.

Also, the bill would provide grants for State courts to promptly enter information to the NICS system. For example, when someone is served with a restraining order stemming from domestic violence, an inefficient NICS system allows him or her to leave the courthouse and head right to the gun store. My bill would make sure all prevailing court records are entered into the NICS database before a crime of passion can be committed.

It is important to keep in mind this bill does not infringe on anyone's second amendment right, which I support. It creates no new gun laws. It simply gives States the resources to better enforce the current laws. If H.R. 1415 becomes law, law-abiding citizens who want to buy a gun legally will not experience any delay at the point of purchase. This bill poses no new burden on gun sellers or owners.

In fact, I first introduced this bill in 2002 with my friend and colleague Mr. DINGELL of Michigan, who is well-known for his strong support of gun rights. This legislation passed in 2002. Unfortunately, the other body didn't have time to take it up. This is something that we can actually get passed. This is something that we should be passing.

We see gun violence becoming more prevalent lately. I know. In my own Long Island district suburban area, over the weekend, we had many gun violence incidents. We are seeing more robberies with guns. These are illegal guns. We must enforce the laws that are on the books so we can save lives, and especially those that do survive these horrible tragedies so that we don't run up the medical costs of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the debate on guns has been going on for a long time, and I understand that this body is nervous about the National Rifle Association, but we have to do what we can to protect the citizens of this country by making sure that illegal guns don't get into the wrong hands. It may not be a perfect bill. We are not going to be perfect in anything we do here, but we can certainly do better, and we should be doing better.

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

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

H.R. 5866, A MEDICARE SOLUTION

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to go out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Texas is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor tonight to talk about the way that this Congress and the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services pays for patient access in the Medicare system and how they reimburse physicians.

Under the current formula, America's doctors participating in Medicare

can expect an annual pay cut of approximately 5 percent over the next decade. That translates to between a 30 and a 36 percent pay reduction for physicians in this country over the next 10 years. Now, Mr. Speaker, I do not know of many small businesses where the expectation of their overhead payments is going to fall by a third over the next 10 years. Indeed, it will be very hard for many of these individuals to remain in business if this issue is not fixed. Not addressing this impending crisis would be negligent at best and put frail and elderly Medicare beneficiaries at risk of losing their physician.

The current Medicare physician payment methodology is fundamentally flawed, and it must be reformed. It is not going to be fixed by the application of a Band-Aid. This requires major surgery. A recent bill introduced, 5856, the Medicare Physician Payment Reform and Quality Improvement Act of 2006, will attempt to accomplish this and two additional goals.

The three purposes of this bill are, one, ensure that physicians receive fair payment for the services that they provide; number two, create quality performance measures and improve the quality improvement organizations that exist to improve the quality of care available to Medicare patients; and, three, identify reasonable offsets to give Medicare physicians a more regular and predictable payment update year to year.

Without intervention, payment for physician services will be cut more than 5 percent next year. H.R. 5866 ends the application of what is known as the sustainable growth rate on January 1, 2007, and institutes a single conversion factor, the Medicare economic index minus 1 percent. This creates a more market-based approach to physician payment by placing more value on the actual costs of inputs and not on arbitrary volume of service targets each year.

In other words, doctors would be paid the same as hospitals are paid, the same as nursing homes are paid, the same as long-term care hospitals are paid, based upon the market cost of inputs for providing that care.

The bill also establishes a system of quality performance measures so that physicians can voluntarily, and let me stress the word voluntarily, report data to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Patients can then assess the level of quality of their prospective doctors, the level those doctors are achieving, and decide which doctor they would prefer to use. These measures will be developed in collaboration with physician specialty organizations for core medical services to make certain that these measures are relevant and meaningful to that particular practice of that branch of medicine.

As an incentive to participate in reporting for performance measures, participating physicians will be permitted to balance bill certain high-income Medicare beneficiaries. Redirecting the stabilization fund from the Medicare Modernization Act provides an additional $10 billion for offsets. Eliminating the double payment from Medicare for indirect costs of medical education is another source of offsetting these costs.

Mr. Speaker, this August, the American Medical Association, in its publication the American Medical News, talked about this bill, 5866. Quoting now, it said that ''the bill would ensure positive annual updates by tying rates to the Medicare economic index. This index is an indicator of how much doctors' cost of caring for patients is increasing. If lawmakers and the White House can approve the measure before Congress adjourns for the year, physicians would start receiving yearly updates equal to an approximately 1.5 percent increase in Medicare rates.''

The bill drew endorsements, of course, from the American Medical Association. But also the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American College of Clinical Endocrinologists are a few of the specialty organizations that have endorsed the concept of this legislation.

We need help to make real changes in this system. We need help from every Member on both sides of the aisle. We need to create solutions and stop simply talking about the Medicare problem. I am asking my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring H.R. 5866.

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

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

REPUBLICAN PARTY AFRAID OF LOSING POWER

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Washington is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, we have not returned to Washington, D.C. to legislate on behalf of the American people. The Republican Party will spend the next 30 days trying to make us all afraid. They are afraid of losing power, and the only way they know how to govern is to play the fear game.

It is the Republican mid-term strategy that if you can make us afraid and keep us afraid, maybe they can cling to power. For the rest of September, until the moment the Republican leaders gavel the Congress into adjournment, Republican speakers will rise and implore the American people to be afraid.

Republicans will call it security. And every time they do, just remember they are speaking in code. Republicans really mean insecurity. During September, Republicans will wield the gavel, but they won't make America safer.

We will not consider, much less pass, legislation to protect our ports by inspecting the minimum number of cargo that it takes to stop a potential terrorist threat. We know what needs to be done, but the Republicans are hard on rhetoric and soft on action.

Republicans are going to use their insecure words so often I hope Lou Dobbs, John Stewart, and the others keep track and remind people daily of how often Republicans are willing to talk and how little they are willing to act.

After America was attacked on 9/11, the finest military in the world, the United States Armed Forces, was sent to Afghanistan to hunt down bin Laden and stop the Taliban. They did a magnificent job, until U.S. soldiers were ordered to leave before the job was done and go to Iraq. We don't have bin Laden and Afghanistan is now looking more like Iraq.

A Republican administration is responsible for diverting our military, draining our treasury, destroying our credibility, and making America less safe. The American people know that Iraq has nothing to do with 9/11, but the administration denies that intelligence. Instead, the President mechanically recites his standard PR line.

The American people know that we are off course and adrift in a sea of violence. U.S. soldiers are not fighting a war on terror in Iraq. They are targets in a civil war among Iraqis. When Republicans parade to the rostrum to outdo each other using their insecurity word, think of just how insecure our soldiers are.

Republicans keep saying things are getting better. This is disproved by their own Secretary of Defense, Mr. Rumsfeld, who ordered another 13,000 troops back into Iraq. There are now 140,000 targets. With 2,653 American lives lost and 19,600 wounded, the country deserves Democratic leadership that knows the Republican plan to stay the course is the most insecure plan for our soldiers, for our Nation, and for the Iraqi people.

But the Republicans are going to spend the next 30 days trying to stay in power. Nothing more. They will say their insecurity code word over and over and over again, but they won't pass the recommendations of the bipartisan Commission on 9/11. Republicans won't bring up immigration legislation intended to make our borders safer. Republicans won't address reforms to Social Security. Republicans won't bring up legislation to end taxpayer subsidies for Big Oil or launch a national campaign to end our addiction to oil.

Instead, the Republicans will tell you to be afraid unless you pay through the nose at the pump and Big Oil can drill in every part of the pristine environment on our planet. Republicans will tell you to be afraid for Social Security unless you give your money to Enron