handles withholding has never heard about it, it does not matter, it is still real, it is passed and the ink is dry.

There is a new withholding form, a new W–4 form, that is available that does address the $400-per-child portion of it. But even that form does not address the $1500 college tuition tax credit, my colleague mentioned a family from Mississippi miss. If I go back to my family from Wisconsin with two kids at home and one in college that gets to keep $2,300 next year, that is almost $200 a month they get to keep. What they would have to do is go in and literally increase the number of dependents that they are claiming on their tax form until they get to a point where literally their take-home pay returns by 200.

I would encourage folks to understand that that many of the employers and people that handle payroll around the country, at this point in time they are not even aware that this tax cut passed. It passed late last year. It is very real. If they have got a college student, their tax is going down by roughly $1,500 for a freshman or sophomore. For most juniors or seniors they are going down by $1,000. If they have kids under the age of 17 at home, they are a middle-income family, their taxes are going down by $400 for each one of those kids. This is very real, and it is a lot of money to a lot of families in the great State of Wisconsin.

We know in Wisconsin we did a study, 550,000 families in Wisconsin have kids under the age of 17 that will benefit by the $400 per child. Two hundred fifty thousand college students in Wisconsin alone benefit from the college tuition tax credit. So this is a lot of money for a lot of families.

Now one problem that we have is most of the families are not doing, as my colleague and friend from Mississippi suggested; most of them are saying, well, I wait until the end of the year. I am not sure I trust Washington and everything they are saying anyhow. So I am going to wait until the end of the year. So if I get it back, great, that is a bonus; and if I do not get it back, I did not believe them anyhow.

The problem with that and the problem of not taking advantage of it right now is that means that those families are sending a heap of their money out here to Washington. That family from Wisconsin I was talking about with a college student and two kids at home, they are sending 200 bucks a month roughly out here to Washington. That is their money, and not only could they be earning interest on it but the problem is we get that 200 bucks out here, and I am sure my colleague from Mississippi knows what happens next, when we see the money sitting out here, what happens is the people in this community want to spend it. So it is a huge, huge fight for us out here to keep them from spending that money that should actually be out there in those Wisconsin and Mississippi homes in the first place.

With that, I am going to wrap up my special order today by reminding us of the different bills that we have talked about and where we have been and where we are going to. The supplemental we now understand is going to be paid for. This is a monumental change. It is new spending in Washington is what a supplemental is. We understand they are now going to find offsets, or lesser important programs, to pay for the new spending as opposed to going out and spending the money. This is a monumental change for Washington to actually offsetting new spending by finding other spending that is less important and offsetting it, as opposed to just spending the new money.

The ISTEA proposal also is going to be offset. We are happy to say that we are seeing the results of welfare spending because the welfare rolls are shrinking as people are getting jobs in this very strong economy we have. Because the welfare roles are going down, some of the spending in social welfare programs is going down and some of that money is being redirected to infrastructure.

The idea of welfare recipients going to work, producing goods and services, and those goods and services needing to be able to get to market through a strong infrastructure system, that makes perfect sense to me. And I am glad to say we are not going to go out and spend new money for the infrastructure system, but again we are reducing one program and reprioritizing or respending that money in a different program as opposed to simply going out and spending more money.

Again, if I had my druthers, we might just reduce the spending, period. But certainly it is much better to offset the spending by finding lesser important programs than to just go and spend the money.

Social Security, we have a long ways to go. The Social Security Preservation Act, H.R. 857, would force Washington to stop spending the Social Security money right now this year and start putting real assets aside so our seniors can again be safe and secure.

H.R. 2191, the National Debt Repayment Act, is where I close today. H.R. 2191, the National Debt Repayment Act, literally restores the Social Security Trust Fund, puts all the money back into the Social Security Trust Fund that has been taken out; pays off the Federal debt so our children could inherent a debt-free nation; and reduces taxes on working families all across America.

I cannot think of a better thing that we in this Congress could possibly do than restore the Social Security Trust Fund, reduce taxes, and give our kids the legacy of a debt-free Nation.

REPORT ON RECENT TRIP TO BOSNIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DICKEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) is recognized for 60 minutes.

(Mr. WICKER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Speaker, four weeks ago today I had the opportunity to lead a bipartisan group of Members of Congress on a five-day trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This trip was taken at the suggestion of the Secretary of Defense and the Speaker of the House. And I was joined on this congressional delegation trip by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CHAMBLISS), the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT), the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. KIND), and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

During our trip, this delegation of first- and second-term Members of Congress had the opportunity to meet with senior officers of the U.S. Command, as well as enlisted personnel, both in the European theater and on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We met with U.S. diplomatic staff and also the people most affected by the ravages of war, the ordinary people of the Bosnian region, the Croats, the Serbs and the Muslim Bosniaas, who are all living together in this war-torn region.

We went to Bosnia, Mr. Speaker, to begin a better understanding of the current political and military situation in the region, to understand the stresses that a continued U.S. military deployment will place on our armed forces, the impact on training and readiness of the United States Army both in theater and elsewhere in the world, the conditions necessary to allow for a withdrawal of U.S. forces and when those conditions might be obtained.

Mr. Speaker, I will say at the outset that our 6–Member delegation has had a bit of a tough time scheduling this particular special order.

□ 1615

We had thought that we might be able to bring these remarks during the evening hour yesterday. Because of the lateness of legislative and House business, we were unable to do so. The other members of the delegation may join me in a few moments, but I am told they are in various hearings and important meetings, and so I may or may not be joined by the other members of the delegation.

However, I do want to let my colleagues know, Mr. Speaker, the unanimous, and I emphasize unanimous, observations and conclusions which were reached by the entire delegation. These are people from both sides of the aisle. These are Members who came to the congressional delegation trip from different perspectives. Some Members had supported the Bosnian operation from the outset. Others had been very much opposed to the concept of our troops being in country there in Bosnia. Based

on our observations, based on the conversations with generals, enlisted personnel, with the very fine United States diplomatic men and women that we have in Bosnia and in the region, as well as NATO and United Nations forces, we did come to these unanimous conclusions, seven items in total which I will share with Members today, Mr. Speaker, and which I will also be sending by way of a Dear Colleague letter.

The number one observation and conclusion, the delegation wishes to acknowledge the impressive professionalism and dedication of U.S. service personnel serving on the ground in Bosnia and supporting Operation Joint Guard from deployment sites in Hungary and Italy. Indeed we met with not only our troops there on the ground in Bosnia, but also from the various staging areas in Hungary and in Vincenza, Italy. We also met with a number of important military leaders in Stuttgart, Germany before going into Bosnia.

I continue to read from the report. It was clear that U.S. military forces are performing their mission in an exemplary fashion. They are being asked to do more with less and are responding admirably. The American people can be proud of the way their Armed Forces, Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard components, have risen to the challenge of ensuring a peaceful, secure and stable environment in Bosnia. All Americans owe these soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines a debt of gratitude.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, our delegation was quite impressed with the military and diplomatic leadership that we have over there. We received an in-depth briefing from General Wesley Clark, the Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. I would just mention that General Clark is not only a 4-star general with a distinguished record of service to our country, he is a West Point graduate, holds master's degrees from Oxford University and is a Rhodes scholar.

We also met with other very fine military leaders, such as Air Force General James Jamerson, also a 4-star general, and Army Lieutenant General David Benton, a 3-star general, Chief of Staff for the U.S. European Command. I also had an opportunity to visit with enlisted and officer personnel from my own State of Mississippi.

Again, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that we can be proud of the effort that these men and women are making. I concluded that they believe in the mission, and they are proud of what they have been doing.

Our conclusion number two is that we have been informed that the U.S. force levels in Bosnia are likely to be reduced from the current 8,500 to 6,900. We are concerned that a lower troop level may lead to increased risk, given the potential for violence directed against or involving U.S. troops as they execute their missions.

We believe that an appropriate level of forces in Bosnia must be based on sound military assessment of the risks and not on any political considerations. Force protection must be a top priority. Increasing the risk to U.S. forces is not an acceptable option. At a minimum, we recommend unanimously, Mr. Speaker, that U.S. force levels not be reduced until after the September 1998 elections are held and a review of the security situation is conducted. We feel that progress in Bosnia should be judged by the achievement of specific milestones and that any troop reduction should be tied to the achievement of these milestones.

Mr. Speaker, I am joined at this point by the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT). Of course, he has never been one to be a shrinking violet. He should feel free, Mr. Speaker, to jump in and ask me to yield at any point, or I will proceed with the discussion of the upcoming election in Bosnia, particularly as it relates to the Republic of Srpska.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. If the gentleman will yield, I will just say that he is doing a wonderful job. I apologize for being late. I had thought we were going to start a little later than this. I think the gentleman should proceed through that. Then we can talk about our trip, what we learned and saw, and what an effect it had on the people who took part in that particular CODEL.

Mr. WICKER. I think my colleague will agree that many Americans, and many Members of the Congress, both the House and the Senate, perhaps are not aware of the complexity of the Dayton agreement. But under the Dayton agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided basically into two federations, one the Croat Muslim Federation, and then the predominantly Serb area, which is referred to commonly as the Republic of Srpska.

Our third conclusion is that prior to the elections in December of 1997, which brought to power more moderate leadership within the Republic of Srpska, hard-line Bosnian Serbs in power demonstrated an unwillingness to comply with the terms of the Dayton agreement. As a result, the overwhelming bulk of Western economic aid has flowed to the Muslim Croat-dominated federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The recently elected moderate government within the Republic of Srpska lacks the financial resources to function effectively, raising concerns about the government's political viability. We were advised by our military and diplomatic leadership that $5 million in U.S. assistance to the new Republic of Srpska Government is essential as part of a $20 million to $30 million international assistance package to demonstrate our commitment to the long-term viability of the new government until it begins generating sufficient revenues on its own. We strongly support appropriation of this $5 million in assistance. Compared to the $2 billion to $3 billion invested annually in support of the military operation, $2 billion to $3 billion invested annually, $5 million on a one-time basis is a relatively small price to pay to ensure the stability of the new reform-minded Republic of Srpska government. However, we do not believe that any U.S. assistance of this nature should be taken from the Department of Defense accounts.

Number 4. Among the more pressing needs within Bosnia is the establishment of an economic infrastructure that will give the Bosnian people a sense of hope and the prospect of a brighter economic future. Without a productive economy, we believe there is little chance for a lasting peace.

Number 5. The need for continued American troop presence on the ground in Bosnia was stressed by U.S. military commanders, political officials, diplomats and the Bosnian people with whom we met. There is a widespread conviction that U.S. troops are essential to preventing the resumption of a war. Having seen the situation in Bosnia firsthand, it is clear to us that the presence of American forces are necessary.

I might interject here before I read the final two points that the devastation of this war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the magnitude of it is really not well known in the United States; 200,000 people dead, over half of them civilians. Of the over 2.5 million people in the country of Bosnia, roughly half of them have now been displaced and are no longer at their home. So the devastation there over this 3-year period has been enormous.

The entire delegation that was over there and saw this concluded that we simply cannot afford to withdraw our troops at this point and see the resumption of hostilities on this scale. At this point, I yield to my colleague for a comment about that conclusion. I think it is central to the observations that we came away with.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I especially thank him for reserving this time today so we could have an opportunity to share some of our observations with our colleagues and others.

I think most of us, and I certainly speak for myself, went to Bosnia with a bad attitude about the entire mission. Those of us who had a little bit of a history lesson in that particular region of the world were aware that they have been fighting over there literally since, I believe it is 1279. I think the feeling that I took with me was these people have been fighting in the Balkans for all of these generations, they have very long memories, it is a trouble spot that will probably never completely heal. My attitude going over there was that this was an act of ultimate American arrogance. To believe that somehow the Nazi panzers and previous occupation armies could not ultimately bring lasting peace to the Balkans, how is it that we now seem to believe that the American forces will magically make these people begin to love each other?

I must say, and I expect that my colleague from Mississippi will agree, that when we first arrived, and particularly when we had our first briefings from the NATO High Command, we were awfully rough on them in terms of questions. In fact, I think one of our colleagues said, do you really expect to turn these people who have been fighting for all of these generations into Republicans and Democrats, and you are going to create a new American democracy here in an area where they have never known democracy, they have never known the economic freedoms and so forth that we take for granted in the United States?

Those were troubling questions. Frankly, we did not get completely satisfactory answers on that first day or two that we were in Europe. But as we began to listen to some of the experts, the picture became clearer as one of the experts over there described Europe. First of all, to understand, I think, the region we call Bosnia, the entire Balkan area, to really understand that, I think we must first understand Europe. I think Americans do have a somewhat hazy and fuzzy understanding of how Europe works and how it fits together. I think the best description that I heard and that began to change my whole way of thinking was that one of the people described Europe in some respects like a dysfunctional family. It is roughly 16 different countries, they speak about a dozen different languages, and they all have memories as well. There have been world wars and there have been various wars down through the centuries so that we have a situation where none of the countries completely trust the others.

The one thing that the United States can bring to the mix, as one of them indicated, the French do not particularly trust the Germans, the Germans do not trust the Italians, the Italians do not trust the British. There is a certain dysfunctionality to this European family. In some respects the United States is like the big brother of this dysfunctional family. When the United States enters the discussion, we are the one entity that can come in and say, ''Okay, knock it off, this is what has to be done.''

□ 1630

We saw that as an example when the European allies first went into Bosnia and tried to bring peace to the region. It was, to use Jimmy Carter's term, an incomplete success. It really was not until the United States came in, and what was very, very apparent to me when we saw the successor to Rommel, who was the German general who was in charge of the panzer division that Rommel had commanded in World War II, when we met with him, I think on the second day, and had lunch in Sarajevo, it was clear to me that he had no problem whatsoever taking orders from an American general.

I do not think that that would have been the case if he had to take orders from a French general or some other general, and I think vice versa. I think the Italians would have had a hard time taking orders from one of the other commanders in Europe, but they had no problem whatsoever responding to the orders and the commands of an American general.

So the first thing I began to conclude that, without an American presence there, this whole thing would begin to unravel.

Mr. WICKER. If I could interject, Mr. Speaker, we are there at the request of Europe. We were certainly a reluctant participant, and I know that there are Members in this body, the gentleman from Minnesota and me included, who were very, very reluctant to participate. So we are not over there insinuating ourselves into a situation where we are not welcome. We are told by our international friends that we are the glue holding the peace together at this particular time, and it would not work there without our presence.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I think that is clearly true; and now I think, at least from my own perspective, I do understand that relationship; and I think it is important. Part of the reason we are respected by all of the parties in Europe is because we are a reluctant leader. We are not there because we want to gain any particular territory or any particular political influence in the Balkans. It is only because we believe it is the right thing to do, and I think that does give us some moral authority that goes a long way.

The other thing that we saw and we witnessed, and I know that we should not make some of these decisions purely based on emotional issues, but as we went out and toured some of the villages and actually met with some of the people themselves, the pictures, the stories, there are certain images that I think I speak for myself, but I know that I speak for everyone that was on that delegation, there are images that are just burned into our minds.

I remember, as I am sure the gentleman does, the meeting we had with some of the mayors in that small little portable building that they had constructed and the emotion in their eyes. One of the mayors said, when we talked about people had been displaced from their homes, he said, I have moved nine times in the last 2 years. Please tell me which house is mine.

I mean, that is something that Americans have a very, very difficult time even relating to. And the fact that the whole notion of a rule of law and having real estate laws so that one has clear title to the home that one lives in, that is somewhat foreign to the people of that region.

There is so much that it is very difficult for us to understand, but it was easy for us to see in the people's faces the appreciation that they have for the American soldiers. In fact, I think the gentleman remembers the story, it may have been told to the gentleman, the old gentleman who told us that he sleeps soundly now because he hears the sounds of the American humvees. I remember the tears on the cheeks of some of the women when they realized that we were Americans and they said, thank you, America.

So I think that we began to see in the faces of the Bosnian people the appreciation for what they know the United States has done and is doing to at least make it safe.

I think we really cannot talk about Bosnia without talking about the Bosnian children. When we got off the planes we were told not to get off the concrete because there were over 1 million land mines buried in that country. They are gradually, with the help of American technology, getting those mines removed, but there are still a huge number of those land mines.

I remember one of the mothers telling me that, yes, they tell the children to play on the traveled areas. They tell them to play in the streets, because the streets are safe. Somehow, for American parents, for a parent of three children myself, to tell one's kids to go out and play in the street is something we would not imagine, but it is safer for them to play in the traveled areas.

There was so much about Bosnia. The more you saw the more you realized that these are people who ultimately do want peace. They ultimately do want to live together in harmony. They do not want to go back to the situation that they saw a few years ago, and that the one entity that stands between them and returning to the chaos of the past are the American GIs.

I think I should say this, and I think the gentleman has already mentioned, that the other thing this is indelibly imprinted in my mind is the enormous professionalism of the American servicemen and women who are serving in Bosnia, from the top generals right down to the lowly infantry men who go to lunch every day with their rifles with them.

They take it very seriously. It is a dangerous place. It is much less dangerous because they are there, but I think I would have to conclude by saying, the best salesmen of all for the Bosnian mission are those kids that are wearing camos and sleeping in tents and the ones who take their rifles with them to lunch and to supper everyday.

They are the ones who literally, in having lunch with them, they told me to a person that they believed that what we were doing, what the United States was doing in Bosnia was important and that we should stay until the mission is done. And they said that in spite of the fact that all of them were homesick, all of them wanted to come home.

I might just share, as long as some of my colleagues may be watching, one other point that they made. I asked them what I could take home and tell people, and one of them says, mail, sir.

Mail is golden. They do love to hear from home. And those who may be watching this, we would certainly encourage them, if they have not written to a friend or a loved one who is over there or if they would like to write to somebody they may not even know, getting mail from home when you are 6,000 miles away and sleeping in a tent is something that is very valuable to our servicemen and women. So I encourage my constituents and my colleagues to write when they can.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. Speaker, that is right. They are over there in the name of the United States of America, and the least we can do as Members and as fellow citizens is to make sure that they and their families realize how much we appreciate them.

The gentleman from Minnesota mentioned the doubts that a number of us had at the beginning of our involvement in 1995 and earlier in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fact that there had been fighting there and ethnic animosity for centuries. That is certainly true, and I hope to get to the point about the importance of Central Europe in just a moment. But it is also true that Serbs, Croats, Muslims and also Jews and other small ethnic groups had lived side-by-side in that country as neighbors and as good neighbors for generations.

I can remember, as I am sure the gentleman from Minnesota can remember, going that day into Tuzla, which is up near the north part of the Bosnian federation, it is actually on the border between the Serb federation and the Bosnian federation, to Camp McGovern, and then taking those helicopters on in to Brcko, which is a very, very critical area and a flash point if this conflict breaks out again, and flying over neighborhoods where there would be one burned-out house and one left standing and one burned-out house and one left standing, based on the fact that one house might have been a Bosnian Croat house. Another might have been a Bosnian/Serb house. And the armies came through and chose to burn down a house based on what ethnic group that family was in, even though the families themselves had been living together in harmony and had nothing whatever against each other.

Major General Larry Ellis, who is a very fine representative of the United States in theater there, was pointing that fact out to us. It certainly occurs to me and I think to other Members of the delegation that the people of Bosnia of the various ethnic groups were not well-served by their leadership during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia by the ultranationalist leadership of Croatia, of Serbia, and of Bosnia and Herzegovina itself and that, actually, these good neighbors were drawn into a conflict that was not of their design and not of their choosing, because of some forces of ultranationalism there that we hope are on the wane.

So I think there is hope that these people who lived once side-by-side can return to that if we can hold our resolve and continue to be a force for stability in that area.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, I do apologize, but I have another meeting that started at 4:30. So I have to run, but I appreciate this time and this opportunity.

In terms of what really happened in Yugoslavia when communism collapsed, when the whole country sort of was torn apart, we need to understand that the real precursor, in my opinion, having seen this now, to the ethnic unrest that then started was really an economic motivation.

When unemployment hit 40 percent, all of a sudden that created tensions between the groups that had not been there when the economy was relatively strong. It may have been a false economy, it was a Communist economy, but I think that is something that is important.

I think where the administration has, in some respects, done a poor job of communicating the situation over there, I think long-term what we need to think about, and I think that this was generally the consensus of the delegation, that rather than focusing on this myopic view of an exit strategy and when are the troops going to be out, I think our conclusion was that we need to focus on what are the expectations of the Bosnian people.

In the book of Proverbs it says, ''Where there is no vision, the people perish.'' And the question we asked several times is, what is the vision of the Bosnian people? Can they return to a peaceful coexistence?

I think, generally speaking, the answer to that question is yes. But I think we have to be there to provide that police force while we move to a transition of a stronger economy. By that, I mean, I think ultimately we are going to be able to reduce our military force. I don't think we do that precipitously. I do not think we should do it before the September elections. But I think, ultimately, we can draw down those forces; and the need for a military presence will be less.

But I think, coupled with that, I think the gentleman already mentioned, we have to do more in the way of helping to rebuild their economy. If there is jobs and prosperity and freedom and opportunity, then I think the likelihood for resumed hostilities between the ethnic bands is dramatically reduced long term.

So I say our strategy should not be about how soon can we get the troops out. Our strategy should be much more about what are the expectations of the Bosnian people. Are they interested in electing people in September who are committed to a long-term, peaceful relationship in Bosnia? Or are they the hardliner militants who would just as soon return to solving their problems with guns and with violence?

If that is the answer, then, obviously, then the United States can probably do no real good over there, and perhaps we should bring the troops home, strike the tents and bring the kids home.

But that should be our message. That should be the message of the administration. And I think that has somehow been lost in all of this discussion about when the troops are going to come home. I think that is a mistake, because I think the American people and the American Congress, to a large degree, has been denied the real reasons we are there; and the real issues at stake in the Balkans have been ignored and, as a result, I think we have rather clouded thinking about how important that area is and, frankly, in the end, how important Europe is to the United States.

We do have a vital national interest in a strong and stable Europe. That is important to the United States. It seems to me a relatively modest investment, I think perhaps $2 billion is too much, but certainly there is a level of investment that the United States can make to ensure a strong and stable Eastern and Central Europe; and that is I think, in the end, something that needs to be talked about as well.

So I appreciate the gentleman getting this time today. I regret that I have to go to a budget meeting that started about 15 minutes ago, but this was a very, very important, and in my life I think almost an epiphany type of an event, because it did change my whole view of that region and our role that we can and probably should play.

I would also suggest, as I did earlier on the House floor, I think the President, the administration, needs to work in consultation more carefully with the Congress. Because I think if we are going to have strong and solid and defensible national policy, in particular as it relates to diplomatic and military policies, I think we cannot do that unilaterally. It cannot be done simply at one end of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. I think the United States Congress has to be full partners in those debates, those discussions and, ultimately, in those decisions.

So we can have our differences about it, but I think we need that healthy debate and dialogue, and I think the Congress needs to be much more actively participating in those discussions. So I think this Special Order today, I say to the gentleman, the gentleman's participation, the leadership in the delegation, the mission that we took to Bosnia was very important.

I thank the gentleman for my own behalf because it really did open my eyes; and, frankly, this is something that is seldom said by people here in Washington. It made me change my mind. Too often, those of us here in Washington are unwilling or unable to say, I was wrong; and, frankly, in the area of the Bosnian policy, I think having seen for myself what is going on over there and what can happen and what our role in the world should and can be, it did change my mind.

□ 1645

So I thank the gentleman for inviting me to go along on the delegation. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I regret that I have to leave now.

Mr. WICKER. I thank the gentleman for his contribution to this special order. I know that the other four members of the delegation had intended to participate in this, and perhaps in the few moments remaining, we will still get their participation.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Minnesota mentioned that he had actually changed his mind fundamentally on the issue of whether our troops should be there. I think when Americans remember that instability in this area, instability in Europe and particularly in Central Europe, has drawn our Nation into two world wars in this century, then we need to be very, very cautious about any action that we might take at this point to cause hostilities to resume there.

We know that in another area of the former Yugoslavia, the Kosovo region, there is a very dangerous situation going on there. Anything that we might do now in a precipitate way I think might bring our allies into a widened conflict, and then the question would be, what does the United States do now that NATO allies are fighting?

The gentleman from Minnesota mentioned a couple of things that I want to follow up on before I get to our final two observations and conclusions. First of all, he mentioned mistakes that the administration had made, and certainly no one is perfect. But I would certainly concur that the administration has not adequately made the case to the American people about why we are doing what we are doing in the Balkans.

I think it was a mistake, Mr. Speaker, for the administration to set artificial timetables. The President may have felt that he had to do this in order to prevent public opinion from stopping the deployment of these troops in late 1995, but I think the establishment of artificial timetables, a year and then we will be out, that sort of talk only gave encouragement to the forces over there who wanted to resume the conflict, who want to resume the ultranationalism that led to this horrible war. So I think that was a mistake.

I am glad that the administration is being more realistic about that now and saying, we want our troops to come home, certainly we want the Bosnian people and people in the Balkans to handle this situation, but we do not believe a timetable is the right way to go. We think specific goals and benchmarks of achievement are better.

It is also regrettable, Mr. Speaker, that the administration has refused to budget honestly for the Bosnian deployment. We have had our troops there since 1995. It has been very expensive, as we mentioned, $2 billion to $3 billion.

The administration fully intends to keep troops there, and I support keeping the troops there, during the entirety of the remainder of this fiscal year and through fiscal year 1999. But the administration has refused to budget for this Bosnian operation.

I do not believe that is honesty in budgeting. I think the administration should admit what they expect we will spend, because certainly it will be expensive, and the administration should submit a budget in the regular budget process so we can adequately plan our budget.

Certainly I want to reiterate the feeling that we should not be taking this peacekeeping money from the other very important national defense needs that we have, separate and apart from our being in there with the stabilization force.

Mr. Speaker, in the few moments that I have remaining, let me simply mention the last two items of our observations and conclusions. That would be items 6 and 7.

Item 6, and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) spoke about this, the importance of the September, 1998, elections.

''The September, 1998, Bosnian elections will be a watershed in determining whether Bosnia moves forward or backward. Until then, we believe the United States should actively continue to support the process of Dayton implementation. Given the effort already expended, it would be foolish to change our political, diplomatic, or military policy in Bosnia before the September elections have taken place.

''However, we do not believe that the United States' commitment can be open-ended. We do not believe it can be open-ended. Stabilization forces will provide important support to the Office of the High Representative in its efforts to create a climate for a fair election. Notwithstanding our observations of the role in peace being played by U.S. troops, we are concerned about the annual exercise of funding our peacekeeping operations in Bosnia by means of supplemental appropriations.''

This is what I was alluding to earlier, Mr. Speaker.

''We encourage the administration to pursue means by which such contingencies can, at least to some degree, be funded, other than at the cost of other important national priorities.''

Finally, conclusion and observation number 7, ''We are convinced that the United States has a vital interest in the stability of Central Europe.''

I might interject here, Mr. Speaker, that Sarajevo in Bosnia was the flashpoint for the start of World War I with the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1940. As a matter of fact, when we were meeting in Sarajevo with Lieutenant General David Benton, he pointed out that we were meeting in the very room, Mr. Speaker, where the Archduke slept his last night.

Also, in World War II, it was in Bosnia where we saw the first instance of the most heinous forms of ethnic cleansing. The subsequent disintegration and division among ethnic groups was in part a source of the Communist influence which later came into that region.

I continue with conclusion number 7, Mr. Speaker. I quote:

> The United States is the undisputed leader of the free world. This role carries with it responsibilities, and among these is participating in efforts to ensure Europe's stability. However, it is our desire that the future of Bosnia ultimately be determined by the Bosnian people themselves.

This statement is signed by the gentleman from Mississippi (ROGER WICKER), the gentleman from Georgia (SAXBY CHAMBLISS), the gentleman from South Carolina (LINDSEY GRAHAM), the gentleman from Minnesota (GIL GUTKNECHT), the gentleman from Wisconsin (RON KIND), and the gentleman from Ohio (DENNIS KUCINICH), persons that I am delighted to have gone to Bosnia with on this congressional delegation trip, and to have been associated with. I think all five of these gentlemen that I went to Bosnia with represented the Congress in an able fashion and represented the United States, and came back with some valuable, valuable information.

In conclusion, let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that our visit to the Balkans, to Bosnia, to the troops there, and to the American personnel on the ground, made me proud to be an American, proud of the role that the United States of America is playing in preventing another world war, perhaps, or at the very least, another deadly conflict.

I am proud of our military. I am proud of the fact that our friends in Europe, in spite of the many differences we may have on certain issues, turned to the United States for help in stabilizing this region, and preventing a resumption of hostility.

I would say that the six of us all concluded that no matter what we initially thought about the United States' deployment in this area, we feel that we cannot in good conscience turn our back on the effort that we have already expended, and I commend the report to the reading of our fellow Members of Congress, Mr. Speaker. They will be receiving it in the form of a Dear Colleague letter in the next day or two.

MEDICARE EXPANSION FOR AMERICANS AGE 55 TO 65

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DICKEY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to mention today how important it is for this Congress and this House to address the issue of Medicare expansion with regard to Americans age 55 to 65.