

We have to get serious if we want to protect this Nation's infrastructure.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON WAR WITH IRAQ

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 have come to the floor, once again tonight, to discuss the groundswell of support for an independent commission to discuss the administration's plans regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. After hearing the administration's case for war, many Americans felt they were led to believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction ready to use against America and were on the verge of developing nuclear weapons. Mr. Speaker, we may yet find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but it is now clear to many Americans that the administration overstated and misrepresented the threat that Iraq posed to the United States. Those Americans can say it better than I can.

Fred, from Ventura, California writes, "I recently read an article that summarized the comments made by the President and members of his administration. I am deeply troubled by how incongruent these statements are with the realities after President Bush declared an end to hostilities."

□ 1700

Susan from Solana Beach, California, compares the administration's untruths with recent corporate scandals, "Enough is enough. Whatever deceptions corporate America perpetrated in the last few years, no one died and we continue to investigate. Washington must be held to a far higher standard because American lives were risked and lost on the word of the Bush administration. Without an investigation to answer these important questions about potential distortion of intelligence reports, all the tax cuts in the world will not buy my vote in future elections."

Steve from Bakersfield was more understanding: "If we launch a preemptive war by mistake, God help America."

This is not God's responsibility, Mr. Speaker. It is the Congress's responsibility.

Beatrice from Redondo Beach is upset with those of us here in Congress: "I am angry at the lack of action by our representatives against this Bush administration on their manipulation of facts in order to take our country to war."

J. Lawrence of California seconds that and I will quote him: "Of all things that a government does, the decision to go to war must be made openly and without manipulations. I urge you to support an independent commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding what we, the public, were told about the justification for our re-

cent incursion into Iraq. We spent millions on a sexual dalliance but appear to have been ignoring what may have been a mass deception and manipulation of truth that in the end put U.S. citizens and soldiers in harm's way."

Stan and Sue from Sierra Madre support an investigation also. They say: "Never should we harm another country nor put our own sons and daughters in harm's way under false pretenses. An inquiry is one of the tools to make sure this does not happen in the future."

Mr. Speaker, other Americans want to remind us, in the Congress, that they do not care about partisanship. They only care about getting to the truth.

Steve from Moorpark writes: "In the interest of preserving the freedoms and liberties inherent to our Constitution, I ask you to support an independent investigation of the Bush administration's distortion of evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. No matter which political party affiliation any American favors, it is detrimental to our country, our Constitution, and our democracy to have our leaders mislead all Americans for reasons yet unknown."

It is time to get the facts. I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2625, the gentleman from California's (Mr. WAXMAN) bill to create an independent commission to uncover all of the facts about the administration's claims and Iraq's weapons. It is time for Congress to stop beating around the bush and take action. Support fact finding. Support an independent commission.

HONORING REED LARSON

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Colorado (Mrs. MUSGRAVE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MUSGRAVE. Mr. Speaker, it was nearly 5 decades ago in the spring of 1954 that Reed Larson went on what he believed to be a temporary leave from his job as an engineer for the Coleman Company in Wichita, Kansas, in order to lead a new grass-roots advocacy group called Kansans For Right to Work. Larson and his group members were determined to pass a State right-to-work law protecting employees from being forced to join or pay dues to a labor union in order to get or keep a job.

Because they first had to deal with a hostile Governor, the job took longer than originally expected. By the time Kansas's right-to-work law was finally passed in November of 1958, Larson had been on temporary leave from the Coleman Company for 4½ years. After the Kansas victory, Larson was quickly recruited to lead the then 4-year-old national Right to Work Committee from its headquarters right here in our Nation's Capital and his temporary leave from the Coleman Company became permanent.

For the next 44 years Larson stood at the helm of this organization, which has aptly been hailed as the Nation's preeminent defender of workers' freedom. I rise today to pay tribute to Reed Larson because of his long, selfless commitment to the right-to-work cause and because late last month at Mr. Larson's own recommendation, the board of directors of National Right to Work Committee appointed then executive vice president Mark Mix as the new Right to Work president and Larson as executive committee chairman.

Reed Larson is still fighting for the right-to-work cause, but his role in the coming years will be in a different capacity than during the last 5 decades, marking the end of an era for the National Right to Work Committee and for opponents of forced unionism nationwide.

Mr. Speaker, I have the utmost respect for Mr. Larson's continued involvement with the right-to-work cause. Almost anyone else who had accomplished what Reed Larson has over the past 49 years would be content to rest on his laurels. During the 1950s, roughly 30 percent of private sector employees nationwide were forced to join and remain in a union. If they refused, they would be fired. Today it is 7 percent of private sector employees who are compelled to pay union dues or fees in order to keep their jobs. One major reason it is now possible to envision the day when every American private sector employee enjoys the personal freedom to decide whether or not to affiliate with the union is the invaluable assistance Reed Larson and the National Right to Work Committee has given to State right-to-work efforts.

Thanks largely to the sound advice of Reed Larson and the committee, the number of State right-to-work laws has grown to 22, with the most recent law being approved less than 2 years ago in the State of Oklahoma. Furthermore, not a single right-to-work law that was in effect when Mr. Larson took over the committee in January of 1959 has been repealed or rendered inoperative through court action, although Big Labor has spent countless millions of dollars on bids to destroy such laws.

The most notorious of these schemes was union officials' Capitol Hill campaign to eviscerate all State right-to-work laws through repeal of Taft-Hartley section 14(b) in 1965 and 1966. Under Reed Larson's leadership the committee saved State right-to-work protections by convincing Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois to lead a filibuster against 14(b) repeal.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly salute my good friend Reed Larson and the National Right to Work Committee's 2.2 million members. I applaud their unwaivering dedication and tireless action on what should be every American's birthright, not to be forced to pay tribute to a labor union in order to get or keep a job.

May God bless you, Mr. Larson and his wife. He is a true American hero and many Americans owe him a debt of gratitude.

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

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

BHOPAL TRAGEDY

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

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to discuss the tragedy of the Bhopal disaster in India. This is an event that the Congress and the world remember vividly. Unfortunately, we have forgotten that many of the victims and their families that remain in Bhopal still remain without much reparation.

On that horrible December day in 1984 when a Union Carbide plant leaked 40 tons of lethal gas in Bhopal, India, about 4,000 people died within hours, more than 20,000 were injured. And since then the death count has risen to over 14,000 as a result of exposure to the gas. According to victims rights groups, over 150,000 people are suffering from the after-effects such as reproduction complications, loss of ability to perform physical labor, rare cancers, severe respiratory problems, and the list goes on.

Not only are there countless trials and tribulations regarding health status, but in addition there are tremendous environmental injustices such as polluted groundwater, toxic waste, and contaminated soil that have largely remained unaddressed.

Mr. Speaker, Union Carbide is the company responsible for the Bhopal disaster. But when Union Carbide and Dow Chemical merged in 2001, there was no doubt that Dow Chemical as a successor company was also responsible for the disaster. Dow Chemical has the resources to deal with the health problems and to provide reparations for the people of Bhopal that were devastated by the tragedy.

To date, Mr. Speaker, there are four basic outstanding demands that the victims and their advocates are tirelessly working toward. Dow Chemical has the responsibility to meet each of these demands, and I would like to express my commitment to seeing that these basic demands of justice come to fruition.

First, Mr. Speaker, there must be acknowledgment that Dow inherited criminal liabilities and accordingly should face a criminal trial for poisoning people, animals, and the environment. At the time, Union Carbide blamed the disaster on a disgruntled worker. But whatever happened to him?

At the time, Warren Anderson was the CEO of Union Carbide. Whatever happened to him? And more importantly, where is he now?

Second, Mr. Speaker, the health of survivors must be monitored and medical care must be provided to them as well as the second and third generations that have already and undoubtedly will continue to inherit health complications due to their family members' exposure to gas in 1984.

Third, there must be adequate funding and some type of safe, workable design and infrastructure for removing 5,000 tons of waste and chemicals in the soil and water. There are over 20,000 people drinking contaminated water thoroughly diffused with mercury. And this example of endless environmental atrocities is simply unacceptable.

Fourth, Mr. Speaker, compensation for injuries must be addressed. Any victim reparations thus far have been woefully insufficient; and in fact, over half the death claims have been rejected. People have no choice but to rely on financial retribution and that is because there have been minimal numbers of jobs since the disaster, and those sickened from exposure have lost the ability to perform simple tasks. In addition, care for the overwhelming number of orphans is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, the struggle of the people of Bhopal has been long and has reduced most to living without dignity. Americans deal with environmental injustices as well. However, we have public health laws that protect our citizens' Federal right-to-know legislation that, in fact, came about in the aftermath of Bhopal.

In an effort to restore basic human rights to the people of Bhopal, my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), and I are circulating a letter to the CEO of Dow Chemical asking that Dow take responsibility for the disaster inherited in 1984 and that it cooperate in meeting the demands of its victims. I encourage all of my colleagues to sign on to this important letter.

In addition, I plan on circulating an amicus brief on behalf of the Bhopal victims who have year after year tried their cases in the U.S. court system and who have been subjected to unfair treatment due to corporate favoritism.

At that time, I will also ask my colleagues to join me in sending a message that the injustice cannot continue and that there is support in Congress for holding accountable those that are liable for this horrific tragedy.

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

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

AMERICANS NEED THE TRUTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, 160-or-so years ago, Congress passed a rule prohibiting Members of Congress from debating the issue of slavery. The issue of slavery, the greatest blemish on our Nation's history, was actually not debated in Congress for many years because conservative leaders of this body simply said it could not be, and passed a rule prohibiting it.

John Quincy Adams, former President and later Member of Congress in the 1830s and 1840s came to this Chamber of the House of Representatives and collected letters from his constituents. He called them petitions from mostly women's group in Massachusetts. Women in those days were not allowed to vote, as most of us know. He brought these petitions from women who were opposed to slavery and read them on the House floor.

While the rules said he could not debate slavery, he was simply a mouthpiece, a conduit, was a megaphone for the concerns of the people in his district about a great national problem.

Fast forward the clock to 2003. We now have a legislative leadership which is again saying no to debating issues of what really happened with the Bush administration's distortion of evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. While the President may have made, perhaps we are not really sure quite what happened, but we want to investigate. We want to know more. There has been no avenue to do that in this body.

So as a result a group called Moveon.org has gathered online hundreds of thousands of petitions and tens of thousands of American citizens including dozens, dozens, dozens in my district, thousands in the State of Ohio, tens of thousands around the country, speaking out about what they think.

So I am going to share in the next 3½ minutes or so, Mr. Speaker, what people in my district are saying when they sign this petition saying that Congress should support an independent commission to investigate the Bush administration's distortion of evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program.

□ 1715

John Ciraldo of Akron, Ohio, in my District, "It seems to me that the evidence of deceit led by the Bush administration is becoming more and more prevalent."

"I feel that it is becoming more of an issue to the American people. As part of a democracy, we believe that we have a right to know."

"Please take a stand," Mr. Ciraldo writes, "for what I believe you know to be right. Be fair to our Nation and show a true patriotism, investigate. All of America has the right to know." Mr. Ciraldo from Akron.

Thomas Spalding, also from Akron, Ohio, shorter letter, "Please pursue an