

State of the Union presentation made by this President. What had occurred was a lot of debate, a lot of involvement in the United Nations, but we had not gone at that time into Iraq.

It was a statement in the State of the Union, I believe, that framed for the American public the urgency of going. The words "recently purchased uranium from a Nation in Africa" caused the focal point to be on the fact that Saddam Hussein might have nuclear weapons that could be poised, if you will, directly at the United States of America.

That is why it is so extremely important that we have an independent commission, which I call for, and subsequently a special prosecutor, if necessary. That is why I have offered an amendment to the foreign operations appropriations bill to ensure that there be no funds blocking the creation of an independent commission, meaning no funds be used to block the creation of an independent commission.

□ 2100

I hope that this amendment will be debated fully on the floor of the House on the basis of truth, not on the basis of partisanship. I have included as well in that amendment, or in amendments that I will offer, the idea of promoting women to be engaged more so in the peace processes. Whether it is in the Mideast or whether it is in discussions dealing with Liberia, women have been effective proponents and/or crafters of peace in international agreements, and I hope that can be the case.

Madam Speaker, I think it is important to note that Americans are equally concerned about a bipartisan, non-partisan independent commission that openly presents the facts in a public setting. I appreciate the fact that the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence is now reviewing this issue, but the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, behind closed doors, does not represent the people's House. It does not represent the people of America being able to understand the trail of information that would cause statements to be made about the status of a purchase of uranium or the intelligence that would suggest to this Nation that we had to go in right at that moment unilaterally and not multilaterally.

Just a brief statement: "I am looking to you and other Members of Congress to look beyond partisan politics and make the courageous choice to discover the truth about what the administration did and did not know about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction before sending our armed forces to Iraq." Lora Munsell, Jackson, Ohio.

Clearly this Congress must speak and must act. I would simply ask we allow an independent commission to go forward.

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#### WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. HARRIS). Under a previous order of the

House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURGESS. Madam Speaker, I have been here for a while and listened to the remarks such as those just given by my colleagues from the great State of Texas, but quite honestly I cannot understand how it is possible to criticize the President for the action that he took in Operation Iraqi Freedom and at the same time ask the President to go forward in an action in Liberia.

That being said, I think it is incumbent upon us on the Republican side of this House to point out that after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it had become apparent that the United States needed, the United States was required to be more vigilant about terrorism and weapons proliferation and pay particular attention to the prospect of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of groups or states that would use them against American interests, American interests either here at home or abroad. And unfortunately, over the prior 10 years we have seen that with attacks in Saudi Arabia, the Khobar Towers, the bombing of the Cole and, of course, the attacks here on September 11.

The Bush administration, the Clinton administration, indeed, the United Nations all agreed that Saddam Hussein possessed a significant biological and chemical capability in 1998 when the inspectors were withdrawn. There is broad agreement that Saddam Hussein, different from any other leader, had proven himself capable of using these weapons for offensive purposes and not merely in a defensive posture.

Where those weapons are today falls into one of several categories. They may still be hidden. Saddam Hussein had become a master of concealment. Please remember that in 1995 the United Nations was preparing to lift sanctions believing that Iraq had disarmed. It was only the defection of Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Jamal and the revelation that significant weapons were presented that halted the United Nations from lifting the sanctions in 1995.

Perhaps Hussein did destroy the weapons after the inspectors left in 1998. It seems preposterous on its face, but while this was unlikely given his other behavior, the burden of proof was clearly still on Saddam Hussein, not the United States, not President Bush and not the United Nations to demonstrate the destruction of the weapons had indeed occurred.

There is also the possibility that the weapons had degraded over time or were destroyed in the bombing or looted during the first combat phase in Iraqi Freedom. It does not really matter. The disorder and political uncertainty we are witnessing in post-war Iraq, while at one level unsettling, are to some extent a reflection of how completely Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime dominated and dictated Iraqi life.

There are efforts in the Congress to employ a full investigation into these

difficult issues to understand whether any mistakes were made and to take action to fix them in fulfillment of Congress's important oversight responsibilities.

To date, the chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence reject a broader probe of the weapons of mass destruction issue.

I believe that Congress is exercising its oversight authority and has set in place procedures to review comprehensively and on a bipartisan basis the intelligence surrounding Iraq prior to the outbreak of war and to take into account any dissenting views on the Iraqi threat within the intelligence community.

People who have lived in a police state with no freedom of speech are unlikely to volunteer information until stability and security are achieved in Iraq. We must remember 30 years of living under a dictatorship cannot be reversed overnight.

But the most important point is this: A free Iraq makes American and its allies safer by removing a destabilizing force in the region, removing a regime that pursued weapons of mass destruction, eliminating a state sponsor of terrorism and, ultimately, by serving as a living example to the people of the Middle East of the benefits of freedom and democracy.

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

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The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

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#### ASSURED FUNDING FOR VETERANS HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2003

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of my special order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. EVANS. Madam Speaker, it is no secret to anyone in this body, nor to