

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, in October, we will have fair and free elections in Afghanistan. Ten million Afghans are registered to vote, one-half being women. When they go to the polls. There will be threats, intimidation and violence, but the Afghans will go.

Compare that to other elections in October held in the European country of Belarus. Candidates have been intimidated, but the people will still go to the polls. The problem is, the dictator will count the votes and the ballots.

If the international community can help ensure fair and free elections in Afghanistan and Iraq, surely they can help enforce fair and free elections in the Nation of Belarus. I call upon them to do so, and I hope they will ensure fair and free elections in Belarus.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR JOHN EDWARDS FOR SUCCESSFUL DEBATE

(Mr. ETHERIDGE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to congratulate my friend, Senator JOHN EDWARDS, for his outstanding performance in last night's debate. Once again, he has done us proud.

JOHN EDWARDS grew up the son of a mill worker in rural North Carolina. He understands the challenges that ordinary people face in these tough economic times. Simply put, he gets it when it comes to the problems, challenges, aspirations and dreams of hard-working families. That is why he will make an outstanding Vice President.

During last night's debate, JOHN EDWARDS clearly stated why the Bush-Cheney administration's stubborn refusal to admit mistakes is so wrong for America. The Bush-Cheney record of failed policies, broken promises, and tired excuses is a strong change in our national leadership. JOHN EDWARDS articulated that case very strongly last night.

Mr. Speaker, JOHN EDWARDS and JOHN KERRY have a better plan to strengthen middle-class families, to create good jobs, provide targeted tax relief for middle-class families and invest in jobs for tomorrow for the broader future of America. We need new leadership in America. JOHN EDWARDS demonstrated last night that he and JOHN KERRY are ready to take our country in a new and better direction.

KERRY DOES NOT GET IT ON IRAQ

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, on the one hand, Mr. KERRY calls Iraq a mistake. On the other hand, he says our soldiers are not dying for a mistake. He has failed time and again to make sense of

his flip-flops. And while he looked good in the debate last week, he sounded like the same old candidate with 57 varieties of stances on Iraq. His call for a timetable to get troops out of Iraq sends a message that terrorists can outlast us. It is a fancy way to spin the fact that he wants to retreat.

His repeated statements that Iraq is a "quagmire," "the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time," repels allies; it does not rally them to our cause. And, talking about real coalitions is a fancy way to spin the fact that, under his watch, other nations would dictate the deployment of our military, and it insults our coalition partners and the Iraqi forces who are risking their lives every day for freedom.

JOHN KERRY just does not get it.

ADMINISTRATION MUST ADMIT MISTAKES

(Mr. EMANUEL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, here are a few headlines from the last 24 hours: "Iraqi Arms Threat Was Waning," the definitive government report saying there was a diminishing threat from Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction; "France Was Ready To Send Troops to Iraq," 15,000, but did not because of the relationship with President Bush; "Bremmer Criticizes Troop Levels," Paul Bremmer now says we never had enough troops on the ground; "White House Embraced Disputed Arms Intelligence," the White House claimed Iraq was buying aluminum tubes to facilitate uranium enrichment even though their own experts told them otherwise; "Funds To Build Iraq Are Drifting Away From Target," only 27 cents on the dollar are going to rebuild Iraq.

This does not even include what Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld acknowledged yesterday, that there was no relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda.

Mr. Speaker, their house of cards that was the case for going to war and how to prosecute this war have collapsed. In going to war, this administration allowed ideology to trump reality. Iraq was not an imminent threat, there was no impending mushroom cloud. With the costs and casualties, candor would be a welcome addition to this White House.

You cannot fix a problem if you do not acknowledge that you have one.

PRESIDENT BUSH HAS A RECORD OF LEADERSHIP

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, last night, Americans saw the choice of DICK CHENEY and JOHN EDWARDS. It is being debated now who prevailed.

Where people know JOHN EDWARDS best, his and my home, birth State of South Carolina and his home State of North Carolina, the people are overwhelmingly supporting DICK CHENEY to continue his service with President Bush to best protect American families in the war on terrorism.

Senator KERRY has a 20-year record in the Senate of voting against every major weapons system that won the Cold War and that our troops are using today. Senator KERRY has proposed budget cuts in intelligence even after the first World Trade Center bombing. He voted against the first Gulf War; he voted for the current war in Iraq and then against the funding to give our troops the body armor needed to fight the war. This is not the kind of record Americans expect in a commander in chief.

President Bush and Vice President CHENEY have a strong and clear record of leading our Nation in the war on terror. President Bush has shown he will take the fight to the terrorists wherever they are, protecting American families from future terror attacks here at home.

In conclusion, may God bless our troops. We will never forget September 11.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO CUT VETERANS' BENEFITS

(Mr. STRICKLAND asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I have a message for America's veterans and the families who love them.

As reported in Sunday's Washington Post, Staff Sergeant Gene Westbrook, 35, of Lawton, Oklahoma, was deployed to Iraq in January as a drill sergeant, sent to train Iraqi Army recruits. While on duty on April 28, south of Sadr City in Baghdad, he was hit by a mortar shell, and the shrapnel severed his spine. He is now paralyzed from the chest down, has limited movement in his right arm and battles constant infections. His wife takes care of him full-time.

"I love the military," said Staff Sergeant Westbrook. "That was my life. But I do not believe they are taking care of me now."

He has received no disability benefits because his paperwork is missing. He is supporting his wife and three children on his regular military pay of \$2,800 a month as he awaits a ruling on whether he will receive \$6,500 from the VA for his disability.

At the same time, President Bush's budget for 2005 calls for cutting the Department of Veterans' Affairs staff that handles disability claims. What is the President thinking, cutting the budget for this vital function while our disabled servicemen wait for justice?

HONORING DARRELL WALTRIP

(Mrs. BLACKBURN asked and was given permission to address the House