

the opportunity to visit that region recognize that there are no words to describe the devastation experienced both in terms of physical structures but also in terms of the emotional loss.

However, as I visited Sri Lanka, let me appreciate and acknowledge the wonderful spirit of the Sri Lankan people as well as those in the other devastated regions who realize there is still hope. But also let me say to the American people that one disaster stood out more than others. And when I say "disaster," one impact of the disaster stood out more than others and that is the impact on children.

First of all, it is important to note that the largest number of victims for the tsunami disaster were children in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Somalia and other places. Waves 15 feet and more swept away thousands of children, and whole generations have now been lost. When teachers returned to schools in Sri Lanka, one teacher acknowledged that she had lost her four children. They had been swept away. A classroom that had previously held 30 students now held six.

I rise today to raise the consciousness of the world on the plight of the world's children, not America's children but the world's children. We find out that in the world we now have still large numbers of those children who are either forced into being child soldiers, children who are forced into child slavery, children who are forced into sexual trafficking. Children have been abused, and we have not responded to the call.

Let me thank organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children and other world-focused organizations who focus on the needs of children, but I would say that the need is greater than we have responded to. It is time now for a Marshall Plan that deals with the education of the world's children. It is time for us to raise an outcry, an outrageous outcry, to demand the cessation of using children in child labor camps, in sexual trafficking and as child soldiers.

It was noted that, in the tsunami disaster, rebel groups are beginning to recruit orphan children in Sri Lanka and Indonesia to engage in rebel fighting, innocent children who before the tsunami had mothers and fathers and grandparents, children who had restful places to sleep and places to play and to be children. It is well known of the terrible tragedy of children in many parts of South America and particularly Brazil, but it is not well known that if we took a mere \$8 billion we could guarantee a primary education for every child in the world.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling upon this Congress, and I will be working with the Congressional Children's Caucus which I am a cochair of. We will take on as our issue a Marshall Plan for educating the world's children, a Marshall Plan that will demand of the world, demand of the United Nations, demand of nations both free and unfree that their children must come first.

We must minimally provide for a primary education for the world's children. What kind of world are we to say that we sit idly by to allow our children, orphaned or not, to be sexually abused, to be lacking in education, to have no homes to go to, to be used in human trafficking, to be sexual slaves and as well child slaves and to be used in war. I believe that we will not as a collective world force, as a family of humanity, be able to stand up and acknowledge our own humanness by sending to the worst plight our children in this world. There should be an outcry. A mere \$8 billion can promise the primary education of all of the world's children.

It will be the challenge of the Congressional Children's Caucus to hold hearings on this issue. I invite Save the Children, UNICEF, other United Nations NGOs, world NGOs to join us, celebrities and others, to join us and put our collective effort behind the idea of really saving the world's children. It is a big task, but it can be done. We can spend \$80 billion and more in a supplemental to help the military in Iraq. We can minimally provide \$8 billion that will guarantee every single child in the world today a primary education.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge is enormous, but in seeing the devastation in the tsunami region I cannot imagine that we can minimally provide for the children of the world.

OUSTER OF VETERANS COMMITTEE CHAIR

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

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, on January 3 of this year, 10 national veterans organizations wrote a letter to Speaker HASTERT. Those 10 organizations were the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Disabled Veterans, the AMVETS, the Blinded Veterans Association, the Jewish War Veterans, and the Noncommissioned Officers.

Why did these 10 groups write a letter to Speaker HASTERT? They wrote this letter because they were concerned that rumors were spreading throughout this Chamber and across Capitol Hill that the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, a Republican, the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs that had been there for 4 years, this man had served on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for 24 years, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the rumor was spreading that Chairman SMITH was going to be replaced as the Chair of the VA Committee and that someone else would be put in that position.

These veterans groups were terribly concerned because, as they said in the letter, the Nation's leading veterans

organizations representing over 5 million members are writing to "urge that Congressman Chris Smith remain chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs."

□ 1530

They also said in the letter, "Over the past 4 years, Chairman SMITH's national reputation as the foremost congressional expert and advocate on veterans' issues has continued to grow." They further said in their letter, "In our view, it would be a tragedy if Chris Smith left the chairmanship" of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The Speaker of this House and the leadership of this House ignored all of these 10 national veterans organizations, and they not only removed the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) as the chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs; they removed him from the committee entirely, a committee that he had served on for 24 years. Why did they do this? They did it because the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) is an advocate for veterans. He had the gall to speak up and to speak out and say we should do what we have promised to do and provide our veterans with the health care they need. And the leadership of this House would not tolerate that kind of insubordination. So this good man was stripped of the Chair's position and removed from the committee.

Let me say something about the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the person. In my judgment, he is the most pro-life advocate in this House of Representatives. I do not agree with the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) on every issue, but I can tell the Members that he is a true conservative. He is an advocate for the unborn. He is an advocate for human rights not only here in this country but around the world. And if this Republican leadership would do this to their own, one can only imagine how they may respond to others who would challenge anything the leadership may want them to do.

We are elected to come here by about 630,000 people. At least I think I have 631,000 constituents in my district of Ohio. We are elected to come here as independently elected representatives of the people that vote for us, and our responsibility is to speak up and to speak out. Benjamin Franklin has said, If you act like sheep, the wolves will eat you. And I would just like to say to my Republican colleagues who sat by and let the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) be treated the way he was treated by their leadership, if they can do it to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), they can do it to any one of them. And if they act like sheep, if they go along to get along or to protect themselves or to keep from being punished by their leadership, they will lose the ability to be an effective advocate for the people who sent them here to represent them.