and we will see what he does. He was very cordial, nice and intelligent; and, of course, they have a President at the present time, a Kurd named Talabani.

We also were heartened by the progress women had made in Iraq, because at the present time every third name on the ballot last January 30 was a female name. So we will have about 80 representatives of the 275 member delegates to the constitutional convention.

So, all in all, Mr. Speaker, we think things are better. They are not perfect, but it is heartening to see the progress that has been made.

GUN LIABILITY LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I talked about no fly. In other words, terrorists in this country cannot get onto a plane, but they can certainly go into a gun store and be able to buy a gun. Today, I would like to talk about gun liability, which is going to be out on the floor in the next week or so.

The leadership of Congress is constantly preaching about personal responsibility: Individuals should accept the consequences of their actions. I agree with that. Unfortunately, this culture of responsibility does not extend to the gun industry and negligent gun sellers.

Both the Senate and the House have bills granting the gun industry unprecedented immunity from litigation and other legal actions, legal actions that many of us that have suffered from gun violence were able to take advantage of in the courts. Under this legislation, dealers and manufacturers of guns would receive immunity from any legal action.

Sellers and makers of nearly every other consumer product must face the consequences of their negligence and their misjudgments. Manufacturers and sellers of toy guns are more liable for their products than the makers and sellers of assault weapons and handguns.

The NRA has named this issue as their number one legislative priority this year. They said this will end frivolous lawsuits, but not a single suit against the gun industry has ever been deemed frivolous by a court of law.

This legislation is not about protecting an honest gun dealer who illegally sells a gun to someone who later commits a crime. This legislation protects cases of gross negligence which has led to the deaths of unsuspecting victims.

For example, I think the majority of us remember the incident here in the D.C. area. The owner of the Bull's Eye Shooter Supply Store in Washington State was sued because he could not account for 239 guns in his inventory. One of these guns was the Bushmaster used in the D.C. sniper cases. The D.C. sniper killers were allowed to get their hands on a gun because of this store's negligence, but this legislation would get Bull's Eye Shooter Supply off the hook from any legal action. By the way, the victims were able to sue Bull's Eye and win a court judgment.

Fortunately, there was a lawsuit against Bull's Eye and Bushmaster, and part of the settlement was Bushmaster agreeing to work with its dealer to promote safer sales practices to prevent incidents of negligence. That is one of the tools of being allowed to sue, to make manufacturers, to make people responsible for their products.

This legislation would have required the immediate dismissal of the lawsuit against Bull's Eye.

The gun industry must be subject to the same laws that govern every other American business. Courthouse doors must remain open to those injured or who have lost loved ones because of the gun industry's negligence.

This bill would allow gun dealers to knowingly sell large quantity of guns to a single customer intending to traffic the guns to criminals without any legal repercussions.

Stripping away the threat of legal action would seriously jeopardize any opportunity to make guns safer. Without the threat of lawsuits, the gun industry will not have any incentives to incorporate gun locks, safety triggers and smart gun technology into their products. Had this law been in place 40 years ago, the auto industry certainly would not have made the cars we are driving any safer than what we are in today.

Instead of giving the gun industry never-before levels of protection, I support giving the gun industry Federal research and development money. This money would be used to develop reasonable safety measures for their products.

But Congress has not been responding to the threat of gun violence. Let me speak in a language the Congress leadership understands, dollars and cents.

The secret that most people do not understand is the gun violence in this country is costing millions and billions of dollars. People do not understand that the Centers for Disease Control at one time was able to study the economical impact of gun violence in this country. By an act here in Congress we are not allowed to do that anymore, so that data does not come out.

Years ago, independent studies have shown gun violence costs our health care system over $100 billion every single year, $100 billion. The $100 billion a year cost includes premiums paid for private health insurance and tax dollars used to pay for Medicaid, Medicaid in our States that are having such a hard time, Medicaid that is going to be cut here in the House and the Senate. These costs often are not reimbursed and cost the States vital health care money.

Victims who survive suffer years of rehabilitation costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. My son was injured 11 years ago and is still going under physical therapy to be able to keep what he has.

The average cost of each firearm fatality, including medical care, police services and lost productivity is almost $1 million a year. This Nation has to start looking at the gun violence. We can do this without the right of gun owners being taken away. Wake up, America.

TRADE IS THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE

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

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, first, let me express my appreciation to my friend the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN).

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to join with my colleagues, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS), the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS), the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. CRENSHAW) to meet with leaders in the European Union and the European Commission. One of the things that I found from meeting with them and from discussions that I had with our great ambassador to the European Union, Rockwell Schnabel, is that trade is obviously the wave of the future.

We have one of the most important trade relationships between the 25 member European Union and the United States of America on the face of the earth. In fact, trade between the EU and the United States is just short of $1 trillion a year. It is $966 billion, in fact, last year.

I think it is important for us to note that we have dealt with more than a few problems with the European Union. We have lots of great challenges, and I happen to believe that one of the best ways to deal with those challenges is for us to enhance that trade relationship.

We are in the midst of discussing the establishment of our first bilateral trade agreement in a long period of time as we in the not-too-distant future are going to be addressing the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which will include the Dominican Republic. As my colleagues know, Mr. Speaker, we have put together a wide range of bilateral agreements over the past several years.

I today met with the ambassador from the United Arab Emirates, one of our great allies in the global war on terror, and we hope very much we are going to be able to put together a free trade agreement with the United Arab Emirates.

I think it is also important for us to note that in dealing with the European

Union one of the best ways for us to address many of the disputes and challenges we have would be to embark upon a U.S.-EU free trade agreement. That is why today I have introduced H. Con. Res. 131, and I would encourage my colleagues to join in cosponsoring this very important measure. It is just a vehicle to begin the discussion, the prospects of negotiating for a U.S.-EU FTA.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at some of the disputes that we have right now with the European Union.

We all know that agriculture subsidies within the EU are many, many, many times greater than the agriculture subsidies that are provided for U.S. farmers. In fact, as we negotiated and worked on the farm bill, I voted against it at the end of the day, the farm bill, because I was concerned about the level of subsidization for U.S. agriculture.

But one of the things that some of the leaders who were supportive of that measure here in the House said was that if we can see a diminution of the level of subsidization that the European Union provides to its agriculture sector of the economy we will not have to have the agriculture subsidies that we have in the United States. So, obviously, embarking on negotiations for a U.S.-EU free trade agreement would allow us to really begin to boldly address the issue of agriculture subsidies that are so great within the European Union.

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Another dispute that we have is this struggle between Airbus and Boeing. We know that within the European Union there are tremendous subsidies for Airbus, and I believe we should do everything that we can to diminish those so we can have, in fact, a level playing field as we address the issue in the aerospace industry.

And we have several other very important issues that need to be addressed in the area of privacy, in the area of e-commerce.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this step which we have taken today to begin the discussion of a U.S.–EU free trade agreement will be very beneficial in enhancing the standard of living of the American people, the people in the European Union, and the people around the world.

AMERICA AT WAR

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

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow a funeral will be held for Staff Sergeant Stephen Kennedy, the second soldier killed in Iraq who was a member of an Army National Guard unit headquartered in my hometown of Knoxville.

Both of these young men who were killed were from just outside my district; but I was able to attend the funeral for the first, Sergeant Paul Thomason, as we were not in session in Congress at the time.

Both of these men leave wives and each had four small children and many other relatives. I admire and respect their service. There are many ways one can serve this country, but certainly one of the most honorable is by serving in our Nation's Armed Forces.

I am pro-military and believe we should have a strong national defense, but I emphasize the word national. It goes against every traditional conservative belief for the U.S. to try to be the policemen of the world and to place all of the burden and cost of enforcing U.N. resolutions on our military and our taxpayers.

It is no criticism of anyone in the military to say that the war in Iraq was a very unnecessary war. The more than 1,500 soldiers who have died there were simply doing their duty in the best way they could, probably hoping to come home as soon as they could, but certainly hoping to come home safely rather than in a body bag.

Now this past Saturday we saw headlines about anti-American demonstrations all over Iraq. One wire service story said more than 300,000 demonstrated in Baghdad.

Last year, our own government took a poll and found that 92 percent of Iraqis regarded us as occupiers rather than liberators. An earlier poll had a similar, but slightly lower, figure of 82 percent; and these were polls taken by us, or at least by the Coalition Provisional Authority, which is 95 percent U.S.

Obviously, the great majority of people in Iraq do not appreciate what we have done there and do not want us there. They do want our money, and that is the only reason some will say good things about us being there because we do still have several hundred thousand Iraqis on the U.S. payroll.

This is a nation that Newsweek said had a GDP of only $65 billion the year before the war. By the end of this year, we will have spent $300 billion in just 3 years in Iraq and Afghanistan, but mostly in Iraq. Iraq had a total military budget of just a little over two-tenths of 1 percent of our military budget in the year before we attacked. They were no threat to us whatsoever. Just a few weeks ago, a report came out saying our prewar intelligence was dead wrong. At that time, Richard Perle, one of the main architects of this war, appeared before the House Committee on Armed Services to say that everyone at that time thought there was a threat. This was not correct.

Just before the House voted to authorize the war in October 2002, I was asked to come to the White House for a briefing with Condoleezza Rice, George Tenet, and John McLaughlin. I asked at that time how much Hussein's military budget was in comparison to ours and was told the two-tenths of 1 percent figure I mentioned a few minutes ago. I asked was there any evidence of imminent threat. I said one man cannot conduct a war by himself, it would have to involve many others, was there any movement toward war. I was told there was none. George Tenet later confirmed there was no imminent threat in his speech at Georgetown University just after he resigned as head of the CIA.

There were just five other Members at that briefing, so we got to ask a lot of questions. I asked about former economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey's prediction that the war would cost 100 to $200 billion. Ms. Rice said the war would not cost nearly as much. Now we know that Mr. Lindsey's prediction was far too low. Most of what we have spent and are spending in Iraq is pure foreign aid, megabillions to provide free health care and rebuild Iraqi roads, schools, water and power plants, airports and railroads, and provide law enforcement, among many other things.

At the White House briefing, I said most conservatives have always been against massive foreign aid and huge deficit spending. The war in Iraq has led to foreign aid and deficit spending on unprecedented scales.

There is nothing conservative about the war in Iraq, and many conservative columnists and activists have now realized this. Columnist Georgie Ann Geyer wrote in 2003, ''Critics of the war against Iraq have said since the beginning of the conflict that Americans, still strangely complacent about overseas wars being waged by minorities in their name will inevitably come to a point where they will see they have to have a government that provides services at home or one that seeks empire across the globe.''

The first obligation of the U.S. Congress should be to our own citizens, not the citizens of Iraq. In 1998 when Saddam Hussein was not even in the news, I voted to give $100 million to the Iraqi opposition to help them begin the effort to remove Saddam Hussein. We should have let Iraqis fight this war instead of sending our kids over there to fight and die and be maimed, and the sooner we bring our troops home the better. I hope we have learned that we should never be anxious to go to war and should do so only when we are forced to do so and there is no other reasonable alternative.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MCHENRY. Mr. Speaker, this evening I have requested an hour to speak about a pertinent issue for our Nation and a large issue for all generations in our country, and that is Social Security. As a Nation, we have to recognize that we have a problem that we