

of ballistic missile technology in Iran. So without any further discussion from me, Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON).

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend and colleague for yielding to me and thank him for this outstanding Special Order. I hope that our colleagues tonight have been listening, because they have seen an outstanding assemblage of excellent young Members of Congress who are picking up the mantle and taking the lead on homeland security issues in our committee.

This is the first year for the full operation of the authorization committee for homeland security funding and oversight, and it is extremely important that we get off to a good start. I just want to say, as a Member who was very aggressively behind this committee, I am overwhelmingly pleased and positive with the type of membership we have on this committee. My colleague, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT), is an example of an outstanding leader who is committed; and he has brought together an assemblage of Members tonight who have articulated the various parameters of the concerns we face, from first responders, to our borders, to protecting our ports and our airports, and for all of the significant work that has been accomplished under Secretary Ridge, now being accomplished under our current new Secretary and under the able leadership of the chairman of our House Homeland Security Committee, the gentleman from California (Mr. COX), and our appropriations subcommittee, the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS).

□ 2230

Mr. Speaker, later on this evening I will be offering another Special Order that will reveal some absolutely amazing information for the American people. I will divulge tonight the information that prior to 9/11, not only did we know about the Mohammed Atta cell, but that the Special Forces Command in our military actually wanted to take action against that cell, and we did not take that action.

I will be discussing our intelligence in detail, and by following through on a special project that was initiated under the leadership of General Shelton focusing on al Qaeda. But at this point in time, I wanted to stop by and thank our distinguished Members, thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) for his leadership, and say to those who participated in this Special Order, if we are going to win the battle and protect the homeland, all Members must play the critical role that you have played tonight and pick a specialty area that you have a focus on so we as a team can make sure that our country is properly protected.

THIRTY-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCHENRY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for half the time until midnight, 44 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to address the House, and the 30-Something Working Group would like to send our appreciation to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) for allowing us to have the time to come to the floor once again to talk about issues that are facing everyday Americans.

The 30-Something Working Group was created in the 108th Congress, some 3 years ago, to start talking about issues that focus on young people, children and grandchildren, about their future and the direction this country is going in. Every 30-Something Working Group hour, we talk about issues that we feel that young Americans and Americans in general should know about, but we also talk about what Democrats are doing that is different than the majority side.

I celebrate the fact that in this democracy we have an opportunity to give our views and opinions as it relates to what is happening and what is not happening. I think both are very, very important. For us to continue to move in the direction that we moved in since we became the United States of America, it is important that we have not only factual information to share with the Members and the American people, but to make sure that we are consistent.

Tonight I am joined by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN). We will talk about issues that are at the forefront of the debate here in Washington, D.C. One is Social Security. Two, we want to continue not necessarily in this order to talk about the issues that are facing veterans. We have men and women that are in the forward area in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many other parts of the world where they are fighting terrorism, but at the same time we have to understand the responsibility of making sure that we keep our end of the deal as it relates to their veterans affairs once they get back.

We have individuals that have served in past conflicts on behalf of this country, that allow us to celebrate the very freedom that we live under today. We cannot leave them behind. We cannot forget them, or turn our back on them. In many places we will point out where there are those in Congress fighting on behalf of veterans, and those in Congress who say they are fighting on behalf of veterans, but it is not coming out on the other end.

I want to talk about the Social Security proposal that has been put forward by not only the President and some Republican leaders, not only in the House but in the other body. I think it is important that the American people understand that in Washington, D.C., all

you may see and hear may not be true. It is also important that we point out those inequities because anything that goes toward private accounts, I think that the American people need to continue to be very wary of. You can dress a private account up and put a fake mustache on it and a wig, but it is still privatization of Social Security.

The bottom line is across the board with both of these proposals, Americans will lose benefits if we go into private accounts. Will private accounts deal with the Social Security solvency issue? I must add that is 47 years away; 100 percent of benefits will still be provided to 48 million Americans, those 33 million in retirement, the rest who are receiving disability and survivor benefits. It will be here. What we are asking for on this side as it relates to the Democratic leadership, not only the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) but also the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the Democratic whip, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), our chairman, and our vice chairman, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN), we have not only an ongoing, but are working toward a bipartisan approach.

Mr. Speaker, I must also add there is a discussion going on now, there was a press conference last week talking about we have a bill and private accounts. It is not as bad as the President's bill, but it is starting us off on private accounts. In this same press conference it was admitted by the sponsors of the bill this will not deal with the solvency of Social Security. I do not know why we are trying to fool the American people. I do not know why we are going through this dance that we call here in Washington the Potomac two-step, trying to fake out the American people.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) and I are going to attempt to share not only with the Members that we know exactly what they are doing, and we are here, elected by the people from our districts, and also representing the people of the United States of America, to make sure that they know exactly what is going on.

Tonight is not about the 30-Something Working Group and what we want to talk about. It is factual. It is not the Tim Ryan report or the Kendrick Meek report, it is what is happening right now, third-party validators. And we will continue to come to the floor to point out factual inequities in what the majority side is talking about. We want to make sure that the American people understand the difference, the difference between the leadership of veterans, or not; and the difference between leadership on behalf of Social Security and making sure that we do not leave the present generation and future generations behind.

We talked last week about the issue of the ever-growing deficit. Guess what, we are going to have to pay it off, and I do mean all of us, some

\$26,000-plus that American people with children, and those unborn, that are going to have to pay because of the ever-growing infatuation with spending.

I think it is important that we point this out.

I want to take a couple of excerpts of what has been said and what has not been done.

For about 6 months the Republicans have talked about, and I would say the Republican leadership because I do not like to generalize. There are some Republicans who are very uncomfortable with both of these proposals. I think it is important that we continue to hold onto those individuals who are showing leadership.

I would also add there are some individuals in the Republican leadership that are trying very quietly to share that private accounts are not the way to go. We are asking them to go see the wizard, not only to get some courage, but to make sure that they stand up to these forces that are trying to push private accounts on the American people.

I have to digress so we can make sure that we all understand, we want to break it down. The bottom line is on the Republican side, by the rules that are set here in the House of Representatives, the majority runs the agenda here in the House. The majority runs the agenda here in the House. I am not only talking to Democrats, Republicans, and the one Independent we have in this House, that we have a responsibility to make sure that we stand up not on behalf of the leader of the Republican Conference or Republicans here in the House, but on behalf of the individuals who woke up early one Tuesday morning to go vote for some leadership. It is time for us to stand up and make that happen.

We hope in the 30-Something Working Group by the pressure applied that two things happen. One, right here and right now, people in the leadership positions make the right decision, to make sure that we make Social Security solvent and do away with the whole idea of trying to go into private accounts.

Private accounts would only benefit those individuals who are involved in the New York Stock Exchange, that care about the \$944 billion that they would be able to prosper from in the next 20 years on the backs of everyday working Americans.

I think it is important that before that happens, in whatever form, and I am in no way supporting or encouraging any of the Members of this House to try to move in that direction, that we need to make sure that Democratic Members who are solid on this issue, and the few Republicans who are solid on this issue, that we stick together on behalf of the American people. Or we may very well have the American people say, fine; I am a Republican or Democrat or Independent, I believe in my Social Security and I want it here.

If you are not a recipient of Social Security, you have a family member that is a recipient of Social Security. If you do not have a family member that is a recipient of Social Security, you will have a family member that will be a recipient of Social Security. That is the good thing about America, is that we care about one another. These individuals work every day and may hurt themselves on the job, and they count on Social Security.

Mr. Speaker, it is once again an honor to have the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) to share this hour, and also to let the Members of this House, to let them know exactly what the truth is.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important as we start tonight and get things rolling here we talk a little bit about what the new proposal is. The 30-Something Working Group has taken a step in another direction as far as our billboards. We are going to go with hand-drawn charts. It is like we are in the locker room during half-time of the football game.

I think it is important to know where we end up after the second proposal that is circulating around Congress. Democrats have not seen one plan yet, but the important thing for the American people to understand is the second proposal that is now circulating around Congress ends up at the same exact place that the first proposal put us.

So here we have on our little chart here everything broken down. The original Bush proposal is on the right, and the new proposal that is circulating in Congress is on the left.

Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) may remember that the first proposal was out of the 12-plus percent, 12.4 percent you pay into Social Security, half by the employer and half by the employee, the Bush proposal was saying that the employee could take up to 4 percent of that and put it in this side private account. Right out of your paycheck, you could give 4 percent and put it into a private account. The rest of yours, the 2.2 left from yours and I think the 2.2 left from the employer, would go into the Social Security trust fund. The employer was actually getting a break. They would not have to match. So the Wal-Marts of the world would not have to match their employees' 4 percent that they put in the private account. So the diversion into the side account is what led to the whole shortfall.

In the second proposal that is now being circulated around Congress, it is just a shell game. All they do, instead of allowing someone to divert the money right away from their paycheck, you send the whole thing to Social Security and then Social Security takes a portion of it and puts it into a private account with your name on it. So it is just a typical Potomac two-step.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what they are doing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is a typical shell game in Washington. All of a sud-

den we have a new proposal. It is all different. The end result is the same thing. There is money not going into a trust fund that is being diverted into a private account. Here is the kicker. There is going to be a tremendous increase in administrative costs for people to have to handle this money, and there is going to be a reduction in the benefits that people get. That is why we are here every week talking about the same issue over and over because we are not going to allow any privatization scheme to come through this body that is going to reduce the benefits.

In the first proposal from the paycheck to the private account, the rest goes in Social Security. The second proposal, here is the paycheck, and everything goes to Social Security and then Social Security will then divert it to a private account with your name on it. It is just a shell game to try to sell the new proposal. You can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the Members need to truly understand this. We know where we are as Democrats. We are solid on the side of the issue of dealing with the solvency of Social Security beyond the 48 years it will be solvent, and beyond 80 percent benefits that individuals will receive after that.

The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I have been working on this issue. We have had town hall meetings on it. Democrats have had some 900 town hall meetings throughout the country and will continue to have more to make sure that we fight against this issue of privatization and make sure that we make sure that Social Security is there for future generations.

□ 2245

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

It is wonderful to be here with the both of them, my two esteemed colleagues from the next generation in the United States Congress, and I have been able to listen to a little of what they have been saying on my way over here.

A few weeks ago when we were talking about this before the latest version of the privatization scheme was put on the table, we were talking about how interesting it is that no matter how many times they are told no, they still keep coming back with the same concept, just a different version. And I know I analogized it is like when I speak to my children and they keep asking me and asking me if they can do something that I do not think they should do for one reason or another, whether it is not responsible or they are not old enough, and they try a lot of different versions of the same thing, and the answer is still no because I have carefully reviewed what they want to do, as their parent, and decided it is not the best timing right now or

for whatever reason I have concluded it is not a good idea.

It would be as if one's teenager came to them and said Mom, Dad, I really want to go to this party, and I want to stay out until 2 o'clock in the morning, and the parent said, no, that is not a good idea, and so they come back to them. This new proposal is like if one's teenager came back to them and said I still want to go to the party, but I promise I will be home by midnight. The whole idea was that they did not want them to go to the party in the first place.

And after 60 days initially on the road trying to sell his privatization scheme to the American people and essentially they have rejected it and an additional 60-day effort where the more the President talks about this, the less people like it, it is mindboggling to me. And I am the sort of baby of the group of the three of us, I am a freshman, I was just elected. It is mindboggling to me that they do not want to come to the table now, as we have been asking them to do, and come up with a bipartisan solution.

Privatization balloons the deficit. It cuts benefits; and yet every version of their proposal, the premise of it is to privatize Social Security, and that pulls the safety net out from future retirees and, quite honestly, from people who are about to retire.

I actually had an electronic town hall meeting today at 4:30, which was amazing. We got tremendous feedback. But can I tell my colleagues that not one person who participated, and I had over 100 people participate live and 120 people signed on in advance of our beginning, and no one said, "You really need to consider private accounts. We really want you to do this." I mean, it is time to sit down and put privatization aside, and like in 1983 when Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others who were part of that group sat down and in a bipartisan way came up with a solution. It is time.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the gentlewoman just said in a State like Florida that the President won in the last election is not getting the kind of support. Here is an interesting statistic, group of statistics, asking rural voters: "Are Bush's proposed changes to Social Security mainly consistent with the values of the people in your community or out of step?" And here is the pie chart. All rural voters, consistent with rural voters' values, 27 percent; out of step with our values, 61 percent. And Bush cleaned Senator KERRY's clock in rural areas, and 61 percent of rural America believe that the President's proposed changes to Social Security are out of step with their values. And when we look at white fundamentalists, 55 percent; conservatives, 47 percent; white women, 65 per-

cent; Bush voters, 44 percent; and Southerners, 58 percent.

Why are we having this debate? Why are we having this argument when we have all these other issues that need to be addressed in Congress and the President keeps running against the wall, hitting his head, bouncing back, and thinking if he keeps running and keeps hitting his head that somehow it is going to change. And when this President in particular, who has done so well in rural areas, is losing support on this issue, it is mindboggling to me.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, the two of us are from a State and from a region of a State where it would be expected that there would be deep, deep concern about the potential privatization of Social Security. Obviously, we have a disproportionately high percentage of senior citizens in my district and the gentleman from Florida's district. But like the gentleman from Ohio said, across all demographic groups, all regions of the country, there is no group that has wide or deep support for this concept, and that is because people are uncomfortable at every level with the explosion of the deficit and this proposal's potential to expand it even more.

When I asked at my live town hall meetings whether people were confident enough in their own investment ability to be assured that their own investment decisions would carry them all the way through their entire retirement years, no one except for two people in three town hall meetings with more than 600 people in attendance, no one raised their hand, because look at the ebb and flow of the stock market; and this proposal is not backed by the full faith and credit of the United States. If people hit a bump in the road where one year the stock market is not going so well, it is whatever is left when they retire in that account with a proportionate cut in their Social Security benefits.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Right. And if the gentleman from Florida will continue to yield, the new system, the new plan that they have where they give the money to Social Security and they put it in side accounts, they are going to invest it in T bills just like Social Security is. So there is no real advantage.

The argument in the first proposal was that we are going to put it in a private account and they are going to be able to gain all this extra interest. Now the new proposal is saying they are going to take it and put it in a private account and they are only going to be able to invest it in T bills just like Social Security is now. So it is just getting more and more ridiculous. It is like a comedy of errors. Every single new proposal is worse than the last proposal. And I think they need to just work with us, work with our side, let us get a solution, make it more sol-

vent, move forward, and start addressing poverty and health care and all the other issues here.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman from Florida will continue to yield, if he does not mind my adding one more thing, like I said, I am a freshman. I was elected. I have been in Congress for 6 months. I really expected there to be a lot more collegiality in this body. The gentlemen are veterans, now, of this process. I have talked to my Republican freshmen colleagues on the other side. We all expected there to be more of an opportunity to work together, less rancor. It is sort of astonishing, and it is astonishing, I think, to the average American that we are still bickering about this and that we are all sharpening our elbows and digging in and going to our respective corners instead of acknowledging, like we are willing to do, that there is a problem with Social Security.

It is not a crisis like the President has been portraying; but there is a problem, a long-term problem with Social Security, and we need to come together and make some changes. But, unfortunately, the leadership in this Congress, the Republican leadership, just wants to be right, or somehow if they say it enough times, perhaps they think that they will be right when the American people are clearly telling them they are not.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Or that they just want to win, Mr. Speaker. If the gentleman will continue to yield, this sometimes is not even about policy. It is about winning the argument, and they are losing; so they are trying to find a new way to win it, and it is just not working out.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And, Mr. Speaker, that is the reason why we are here. It is not about winning or losing under the Capitol dome. It is about the American people being able to win and keep confidence within this body. And I will tell my colleagues now, looking at the recent poll numbers, they do not feel good about what is happening here in Congress.

There was an article on Friday, and it was in The Washington Post: "GOP Sounded the Alarm but didn't Respond to" the issue of Social Security. And I would recommend Members take a look at this. It was written by Michael Allen, and I just want to take an excerpt out of this.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) mentioned something about winning, wanting to win. We are here to win on behalf of the American people; and one Republican Member of the other body, not this House but the other body, and I know that Members understand that we have the legislative branch, judicial branch, and executive branch but the legislative branch consists of the House and the Senate. But in the other body I must add that if the Republicans take this to a vote and the Democrats try to stop us, we will end up as the winners. That comes from a Member of the

other body that is from South Carolina.

Let me just share this with my colleagues. This is not school yard kickball here. This is Social Security, and this is serious business; and this is not about because we can, we will. This is about doing the right thing. And it really is stomach-turning when we see individuals taking an end zone dance and talking about what we can do because we can do it.

If I can, I would like to talk a little bit, because we have limited time here tonight, and we can talk about Social Security, but I have to address this issue of not only the Veterans Affairs but what is happening right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. Earlier tonight during the first Democratic hour, members of the Democratic Caucus read the names of those individuals who have fallen in the line of duty, and we honor and we respect them, and on behalf of a grateful country, we appreciate their family members' sacrifice. They paid the ultimate sacrifice, and so did their loved ones.

A lot of mothers and fathers are no longer with us because we asked them, this Congress asked them, to go into battle and they lost their lives. And, Mr. Speaker, this is the reason why we run not only for Congress. And I hate to hear the gentlewoman from Florida say 6 months. I mean, she spent double-digit years in the State legislature. She has dealt with many of these issues in the Florida house and the Florida senate, and many of those issues are the same here. Unfortunately, the inaction on behalf of the Republican leadership is very disturbing, and I say some of them because I know some are people of good will and want to make sure we do the right thing.

I want to point the attention of the Members, Mr. Speaker, to the June 27, today, article that was on page A13 of *The Washington Post*: "VA Gets the Picture, No Shortfall Here." I just want to take some excerpts out of this article because we have limited time, but we have to make sure that we call a spade a spade, and that is the reason why I like the 30-something Working Group because we put it on the table and let it be known. If anybody wants to make an argument, it is democracy. Bring it on and defend the situations that they are making. But, unfortunately, this is not school yard kickball. This is the United States Congress.

"Turns out that \$1 billion shortfall for health care funding for our Nation disclosed last week by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing is only one of many important and vexing dilemmas facing top officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs."

I am going to go a little further down in the article. It talks about a conversation, I believe a conference call, by the Deputy Under Secretary Laura Miller, who said on the May 27 call, "Many of our facilities, medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics,

there are about 850 of them in the country, many in rural areas," Mr. Speaker, "and some open only 1 or 2 days a month." Not 1 or 2 days a week; 1 or 2 days a month in rural areas. "And other offices have a picture of Secretary Jim Nicholson prominently displayed. Unfortunately, however," Ms. Miller continued, "there are many facilities that currently do not have the picture displayed. I am aware that the mailings of the pictures occurred on April 22, 2005. So that's more than 5 full weeks." It goes on to say that "We are asking that you give this your highest priority."

□ 2300

This is from Washington, DC. The highest priority, we will continue to ask daily on updates of the status until we are sure that all facilities have a current displayed picture.

In the defense of local VA officials, it turns out that Miller was wrong. Not all the photos went out on the 22nd. We are hearing that some officials disagree that the photos should be the highest priority, and they are asking that it should not be. Also they are saying what they are focused on right now at these local VA facilities is they are trying to sell furniture to buy prescription drugs on behalf of veterans out there now.

Then it goes on, and, unfortunately, it gets worse. The Secretary, Mr. Nicholson, when he testified in a hearing last week, Nicholson was the author of an April 5 letter to Senators saying "I can assure you that the VA does not need additional funds to continue to provide timely and adequate service."

Let me just share something with you. The bottom line here, Mr. Speaker, when we have a Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs that is more concerned about his picture being displayed in VA hospitals and community-based facilities, some that I must add are only open 1 or 2 days a month, these are individuals that get all teary-eyed here on the floor talking about what we need to do for the troops and for the veterans, but meanwhile, back at the ranch, we have a \$1 billion shortfall. And Democrats have tried to do something about it.

All I have to say to the Secretary is, he wants his picture displayed, I am going to put his picture in my office. His picture will no longer be the priority on behalf of veterans. We will to the Hill and fight on behalf of veterans and make sure that they do not have to wait 6 months to be able to see the ophthalmologist.

Mr. Speaker, I know I am bending on the time here, but I wanted to share this with my colleagues, because I think it is important that everyone understands we are about the business of not just saying pounding our chest and saying "we are going to go to Iraq and make sure that we have democracy there." We are making sure we keep our promise, not only to those individuals that have served in past conflicts, but are in present conflicts.

So the individuals walking around here talking about what we are going to do, and how long we are going to stay, and there is no plan to make the coalition bigger or no plan really to start talking about how we are going to bring our troop levels down in Iraq, meanwhile Democrats are here adding amendments to the Committee on the Budget. And I must add again, we all know, and it is important our constituents know, that the majority runs this House of Representatives. The bottom line is, they bring bills to the floor, they bring issues to the floor. Some issues we can work with them on. But when it comes down to veterans, to health care, when it comes down to Social Security and folks want to talk about something that is going to take us back versus move us forward, we have a problem with it.

There was an amendment, an alternative to the budget that was passed on March 5 of this year, the Democratic budget. It included a \$20.9 billion increase for the next 5 years for veterans health care in order to meet the needs of the returning soldiers and veterans who rely on VA hospital care. Without that, there will be an estimated fee, can I say "tax" on veterans, to pay more for their health care.

Now, they have been lied to. I will not be an unindicted co-conspirator in that lie. I think it is important that we make sure that the veterans know. I see veterans, and I am not concerned about their party affiliation. The bottom line is what they get and are not getting. What they are not getting, in my opinion, is appropriate representation that they need here in Congress to make sure that they get what they need.

Am I emotional about this? You are dog-gone right I am, because I would not be here under this flag if it was not for individuals that have served this country, day in and day out. Many of them have to put on a prosthetic limb to walk around in the morning. Many of those individuals cannot perform the kind of functions that they carried out prior to going into a conflict. So, I have no time and no tolerance for the Potomac Two-Step.

Once again, Democrats, people want to know the difference. I am sharing it with them right now. Once again, an amendment in the committee by one of our great Members, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), increased health care funding above President Bush's proposed budget by \$1.9 billion, an estimate that the Republican budget plan for \$798 million in veterans cuts over 5 years. Once again, a Democratic Member from Texas supported by Democratic members of the Committee on Ways and Means, a 15 to 20 vote.

The bottom line is, one of two things needs to happen: Either some individuals on the Republican side have to step up and represent the people that sent them here, or the American people are going to have to make a difference.

I will tell Members in closing that I am really, truly not concerned about

individuals' feelings being hurt about what I am sharing with them as it relates to facts and what we are sharing with them as it relates to facts. If we were here talking fiction, I would not be able to sleep well at night.

I will tell you right now, this is factual. Individuals can go into the record. As a matter of fact, they can go to nationaljournal.com/members/markups/2005/03/200506812.htm and find it. It is what it is. And if individuals do not want to man up and woman up and lead, then the American people need to make other decisions.

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the former chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, was removed; not by Democrats, not by the people in his district, but by the Republican Conference. Why? Why? This is Fox News, okay? This is what I am reading right now, Fox News, right off their website. "Smith passed an increase in investment on the Veterans Affairs Administration budget that put him on a different page from party leaders." He is no longer the chairman because he decided to represent the veterans that are out there in America.

So, the gentlewoman knows, being from Florida, we have a number of veterans. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) from Ohio has a number of proud veterans and reserve units in harm's way. It is important to stand up for them.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, there are three things I want to add to augment the gentleman from Florida's comments. One of them is 30-something oriented.

I noted when I went and spoke at Memorial Day services this year and Veterans' Day services on November 11 of last year, that every previous Veterans' Day and Memorial Day that I was able to participate in as an elected official prior to my time in the legislature, I was able to thank them. And generally the crowds that come to those events are older folks, senior citizens especially in Florida, veterans of many wars. I was able to say "thank you" from our generation, because prior to now, our generation is the first since before World War II that has never been called to war, that had never had the casualties that the generations before us had. And I was able to thank them for allowing us to stand on their shoulders and their sacrifice.

But I cannot say that any more. I cannot say that any more, because, as was read tonight, the more than 1,500 names that we are in the process of reading, we could have a whole hour just on the Iraq war and our deep concerns over that.

But to continue in the gentleman's thought process about health care for veterans, I visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center a few weeks ago and had an opportunity to visit with soldiers who had come back from Iraq and Afghanistan without their legs, hearing their stories, watching the pain

etched in their face, and the dedication that they have. To the person, they wanted to go back, and their regret was they were not able to, they had to leave their comrades behind.

These people are struggling to get the health care they need when they are still enlisted. At home in South Florida and across the country, our veterans, as the gentleman said, 6 months is not an exaggeration for how long our veterans have to wait to get their health care needs taken care of. Is that the thanks that we give them, the proud veterans that have served this country?

We sound so soap-boxish, but your actions have to back up your words. It is really nice to stand on the floor and give a good speech and get all choked up, but what matters is how you cast that vote and what your light up on that board when they put it up there says, and you are either with them or against them. The Members that voted against those amendments that were offered in committee and on this floor and who opposed them, in spite of valiant speeches that were made on behalf of those veterans, should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, 70 percent of those currently in Iraq and Afghanistan are under 30, so they are going to need to access this system because they are going to have a lot of years in it.

□ 2310

Mr. Speaker, we are wrapping up here; I think we just have a few minutes left. If you have any e-mails you want to send to us, the address is as follows:

30something.dems@mail.house.gov.
Again, the address is
30something.dems@mail.house.gov.

I received a letter today from a local veteran in Ohio. Korean War veteran Bob Brothers wrote and sent me a copy of a letter to the editor that he was sending. He wrote this after the flag burning amendment that we voted on last week. He calls it, "Conundrum: Congress of the United States is voting on a flag desecration amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. The riddle is, this allows Congressmen to stand under the American flag and declare, I am patriotic. The pun is these same Congressmen vote against mandatory funding for the Veterans Affairs Department. This demonstrates to me the true hypocrisy of Congressmen and women who vote against mandatory funding for the Veterans Affairs Department. Why are these two items not attached so that courage, honor, and valor become necessary when they enter the Chamber to vote?"

"A veteran is a veteran is a veteran. When as a young kid I hit the beach in Korea, I did not see any Congressmen or Congresswomen, and I was not asked my income before going ashore. I will not vote for anyone who tries to show

they are patriotic by voting for the flag desecration amendment and voting against mandatory funding for the Veteran Affairs Department. Iraqi Freedom veterans take note: as soon as you are discharged, you will begin a life-long battle with your government. A vote for the flag desecration amendment coupled with a vote against mandatory funding for the Veterans Affairs Department brings shame on the very symbol of liberty and freedom that my comrades gave life and limb and more since it all began over 200 years ago. Not giving the care veterans earned and deserved is burning the flag."

That was from Bob Brothers, a Korean War veteran from my district who is at every Memorial Day, at every Veterans' Day event that there is. They are committed to the community. So I just wanted to share that.

We have a long way to go here, and I think the point tonight is, the argument nationally is about Social Security and how we are going to fix a problem that does not exist for 40 years, or are we going to address the veterans issues that we face today.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I think that we have demonstrated here tonight, as we will in the future, that there are so many issues facing our generation, and we need to make sure that we take this country back in the right direction so that when our generation inherits the results of the decisions that we are making here, that we are not struggling to make sure that we can clean up the mess that was left for us.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again, we had another good 30-something Working Group Special Order. We look forward to coming back after we celebrate our independence on the Fourth of July. As my colleagues know, here on the Washington Mall we have quite a celebration and throughout America in many small towns and cities. We will be coming back to the floor to talk about Social Security, factual information, and to talk about how Democrats are part of the solution.

I must say, once again, we are not here to generalize. We have some Republicans on the other end that are totally against the privatization of Social Security and totally for the full funding, as the gentleman from New Jersey (Chairman SMITH) was, as it relates to veterans affairs, doing better by our veterans. Seventy percent of the individuals who are fighting in Iraq are young people who are doing what they have to do.

Mr. Speaker, with that, we would like to not only thank the Democratic leader but the Democratic leadership for allowing us to come again.

U.S. INTELLIGENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MCHENRY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) is recognized for 44 minutes.