

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

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

THE OFFICIAL TRUTH SQUAD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE) is recognized for 30 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity given to me by the leadership and by the Republican Conference to come and share a few words this afternoon. This is something that we call the Official Truth Squad, and we have been coming to the floor of the House almost every day that we have been in session this year.

We who have organized it are the freshman class. There are about 25, 26 members of the Republican freshman class. We are the new folks on the block. We have been in Congress now for about 14 months. And one of the things that disturbed us so, being here, was the tone of the debate, was the level of incredible partisanship, the remarkable and distasteful distortion of facts, the personal attacks, some of which we have heard within the past 30 minutes. The hyperbole and the disinformation and the misinformation that goes on here in Washington seems to be kind of the order of the day.

What we thought we might be able to do to contribute to kind of raising the level of the rhetoric and the tone is to develop what we call the Official Truth Squad. And our effort and our desire is to try to bring a positive view of America, a truthful view of America, point out some of the wonderful and great things that go on in our Nation and that our citizens are involved in. Because truth is incredibly important to public debate.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, if are you not dealing with truth in the area of public policy, you cannot reach the right solution, you just cannot get to the right end point. That is what is so disheartening about much of the debate that goes on here. And I say that in all sincerity, understanding, as I know my constituents do, that these are not Republican problems or Democrat problems, these are American challenges that all of us face. So truth is so incredibly important.

In my former life, I was a physician, and I knew that if I did not have truthful, accurate information going in to take care of a patient, that I could not make the right diagnosis. If somehow the information was distorted or not accurate, then it just was not possible to get to the right diagnosis.

The same is true in the public policy arena. If we are not talking about truthful items, then it just becomes that much more difficult to reach ap-

propriate conclusions. I know that when I go home and talk to my constituents. They say, do you not get tired of all of that negativity up there? And I do. And I know that you do too, Mr. Speaker.

But that is why our goal is to try to put a little positive spin on exactly what is happening here in Washington and present to the American public an optimistic view of where we are.

And we have in the Official Truth Squad many quotes that we are fond of. One of the ones I am most fond of is one from former New York U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He says, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts." Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but not their own facts.

And it really is so true about much of the debate that goes on here in Washington. Because with many people, everybody obviously has their opinions. But oftentimes they are not supported by facts. And we have heard recently some incredible accusations given about, for example, the Dubai Ports deal.

Now, I am not certain that I support that at all, but I do know that unless you are dealing with truth and with fact, you cannot reach the right conclusion. And one of the things that has come to the floor is this huge accusation that there just has not been any money for port security, that Congress has been delinquent, that the White House has been delinquent, that they are not even paying attention to what is happening at the ports.

Well, here are the facts. Here are the facts. Port security funding in 2001, prior to 9/11, was at a level of about \$250 million. \$250 million. Fiscal year 2006, port security nearly \$3 billion. Nearly \$3 billion. The request for 2007, over \$3.5 billion.

So when you look at the facts, they do not back up the rhetoric of so many individuals who are obviously playing politics. And you cannot take the politics out of politics, I understand that. But it is important that we talk about truth. It is important that we talk about real numbers when we are trying to get to solutions to these incredible challenges that we have before us.

So there are the facts on port security funding. Almost a 700 percent increase since 9/11. Mr. Speaker, that certainly is not inattentiveness to port security funding.

We have also heard recently about the "cuts" in certain budgetary items; and the other side is fond of saying that there are cuts in Medicare and cuts in education. And so what I would like to do today is just share very briefly with folks what the actual facts are, what the truth is.

This is Medicare funding. This is Medicare spending from 1995 to 2005. These are not my numbers, these are Treasury, budget office of the U.S. Government: 1995, \$156.9 billion; 2000, \$187 billion; 2005, \$294 billion.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do not know where you went to school, but I do not

think that they would call moving from \$187 billion to \$294 billion a "cut." It is simply not. And so when people describe it as such, then all they are doing is playing on the fear of the American public. And that does a disservice to the debate. It is dishonest. It does not help get us to the right conclusion. Medicare spending every single year has increased.

Education spending: Many are fond of saying that the amount of money spent on education over the past 5 years has been cut. You have heard them say that. I heard them say that. I always shake my head when I hear it, because if you look at the facts, if you look at the truth, what we have here is total education spending since the year 2000 to 2005 has grown, on average, 9.1 percent each year over the past 5 years.

Those are the facts. That is the truth.

So when you hear people talk about the kind of allegations that they have regarding decreases to, cuts in spending, it simply is not so. What they are talking about it a decrease in the increase; only in Washington is that described as a "cut."

So it is important that we talk about truthful things. It is important we talk about facts, important that we agree on those items before we get to the solution to the remarkable challenges that we have.

Today we are going to talk a little bit about the economy. And if you were just getting your information from the major media markets, the major television stations and the networks, or the major newspapers across this Nation, you might not appreciate that the economy is ticking along pretty dog-gone well. And so we are going to bring some information today, some facts, some truth about the economy, that we hope will be helpful to the debate and also helpful information for the American public.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be joined today by many of my colleagues, and initially, Congresswoman SHELLY MOORE CAPITO from West Virginia. Congresswoman CAPITO is a veteran here compared to us freshmen. She is from West Virginia and has been a real leader in the area of our economy, and a real leader in the area of health care, has been working actively to make certain that health care costs do not continue to skyrocket because they play into our economy to a great degree.

So I am so pleased that you are able to join us. I yield to you and look forward to your comments.

□ 1430

Mrs. CAPITO. I would like to thank my colleague from Georgia for his leadership on so many issues, but also on his leadership of the Official Truth Squad.

I think one of the things that I find when I go back to my home district is people do not get what the real truth is. The way we debate here in Congress, it is almost who can besmirch somebody's character. Who can besmirch

somebody's program. Who can say in the most sensational way why something is not good, instead of actually looking at the facts and debating the truth on the facts.

That is why I am pleased to be here today, because I want to talk about something that I think is very good news for the American public, and certainly the State I represent, West Virginia, is one of these and that is the state of our economy.

The American economy in 2005 was the envy of the world. Just yesterday, the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, was here extolling the virtues of a democratic government, extolling the virtues of the enormous economic engine that the United States has and brings to the global economy. And I think he made us realize that, number one, we should not take this for granted and, number two, we should recognize it.

I will talk about facts. We will stick with the facts today. Just the facts, ma'am. That is what they say. The economy grew at a robust 3.5 percent rate in 2005, making this the fourth year of expansion. For 10 of the last 11 quarters, the economy has grown at better than 3.3 percent and that is sizable. Furthermore, our economy's fundamental health was underscored by the fact that gulf coast hurricanes and rising energy prices could not derail significant growth, much to our relief.

We have now seen 29 consecutive months of job gains. During this period, 4.8 million jobs were created, and 193,000 just this past January. The latest national employment figure, 4.7, is the best since July 2001, two months shy of September 11. In my home State of West Virginia, we have perennially fought high unemployment. We have perennially fought low economic gains, but I am really pleased West Virginia is part of this economic boost we are feeling across the country.

Our seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.8 percent in January; 3.8 percent is the lowest seasonally adjusted rate we have ever had in the history of keeping statistics in West Virginia. In December alone, the statistics of unemployment was the lowest rate that had ever been in the history of any December when that rate was recorded in the State of West Virginia. That is wonderful news for our State.

The numbers do not lie. They are real results, and the results like these do not happen by accident. Not so long ago in late 2001 during the recession, the economy was being afflicted by serious problems in the wake of 9/11, corporate scandals, and other problems. Economic growth was lagging, and Americans had stopped investing like they used to. There was no job growth, or very little. Fortunately, we here in the House acted on a piece of common-sense legislation. The less you tax something, the more you get. That goes for income, but it also goes for investment. So Congress responded with real tax relief in 2003, encouraging

more Americans to invest their earnings.

The Jobs and Growth Act of 2003 lowered all individual tax rates, but lowered the individual tax rate on dividend and capital gains to 15 percent. This loosened the shackles on every individual and freed the genius of the American economy. Since May 2003 when the Jobs and Growth Act was enacted, 4.7 million jobs have been created. Now, that is a truth that is undeniable.

After nine straight declining quarters of business, we have seen 10 straight quarters of rising business investment. Unemployment had reached 6.3 percent in 2003; and as I said today, the 4.7 figure is lower than the averages of the 70s, 80s, and 90s.

An added benefit of the tax cut was that the Federal Government actually collected more tax revenue from capital gains even though the rate was lowered. From 2003 to 2004, revenues from capital gains taxes increased from \$50 to \$60 billion. Last year, the Federal Government received \$75 billion in capital gains tax revenue. In fact, overall government tax revenue is currently at its highest level in American history, and our State revenues are reflecting this as well. So we need to keep that tax rate at 15 percent.

We recently passed H.R. 4297, and this bill would make the 15 percent tax rate permanent, and I am hopeful that will pass. But, you know, it is not Washington, D.C. that drives the economy. It is the daily choices of millions of free Americans that drive it. Small businessmen and -women, miners, farmers, taxi drivers, doctors, teachers, all these people who contribute to what we call the national economy. And we should always remember that we owe the strength of our economy to all these hardworking Americans who quietly make this country work every single day.

I would like to take just a few more minutes about my home State of West Virginia. I am very proud that we have had low unemployment. It has been spiraling downward over the last several months. Our homeownership has gone up. We are at one of the highest levels of homeownership across the Nation.

Our crime rate, which we are very, very pleased is perennially low, is lower than ever. I think that is indicative of the rise of the economy and the feeling of robustness and optimism that they have that they can provide for their families.

In West Virginia, more people are going to college than ever before. To me that is an indicator of several things: people are preparing to engage in the knowledge-based economy that we see in our future. Also, if they are able to go on to college right after high school, what does that tell you? It means they can improve their education and they do not need to go into the workforce right away to help their families. And this is a positive step, I

think, in broadening and making our West Virginia economy much greater.

As everyone knows, coal is very important to our West Virginia economy. We are a resource-based economy. We always have been. We have had some very sad times recently in our coal industry, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Nation for their heartfelt prayers and sincere thoughts concerning the loss of our miners in West Virginia.

It has been very difficult for us because we are a small State. We care about each other very much and one person's loss is every person's loss. That is why we are working in a bipartisan way to do mine safety legislation here in Congress to help with oxygen supplies, to help with tracking miners, to help with communications, to help with response times. And I think that we will get to a good bipartisan resolution on how we can prevent these accidents from happening in the future.

We have over 12 new mines opened in West Virginia. Twelve more than last year. Over 1,200 new miners. This shows you the strength of our economy. Over 50 percent of the electricity generated in this country is generated through coal, and we are very, very pleased about that.

So I think that the problems now that I am hearing or whenever I go out to my town meetings or around grocery shopping or wherever I happen to be, I ask people all the time, how is it going? How is your business? How is work? How are you feeling about the economy? And honestly, to a person, the optimistic flavor of West Virginians both in the State and national economy is immeasurable.

It is so much greater than it has been in the past, to the point where, what am I hearing now: I cannot find enough people to employ; I need 50 more people; we need more miners; we need more electricians; we need more clerks. So I think that we are going to see a time of national prosperity, as we have now, continue to grow and to continue to make that American Dream possible for every American family: the ability to buy a home, to raise your family in a community that you know is safe, to be able to enjoy those small-town values that States like Georgia and West Virginia provide in abundance to Americans.

So I am very pleased that the growth and jobs packages that we have put forward in this Congress are translating into the real meat-and-potato issues on the dinner tables of America. So I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak. I am going to be speaking about this a lot because I think not only do people realize it, but they need to be reminded that these things do not happen by accident; that policies go into place that bring about the economic changes that bring about more jobs, lower unemployment, more homeownership, more people going to college, and a more optimistic attitude about our future.

Again, I would remind you if you did not see the Prime Minister from Italy yesterday, he had a very powerful message for Americans on several fronts, national security certainly, but also the fact of the admiration that people around the world and countries around the world have for our American economy.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I thank the gentlewoman from West Virginia so much for sharing those words and what a wonderful, wonderful picture you paint about West Virginia, about the economy and about the policies that we adopt here and their effect on the Nation and each and every State.

I too was struck by the Prime Minister from Italy, Prime Minister Berlusconi yesterday. It was really a moving time to have him speak to us in his native tongue and to describe what he said he saw in America. And that is the leader of the world in the area of democracy, in the area of freedom and liberty but also in the area of the economy, and how those things are so interwoven and intertwined together. So I appreciate you bringing that up. Thank you ever so much for being with us today.

Mrs. CAPITO. Thank you.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. I want to very briefly comment about how all of our hearts go out to West Virginians and the miners and their families. We had a committee meeting yesterday on mine safety, and I know that we will reach the right conclusion on trying to get to the tracking and the oxygen and resources for them. Thank you ever so much.

Mr. Speaker, did you hear the numbers that were described by the gentlewoman from West Virginia? Did you hear the unemployment numbers: 3.8 percent in West Virginia. Most economists will tell you that 5 percent, or even some will say 6 percent, is full employment. If you have unemployment of 5 or 6 percent, then you are at full employment because of people desiring to be between jobs; but West Virginia is at 3.8 percent, which tracks relatively well to the entire Nation.

Again, the Official Truth Squad's desire is to put real information, honest information, truthful numbers out for the American public and just let them draw the conclusions that they draw, understanding that the conclusions that we draw when we look at these numbers are pretty doggone optimistic, pretty positive, not what you normally hear coming out of Washington.

This chart here talks about the unemployment rate and the jobs rebound. And the graph here goes from January of 2003 to just the end of last year, the end of 2005. Now, it ought to go further. I have to get this updated because the trend of these lines continues in the same direction. And this upper line here, the red line here, is the unemployment rate; and the green line down here is the number of jobs. And as you see, there was a peak of unemployment around the beginning to the middle of

2003, and that rate at that time was somewhere in the range of 6.1, 6.2 percent.

What we have seen since that time is a steady decrease in unemployment and a consistent increase in jobs. As the gentlewoman from West Virginia mentioned, in January 193,000 new jobs. And although this has the unemployment rate at 5 percent, which it was toward the ends of 2005, the unemployment rate now for the Nation is 4.7 percent.

□ 1445

4.7 percent, as she mentioned, is the lowest monthly rate since July of 2001.

I think it is important when we talk about these numbers, again truthfully, honestly and openly, to give folks an opportunity to compare them to something. What are you going to compare it to?

The best thing to compare it to is the history. What is our history? Where has the rate been? Well, the rate that we currently have now, 4.7 percent, is lower than the average for the decade of the 1970s, decade of the 1980s, and the decade of the 1990s. You remember the boom time in the 1990s?

Lower than the average for the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. Over 2 million jobs created in the last 12 months and over 4.7 million jobs created since 2003.

I am fond of charts and pictures because I think they just paint the story so much better than I can describe it. There is also a line here, this vertical line here of the dotted green color, and what happened at that point, curiously enough, is what again the gentlewoman from West Virginia mentioned, and that is, that the Jobs and Growth Act went into effect, the fair tax decreases went into effect so that there was more money to put into the economy so people had more disposable income. And when you give people back more of their own money, what happens? The economy booms, the economy increases and gets better. So it is a cause-and-effect relationship without any doubt.

I mentioned the number of new jobs, 4.7 million new jobs, and again, with a picture being able to paint it so much better than I can describe, on this axis down here, we have January 2002, all the way over to January 2006. These are the percentages of unemployment, the monthly change each month in the number of jobs, the amount of unemployment, and before the fair tax decreases went into effect, what you see is a decrease in the number of jobs available, lower jobs available.

Then, as soon as that happens, as soon as those tax decreases went into effect, what happens? We see significant increases in the number of jobs available; so much so that it is a steady run, and it continues as such, again, 193,000 new jobs in January of this year.

So these are facts. This is the truth. The picture tells the story, and it is a story, again, that you often do not get

if you are paying attention to your nightly news or your friendly newspaper.

So we are proud and pleased to come before the American people and tell this kind of optimistic and positive story.

I am always pleased to be joined by the gentlewoman from Virginia, another fellow freshman who, like I, was somewhat distressed at the tone of the rhetoric that we heard in Washington and was really a prime mover in getting this started, this Official Truth Squad, to bring a positive message to the American people.

And today, talking about the economy, a successful small business woman; and I am so pleased to have you join us again. I yield to the gentlewoman from the great State of Virginia (Mrs. DRAKE).

Mrs. DRAKE. Mr. Speaker, I thank you, Congressman PRICE, and I really do appreciate the effort you have made to make sure that the American people truly understand what is happening within our economy today. I know you and I share a lot of very similar beliefs.

I just wanted to start today by reminding you and bringing to mind again a really wonderful quote by former President Ronald Reagan, when he said, "There are no great limits to growth because there are no limits of human intelligence, imagination and wonder," and that is part of what you are seeing in this increase in job growth.

We believe that the strength of our Nation lies with the individual and that each person's dignity, freedom and ability and responsibility must be honored. We believe that free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this Nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity.

But there is an alternative to what we believe, and that alternative belief is one that seeks a solution that consists more of invasive government. And not surprisingly, Ronald Reagan had something to say about that as well. I think we as Americans remember the quote very, very well, and it is that "The government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it."

In economic terms, we will all remember the 21st century began slowly. The telecom bubble burst. We were attacked in the heart of our financial sector. Certain industries lagged, and we had entered a recession. It is during these difficult periods that we require leadership more than ever. We needed to pursue positive economic policies that would put the American people back in the driver's seat.

I know you and I share the belief that our tax policies should be one that supports our economy, that it increases our revenue, and so that is why I wanted to talk today about what changes have come about in the past 5 years, these changes that support our

American families and support American businesses.

You will remember in the 2001 tax cuts that the first objective was to put money back in the hands of individuals and families. In June of 2001, tax cuts were enacted through the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act. Some of the most important aspects of that act are that they lowered marginal income tax rates, reduced the marriage penalty and the death tax, and increased the child tax credit, all things that are very important to American families. This was comprehensive legislation that reduced the tax burden on all Americans.

In the 2003 tax cuts, the objective was to create a more favorable climate for industry and small business to invest and to create job growth. In the years preceding the 2003 Jobs and Growth Act, business investment spending had steadily declined. We needed to pull businesses and entrepreneurs back into the market through investment-friendly tax policies, restoring economic competitiveness and employment opportunities. So Congress took decisive action.

Despite the naysayers, the results speak for themselves, and the results are very clear. Growth in our economy is one of the least told stories. I believe, and I know that you believe that if we allow Americans to keep more of their hard-earned dollars, that they will save that money, they will invest that money, they will create new jobs with that money.

And business investment has grown in every quarter. Today, small businesses, small businesses like mine, represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms. They employ nearly half of all private sector employees, and over the past decade, on average, have generated 60 to 80 percent of the net new jobs.

Job creation, as you were showing the chart there right now, nearly 4.7 million jobs have been created since President Bush signed the 2003 Jobs and Growth Act, with 2.1 million of those created in the past year.

Today's unemployment rate is at 4.7 percent and is lower than the decade averages of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. What an incredible statement. And they are good jobs. Real, after-tax income has risen at a rate higher than inflation since 2001, and personal income has grown above inflation in 49 of our 50 States.

Most importantly, Federal revenues have been rising during this time. If we let people save their money or create new jobs, create new revenues, that creates additional tax revenue for the Federal Government. In May of 2003, receipts were under \$1.8 trillion. In fiscal year 2005, they rose to an all-time high of \$2.15 trillion.

We realize that we cannot feed the Federal Treasury by starving American businesses, but thanks to these policies, more low- and middle-income Americans looking for a job will be

able to find one simply because there are 2.1 million more jobs this year.

But you and I realize there is more work to be done, that America agrees, and I think it is in everyone's minds that we do need complete tax reform, and I know that is something we will be working on.

I really think that there are models across the world for us, and I think the most compelling story today is the story of Ireland. In the mid-1980s, Ireland's economy was faltering; we all know that. College graduates could not find a job and were leaving the country in droves. Confidence in the Irish economy was at an all-time low. Change was necessary, along with the leadership necessary to implement it.

The corporate tax rate today in Ireland is 12.15 percent, far below the rest of Europe. This attracted foreign investment necessary to boost economic growth. Today, nine of ten of the world's top pharmaceutical companies and seven of the top ten software designers currently have operations in Ireland, and it is currently the second richest country in the European Union with a per capita GDP higher than that of Germany, France and Britain.

Now we have to ask ourselves, do we continue to encourage American businesses by creating the climate necessary for success or do we allow them to go somewhere else?

So I thank you for the opportunity, thank you for your work in making sure that we do tell the American people the good news story that we are in as a result of the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003. It is our responsibility to make sure that we maintain a solid policy, tax policy that grows our economy, grows our revenues and benefits each and every American.

Thank you for what you are doing.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, you are very kind. I appreciate you coming and sharing those words and, once again, words of optimism, words of truthful perspective as it relates to the United States.

I was struck by your description of the tax policy because what we saw with that tax policy is the increase in the child tax credit, the decreased marriage penalty. These are family-friendly things. This is what some of the folks on the other side of the aisle will call tax cuts for the wealthy. It just is not so. Again, we have got to talk about truth if we are going to get to the right solution.

When you decrease taxes, as you well know, on small business, which is the engine of our economy, small businesses across our Nation, what happens is that you allow individuals more opportunity for employment. When people have jobs, then they are able to care for their families and, again, a family-friendly environment that we have in this Nation now as it relates to tax policy. Those are the kinds of things that need to continue.

People say, well, what difference does it make who is in charge there in

Washington? I am here to tell you, elections are about choices and the choices we are going to have this year are fairly stark from individuals on one side who will tell you that, no, you do not need to have the kind of tax decreases, the tax cuts, that we have had; what the government needs is more of your money. That just is not the case, as we have demonstrated time and time again here with The Official Truth Squad.

But when you put more people's money back in their pockets, what happens? They are happier, their families are more secure, the communities are more secure, and businesses and the economy flourish.

So thank you very much for sharing those kind words.

I was also struck by the description of Ireland, which nobody a few years ago would have said was an economic engine or a powerhouse, but now it is. It is again because of their tax policy that is friendly to business, which, in turn, becomes friendly to communities and friendly to families, and that is how economics work.

If you appreciate and you understand how a capitalist economy works, and then you understand that it is important to put more money, more people's money back in their own pockets; that it is not the government's money, it is the people's money; and that we here in Washington do not have a revenue problem, we have got a spending problem.

So I am so pleased to be able to be joined by my colleagues to bring light to that, and one of my great freshman colleagues who has just been a wonderful contributor and supporter and innovator in the Official Truth Squad joins us now, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX). She is a great friend, has a great history in the arena of education, but understands clearly the importance of a positive economic outlook and a positive economic perspective and economic policy.

So I welcome and yield to the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX).

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman PRICE for yielding. I appreciate it very much, and as our colleagues have expressed to you before, we thank you for organizing these meetings and helping to get the Truth Squad out here.

Many of us have been concerned for the past several months that there is a lot of disinformation out there and that the time has come for us to set the record straight, and I think that it is very important that we do so. Just saying things will not make them so, but if they are not responded to, then people will believe that they are so.

I thought that our colleague, the gentlewoman from the State of Virginia (Mrs. Drake), was doing a great job of talking about several of the issues that I think are important, and talking about Ireland as a great success story is important to do.

□ 1500

Our economy is doing great, and talking it down does not help our situation and our country. I think we do need to be positive and talk about how things are going great.

I speak to a lot of school groups, and they will often ask me what is the difference between Democrats and Republicans, and I generally give them several things to think about. But as my colleague pointed out, the biggest difference between Democrats and Republicans is we believe that the public knows how to spend its money better than the government knows how to spend their money. That is sort of a short definition. If we left it up to the Democrats, they would basically be taking all the money from everybody and giving it to government bureaucrats to spend.

I think the whole issue of family friendly taxes is very important too. We are not a party of extremely wealthy people, as we are portrayed to be. In fact, there is a lot more wealth on the other side than there is on our side, but they do a pretty good job of trying to hide that.

I want to talk about some specific numbers also, in addition to talking about in general terms some things that may have already been said by some of my colleagues. I have been out meeting with constituents, so I am not sure of all the things that were said, and I hope I do not repeat too many of the same things.

I think it is important to talk about the fact that our unemployment rate right now is 4.7 percent, the lowest monthly rate since 2001, and lower than the averages of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Just today I was talking to a man with a very large business down in North Carolina in the fifth district, and he was saying they could grow their business by 300 or 400 people if they could get the skilled workers that they need to grow that business. That is a very significant point for us. Our economy could be doing even better, but we do lack skilled folks. I talked with him and I will be working with the community college system down there to try to help him get the programs established that he needs so that they can get people with the backgrounds that they need.

I am not sure if Congresswoman DRAKE mentioned this, but real household net worth right now is \$51.1 trillion, an all-time high in this country. Our GDP, of course, is growing at a much higher rate than anybody thought it was going to grow. The fourth quarter grew at 1.6 percent, and the estimate had been 1.1 percent. This encouraging economic news is proof that lower taxes plus restrained Federal spending equals economic growth.

That is a math equation that the Democrats just cannot seem to grasp. Maybe it is because they keep trying to substitute new variables and it just does not work. Taxing plus spending

will never equal economic growth and prosperity. But the Republican formula of lower taxes and restrained Federal spending will always come out in favor of the American taxpayer and his checkbook, and that is what we need to be concentrating on.

I am going to throw out a few more facts to go along with what we are trying to do through the Truth Squad. We have got high consumer confidence these days, too. It rose to 106.3 in January, the highest level in over 3 years. So we are doing our best to make sure people know the economy is doing well and to raise consumer confidence.

We know that incomes rose in December, and we are up 1.4 percent in 2005. Again, very, very good news. Retail sales rose in December. We are up 6.4 percent in 2005 over 2004. Our manufacturing continues to expand. Manufacturing activity grew for the 32nd consecutive month in January. There is tremendous expansion out there, so we want that to continue to grow.

Construction spending is at an all-time high. Construction spending rose 1 percent in the month of December alone. For 2005, spending reached a record \$1.120 trillion, an increase of 8.9 percent over the previous record set in 2004. Housing starts continue to go up.

So our economy is doing very well, and, again, it is based on the fact that Republicans believe in lower taxes and leaving more money in the pockets of American families. That is the way we can grow the economy. I hate hearing the words "government investment." The government never invests. It spends.

We have to get people to understand the language. As my colleagues know, language is a very important thing to us. How we use words is important because it gets people's minds set about what those words mean. We need to stop government spending, and we need to leave as much money as possible in the hands of the American taxpayers. We need to keep this economy growing vitally, and the way to do that is to keep Republicans in charge.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will yield back to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Congresswoman FOXX, thank you so very, very much for coming and joining us today and really painting a wonderful picture.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you heard all of the items that Congresswoman FOXX ticked off there, but this is positive news. This is great news. This is good, good news.

Consumer confidence increasing, incomes up across the Nation, average real after-tax income per person has risen 7.9 percent, retail sales increased, manufacturing continues to expand, durable goods orders on the rise, new orders for durable goods increased 1.3 percent in December with new orders for machinery rising 6.5 percent, the highest level since the series began tracking that in 1992. That is good news. Productivity growth is strong.

Productivity increased 2.3 percent and has grown 3.2 percent, at that annual rate, since the end of 2000. That is good news. Construction rates up; all-time high. Again, remarkable. Remarkably good news.

And that is what the Official Truth Squad is all about, coming to the floor to give honesty to the debate. Truthful numbers. Real numbers. Because it is important that people have that in order to make decisions.

Something that has been alluded to a number of times as we have had our discussion here today is the effect of tax decreases. I call them fair tax decreases. Some people call them tax cuts, I guess. I call them fair tax decreases. And what they will say is, we cannot have any more tax cuts. We cannot have any more tax decreases or even keep what we have. That is what the other side says, we cannot allow you to keep your money because government needs it. That is the way the line goes.

But what is the effect of tax decreases? What is the effect from an economic standpoint? Well, again, a picture paints it better than anything I could ever say. Down here is the year 2000 all the way to 2005. The vertical line there, the vertical dotted green line is when the tax decreases, the Jobs and Growth Act, went into effect. And the red line is revenue coming in to the government, how much money the government is receiving based upon the taxes.

Again, remember, revenue going down here from 2000 to 2003, decreasing money coming into the government. So what do the President and the Republican Congress do? Well, they decrease taxes. A fair tax decrease. That is what happened here. Then what happens? Revenue increases. Money coming into the government increases.

That seems counterintuitive, but that is what happens. President Kennedy knew that. That is what happened when he had his tax decreases. President Reagan knew that. That is what happened when he instituted his tax decreases. And what happened with President Bush's tax decrease? Same thing.

You would think there was a trend there, Mr. Speaker. You would think that, in fact, if you decreased taxes, you would increase governmental revenue. Well, that is the secret. That is what happens. And why does that happen? Because as we have talked about, the economy flourishes. The economy flourishes when you put more of the people's money in their back pocket and in their purses, and not in the government's purse. What happens is that the economy flourishes.

Now, I mentioned a little earlier that we in Washington, that government does not have a revenue problem. It has enough revenue. That is clear. It has a spending problem. So Congress is trying as hard as it can to decrease the amount of spending. And it is a difficult thing to do in this environment

where you have the distortion and the misinformation and the disinformation and the incredible personal attacks that are given. So it is a difficult thing to do.

But all last year what we tried to do is to work on what is called a deficit reduction act, which is spending less money. Ultimately, it took a little over a year, but in January when we came back, in early February we passed the Deficit Reduction Act that saved, that saved \$39.8 billion. That is a good thing. That is a positive thing.

I asked my staff to see if they could get me a poster of the number of folks on the other side of the aisle, the Democrats, that supported a decrease in spending, which is what they say they want to do all the time. How many folks on the other side of the aisle voted for that? And I have that chart here somewhere. I found it. I found the poster that has the name of every single Democrat that voted in favor of a \$39.89 billion decrease in spending.

There it is. Right there. Not a one. Not a one. I point up the other charts because, as I say, they are truthful. This is truthful. This is the slate of individuals on the other side of the aisle who are interested truly in stepping up to the plate and working hard together. Because these are not Republican problems, and they are not Democrat problems. But, Mr. Speaker, when only one party is interested in working positively, it gets pretty doggone hard to do something here. It really does.

So those are the folks willing to help us on the other side in terms of decreasing spending. So that is what the Official Truth Squad is all about, bringing appropriate, honest, truthful information to the American people. And we get terribly frustrated, as I mentioned, with what has been described as the politics of division. Many people practice it here in Washington. It is kind of tried-and-true; but, again, it does not get to the right answers. It does not help. It has been used for a long time, but it is not positive, it is not a productive activity, and it does not serve people well back home.

One gentleman who knew that well was Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln knew that the politics of division are destructive, and he talked about it in a way that I think is more eloquent than anybody has ever said. What he said was: "You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer. You cannot encourage the brotherhood of man by encouraging class hatred. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence. And you cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could do for themselves."

Remarkable words from one of the pillars in our Nation's history. It kind

of crystallizes the American philosophy. It puts it better than, frankly, I have ever heard it.

So what the Official Truth Squad is all about, Mr. Speaker, is bringing truth and enlightening information to the American people and trying to give them a little alternative to what they oftentimes hear coming out of Washington. We try to make sure there is a positive tilt to it, because we live in the greatest Nation on the face of the Earth. We live in a glorious and wondrous Nation. It is a Nation that still is seen by men and women around the world as a beacon of liberty and a repository of hope.

I am so honored and proud to serve in the United States House of Representatives and to have the opportunity to share a positive perspective and a positive vision with my colleagues and with the American people.

□ 1515

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN AFGHANISTAN AND BEYOND

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Speaker, President Bush's brief stopover in Afghanistan yesterday gives us an opportunity to take stock of the progress that has been made there. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on what the world might look like today if the United States had adopted a wiser foreign and national security policy after the terrible attacks on our country on September 11, 2001.

After that tragic day, the world united behind the United States and our determination to destroy Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the terrorists responsible for those attacks. We sometimes forget here that within days of the attack the United Nation's General Assembly, friends and foe alike, unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the attacks on the United States. And NATO, for the first time in its history, invoked article 5 of the Washington Treaty stating an attack against one is an attack against all.

When the brutal Taliban regime refused to support action against al Qaeda, the United States took appropriate military action to force out the Taliban and attempt to destroy the al Qaeda terror network. That was the right action and had the strong backing of the American people. And Afghanistan is a much better place today.

However, while we succeeded in driving out the Taliban from the capital city of Kabul and killed a number of al Qaeda leaders, we have not finished the job. Indeed, Osama bin Laden, the man responsible for masterminding the 9/11 attacks, is still alive and likely to be somewhere along the Afghan-Pakistan border, less than 100 miles from where President Bush stood just yesterday.

And the continued presence of active Taliban and al Qaeda resistance in Afghanistan and along the Pakistan border represents a lost opportunity. Instead of finishing the job against al Qaeda, the President decided instead to attack Iraq, a nation with no weapons of mass destruction and a government that was actually an ideological adversary of al Qaeda.

As a result of invading Iraq, the Bush administration squandered a huge opportunity to keep both our forces and the international community focused on defeating al Qaeda and its brand of radical Islam. The goodwill that the United States had developed throughout the world in the aftermath of 9/11 evaporated as we switched our focus from the enemy that attacked us to one that had not. As a result, our invasion of Iraq has fueled radical Islamic and anti-American forces and allowed al Qaeda to gain new recruits around the world.

Today, the United States is tied down in an increasingly volatile Iraq, and the man actually responsible for launching the attacks on the United States, Osama bin Laden, remains at the top of his terrorist network.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to make mistakes that will hamper our ability to put the Taliban and al Qaeda out of business permanently. First, the United States is sending the wrong message by reducing the number of our forces in Afghanistan. Just yesterday, as President Bush was arriving in Afghanistan, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, General Maples, told Members of this Congress that the insurgency in Afghanistan is growing and will increase this spring, presenting a greater threat to the central government's expansion of authority than at any point since 2001. And the greatest threat of Taliban resurgence is in southern Afghanistan, the area from which the United States will be withdrawing more than 2,000 troops.

While we welcome the additional NATO forces in Afghanistan, it would be far wiser to use these NATO troops to supplement rather than replace the U.S. forces in the region. We should not be sending the wrong signal to the Taliban and al Qaeda at this delicate time. We are still living with the consequences of neglecting Afghanistan in the past.

Second, Mr. Speaker, the United States must end the abuse of the detainees at the prison at the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Recent evidence suggests that the abuses that have taken place there are even worse than those that occurred at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

The United States must lead by example. The abuse of prisoners is wrong and will only strengthen the hands of al Qaeda and the extremists. We cannot credibly demand that others adhere to the rule of law if we are flouting international human rights standards. The President's stopover in Afghanistan