

responsibility and an expectation to do good. It is far too convenient to bash the government and blame it for all our ills. In America, the people are the government. I think the people expect and deserve a government that acts in their name and on their behalf in a way that reflects the hope and promise America has meant for over two centuries.

America's future is in our hands, and it is within our power to nurture, heal, and defend. That is my mission, and that is the mission of this Congress. The safety net is ours to weave and ours to protect. We must do it.

□ 1830

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

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

#### WE MUST ADDRESS GUN VIOLENCE

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

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, as the House begins its work in the 110th Congress, we must address the issue of gun violence. Congress has a responsibility to make sure violent criminals cannot legally purchase guns. I am not proposing any new laws or a ban on buying guns. Instead, we must help our States enforce current laws that prevent criminals from buying guns.

The NICS system, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, is the database used to check potential firearm buyers for any criminal records. In large, NICS has been a very good success. Since 1994 more than 700,000 individuals were denied a gun for failing their background check. However, the NICS system is only as good as the information in its database.

Mr. Speaker, 25 States have automated less than 60 percent of their felony convictions into the NICS system. In these States, many felons won't turn up on the NICS system and would be able to purchase a gun with no questions asked.

In 13 States, domestic violence and restraining orders are not accessible through the NICS system. Common sense would dictate that you don't sell a gun to somebody that has a restraining order. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

On March 8, 2002, Peter Troy purchased a .22 caliber semiautomatic rifle. His own mother had a restraining order against him as a result of his violent background. It was illegal for him to purchase a gun, but he simply fell through the cracks. Four days later, Peter Troy walked into Our Lady of

Peace Church in Lynbrook, New York, opened fire and killed two innocent people. Peter Troy had no business buying a gun, and the system created to prevent him from buying the gun failed.

We must fix the NICS system. That is why I introduced H.R. 297, the NICS Improvement Act. This legislation would provide grants to States to update the NICS system. States would be able to update their NICS database to include felons, domestic abusers and other violent criminals. We need the NICS Improvement Act to become law, and we need to pass more bills like it.

These ideas impose no new restrictions on gun owners, but give the government the tools to ensure existing laws are effective and enforceable. In fact, the NICS Improvement Act already passed the House in the 107th Congress by voice vote. Last Congress, a Judiciary subcommittee passed the measure. Unfortunately it did not get to the full committee.

This is commonsense gun legislation that we can all agree on. This bill will save lives while not infringing on anybody's second amendment rights.

Mr. Speaker, I call on Congress to act quickly on H.R. 247. If we can prevent tragedies like this happening throughout the country, we could save lives and enforce the laws already on the books.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring one other subject up. This country is facing a shortage of blood. I would encourage all people in this country to give blood. It is easy, it is painless, and it can save someone's life.

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

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

#### IRAQ WAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. ZOE LOFGREN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, we did not need to invade Iraq. From the beginning, I found President Bush's stated reasons for the Iraq war unconvincing. Now we know they were also untrue.

At the time the decision was being sold to Congress, I was unable to get any level of assurance that there was a workable plan for victory. There weren't answers to questions like, "What is the strategy for stabilization after the military victory?" or, "What is the exit plan?"

The American forces were to be greeted by grateful Iraqis bearing flowers, but I was never able to learn what plan B was if this rosy scenario did not prove out. Now we know there was no plan B.

I voted against the war in Iraq, but even though I opposed the invasion, I never dreamed that the President's policies and course of action would be as disastrous as they have been for Iraq, for the Gulf region and for America.

I think the real question America now faces is what is the least catastrophic end to this debacle, and how can we obtain it. Answering such a question would include options of utilizing diplomacy in the region as recommended by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. It would include America calling upon neighboring States to take strong measures to avoid a spread of the conflict beyond Iraq as that nation disintegrates into tribal and sectarian violence. The Saudis are aware of the peril and Iran is aware of the prospects.

But President Bush has once again offered a proposal based on wishful thinking instead of the unpleasant reality. Having been the cause of the destabilization of Iraq, America has a moral obligation to take what steps are possible to obtain new stability. But wanting to create stability within Iraq and being able to accomplish that goal with U.S. military forces is not the same thing. That is why I have decided to cosponsor Representative John Murtha's resolution directing the redeployment of our troops at the earliest practicable date while maintaining a quick reaction U.S. force and an over-the-horizon presence of U.S. Marines in the region. Like Representative MURTHA, I feel like the solution to the war in Iraq is a diplomatic one.

America is a country that doesn't take disappointment well. Our culture is one where the phrase "failure is not an option" just makes sense. That attitude has served us well historically in science, industry and war. But it can also lead to problems and to decisions based on wishful thinking instead of on facts.

Political leaders don't want to be the ones to bring the bad news to an American public raised on the phrase "failure is not an option." Some even suspect that the President's escalation plan may have as a goal running out the clock so the next President will be the one who has to deliver the bad news.

Right now I think another American phrase is better for this situation: When you are in the hole, the first thing to do is stop digging.

It is time to stop digging. Sending in more troops is not going to bring stability to Iraq because the primary problem between the Iraqis is political, not military.

We are not going to be met with flowers by the Iraqis today, or probably ever. More than 60 percent of the Iraqi public believes it is a good thing to attack and kill Americans stationed in Iraq. We have to accept that we are part of the problem in Iraq, not part of the solution.

Real leadership deals with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. And