

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

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

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

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

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

FRESHMEN DEMOCRATS PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. KLEIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am RON KLEIN, and I represent Florida's 22nd Congressional District in Congress, which is southeast Florida, Fort Lauderdale to West Palm Beach area, and I have the privilege of anchoring tonight's freshmen's Special Order. We decided as a group of freshman, and there was a large group of us that were elected this year, to meet on a regular basis and to discuss policy, those of us who had contested races, those of us who did not have contested races, but all of us new with this process coming in with a fresh perspective and the belief that hopefully we could influence the process in a way that would move things along, which is, I think, the loud message we heard from the people that elected all of us, both Democrats and Republicans this year.

Tonight our Special Order is going to focus on the importance of accountability and oversight within our Nation's government. There is no question that the ability to exercise ac-

countability and oversight among the executive and legislative branches, that is our branch and the President's branch, is vital to making sure that our government is operating and governing within the highest ethical and moral standards, and makes sense. It is also important to make sure our government is doing the right thing for our people.

It seems that every time we are turning on the news lately or pick up the newspaper, there seems to be some story about where there is no accountability. And the oversight and lack of accountability seems to be the prime topic of conversation back home in our districts, in our offices, in our supermarkets, in our churches and synagogues. If you just think about the most recent one, the United States attorney scandal, where a number of U.S. attorneys were fired; and, of course, there is a question about for what purpose they were fired and whether there is a reason, and now there is a question of getting all the information out on the table.

The ongoing concerns over Valerie Plame and the outing of Valerie Plame. And, of course, I think most of us as Americans understand, when someone works for this country as a member of our intelligence services, we owe that person the highest degree of respect and integrity and make sure that their position is held confidential. And certainly anybody who is responsible for outing that person should be held accountable and punished.

Conditions at Walter Reed Hospital. And we are going to talk about that a little more tonight, and, unfortunately, other veterans hospitals. And I am happy to say that in my area and in many other parts of the country that there are some very good things going on in our veterans hospitals and our veterans outpatient clinics, but many times it is a matter of having the resources to have enough doctors in place. And I know I have heard from time to time about long waiting lines. But there are places like Walter Reed and other places that have now been identified where you had mold and you had ceilings falling in and lack of care, and people that were working there that were overworked and unfortunately not providing the type of treatment that should be awarded. The highest level of respect should be awarded to our men and women who are our heroes in this country.

And, of course, the no-bid government contracts being awarded to companies doing business in Iraq to the tune of billions of dollars of waste, and certainly not accomplishing the major goals. One of the goals we went in there with, of course, was to take out Saddam Hussein, but I think everybody understood very quickly that if we were going to be successful in changing the hearts and minds, that some of the rebuilding activities, getting electricity on, getting hospitals up, creating jobs, those kinds of things would

be very, very important to making the people of Iraq feel that this was a worthy cause to set up their own government. Unfortunately, we have spent billions of our money over there, and, unfortunately, the condition is in many ways worse today than it was with the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The news on these subjects is everywhere. So tonight we are going to talk about accountability and oversight, and my colleagues who are going to join me tonight as freshman Members recently elected are going to be talking about how we are working to restore those features of accountability and oversight to Washington and our government.

A couple things I just want to touch on before I turn over to my colleague Congressman HODES. On November 7, which was last year's election, we believe that the American people, I know we all heard this as we walked door to door and heard from the American people, they wanted change. It wasn't necessarily Democrat or Republican; they wanted people to come together, find common ground, and move forward. And fortunately for this country, this House has, in fact, started that process. There were six items very quickly that were passed in the beginning called the 100 Hours, the Six for '06, everything from fixing the Medicare prescription drug program, which I know many of our seniors are concerned about making it easier to use, less costly to the taxpayers; minimum wage, making the minimum wage higher, of course, is a key issue; lower student loan rates; and a number of other issues like energy policy. These are the things that we came to work on and that were done.

We also passed the lobbying reform bill and a full disclosure bill which has already significantly reduced the influence that lobbyists have on this legislative process. We need to do more, but we certainly took a lot of the right steps by not allowing lobbyists to take Members of Congress out to lunch. We had that in Florida, we changed that, and I am glad we changed that here, too.

And, of course, the earmark process. And for those of you who don't know what earmark is, that is this idea: In the past, Congressmen, Members of the Senate and House, would go behind closed doors and add millions and tens of millions of dollars, even hundreds of millions in some cases, of special projects in the dark of night to the budget without any consideration by all the Members of Congress. And that needs to change, and I am very happy to say that with new earmark reforms in place, that will change.

The way it is changing is very clear: Anything that is presented needs to be presented in the light of day. It needs to be publicly disclosed and laid out for the Members of the Congress so that a legitimate project in Alaska should be a legitimate project in Florida. Even though it may benefit one State, we all

represent this country, but it has got to be done the right way.

This week we passed important legislation which curbs waste in Federal contracting; strengthens protection for whistleblowers, and those are, of course, people that discover and come forward when there is waste and corruption in government; and also provides long overdue of the veterans health care crisis and other Federal issues. We are going to talk about accountability of tax dollars. We are going to talk about a number of other things.

I am joined by some colleagues here, and I would like to introduce them. We have got Congressman ELLISON, who is going to join us and talk to us a minute; Congressman HODES. Congressman WELCH is going to join us for a few minutes.

You look like you are poised and ready to go, Congressman HODES, so why don't you kick off and give us a little oversight on what you are going to talk about on oversight and accountability.

Mr. HODES. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for being here with us tonight. I am delighted to be a new Member in the House of Representatives, the people's House, sent by my constituents to help restore the fabric of our democracy, which, during the past 6 years, has really been torn and undermined by a rubber-stamp Congress which refused to ask questions of an administration conducting its policies largely in secret, taking the American people down a path with counterfeit leadership, a leadership that used fear and intimidation to lead, instead of real leadership which helps people face reality, come together and seek common ground and solutions.

And for many people, when they think of the United States House of Representatives, they think of Congress as a body which raises revenue and figures out how to spend it. It sets taxes and sets a budget. And that is how a lot of folks think about Congress, and sure we spend a lot of our time doing that.

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But there is another very important function of the United States Congress in our constitutional scheme, and it is completely independent of what party is in the White House, what party is in the majority in Congress, what party is in the majority in the Senate. It is the way that, in the wisdom of the Founding Fathers, they set up this great government of ours so that there would be checks and balances, there would be controls. And the accountability and oversight function of Congress is what we have restored with this Democratic majority.

There have been great leaders who have recognized that important feature and that important job of Congress. And I have got a chart here, a little board and a quote that is really important and talks a lot about what it

means for Congress to exercise its function of accountability.

President Woodrow Wilson said, "It is the proper duty of a representative body to look diligently into every affair of government and to talk much about what it sees. It is meant to be the eyes and the voice and to embody the wisdom and will of its constituents. The informing function of Congress should be preferred, even to its legislative function."

So here is President Wilson, some years ago, recognizing that the oversight and accountability function of Congress is perhaps even more important than the legislative function.

So for this Congress, while the last Congress might have been called "the rubber-stamp Congress" or the last Congress might have been called "the Katrina Congress" because they presided over such a disaster for us, I bet that this Congress, under Democratic majority, is going to be "the accountability Congress."

Now, one thing that is interesting, I want to take us back for a moment as we sort of set the tone for tonight to talk about something that happened in ancient times. It has been said that the ancient Romans had a tradition. Whenever one of their engineers constructed an arch, at the capstone was hoisted into place, the engineer assumed accountability for his work in the most profound way possible, he stood under the arch. In the President's war on terror, the capstone he chose is Iraq, but it is everyday Americans, and especially our veterans, returning soldiers who are wounded and our veterans who stood under the arch as it crumbled.

Over the past few weeks, we have sustained blow after blow as the President's plan fell apart. But it is not the President who will pay the billions necessary to stabilize Iraq, it is not the President who slept in molding infested rooms at Walter Reed Hospital, it is not the President who lost his job because of a political decision. But maybe it ought to be.

The confluence of events of recent weeks, the Valerie Plame scandal, the Walter Reed scandal, the politically motivated firing of U.S. Attorneys, is the result of an administration that went too far for too long without any meaningful oversight, without any meaningful accountability, without a Congress to hold it accountable. It has been said that absolute power corrupts absolutely. And for years, absolute power is what our Republican colleagues, who were in control until November of 2006, gave to this administration.

Tonight, I come to the floor with my colleagues to talk about restoring accountability to government because the arch has fallen on us, and we are going to repair it.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Thank you, Mr. HODES. I think you laid it out very well.

I think the average American believes very strongly in accountability

and oversight because they understand, that's how they live their lives. If you have a business, you can't do anything without keeping track of your books, keeping track of you inventory, keeping track of your personnel, your employees, and knowing that there is an end-point. And you will make money or not make money by running it efficiently with oversight. And I think that nobody is asking for any more than that in government. And, unfortunately, as you have pointed out very eloquently, that is exactly what has gone on without anybody looking after it. And many of the committees were either not operating or were abolished in the last number of years, and that just doesn't make any sense.

So I think you pointed out very appropriately that we are glad I think in a way that the Democrats are leading, but I think the Republicans are now joining us. And, again, this is a bipartisan approach to fixing this.

Mr. ELLISON, I know that you have been leading and talking about this as well, so give us some of your thoughts, please.

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, let me thank my colleagues, the gentlemen from Florida and New Hampshire, both for their eloquent remarks. I am looking to my colleague, Congressman WELCH and his remarks, but I would like to say that the bedrock idea behind accountability in government is trust in government. If somebody is not accountable, if they are not answerable, if they don't have to tell you whatever you want to know, if they can tell you to take a hike, take a walk and they don't have to listen to you and they are not answerable to you and not accountable to you, as the public, then what you cannot have is trust.

Trust goes away when accountability goes away. Trust leaves the room when there is no one to answer the question about what happened. Trust leaves the room when you cannot have a public official look you in the eye and say here is what happened, the good, the bad and the ugly.

Accountability is not about perfection because when you have a human endeavor, there is no such thing. But accountability is about being able to say, you know what, those folks up there on Capitol Hill, I believe that they are doing the best they can because when I asked my question, they gave me an answer. When I came forward with my concerns, they gave me a reply. They had the documents. They were able to say, here is what is going on.

But when government, Madam Speaker, will not answer, we have problems, we have a lack of trust, and unfortunately sometimes people disengage. But this Congress is here to turn that around. This Congress is here to say, no, there will be accountability. You can trust your government. You can expect that your government is going to be operating on your behalf.

Let me turn to an example. One example is that for the last several years

we have had prosecutors, United States Attorneys, trying to do the best they could in many instances at ferreting out corruption in government. We saw prosecutions go on, former Congressman Cunningham and others, and we saw prosecutors who were appointed by a Republican administration to essentially do their job. As you know, Madam Speaker, prosecutors are not like other attorneys. Their job is to seek justice, find the truth. They are ministers of justice, whereas other attorneys, very correctly, have, within the rules, no other obligation than to zealously represent their client. But prosecutors have a higher calling than that, and that is because it is their job to protect the public.

But what we found out recently is that eight of them have been fired, and it appears very clearly that the reasons were entirely political. Eight of them have been fired, and the evidence that has been unearthed so far in only 3 months of this "accountability Congress," as the distinguished gentleman from New Hampshire is calling the phrase, in this accountability Congress, the first 3 months we have seen getting to the bottom of this question of justice being undermined.

The Democrats have brought back accountability. And what we have seen that is unfolding right now is that the Justice Department has released thousands of pages of e-mails based on the demands of the accountability Congress, and internal documents as well, related to this U.S. Attorney scandal. These documents would not be in the public domain. They wouldn't be in front of the people. They wouldn't be available for questions to get to be asked and answered but for this accountability Congress.

I am so proud to be associated with this accountability Congress because what it means is that the U.S. Attorneys, whether they be U.S. Attorneys or food inspectors or people who work at the hospitals taking care of our veterans, they now can know that there is not going to be an intolerable condition that exists for too long before some inquiring person in Congress says, what is going on over there. Thank heavens for it.

And I just want to point out, and I will get back to this in a little while, I just want to point out that even Patrick Fitzgerald, who was a prosecutor in a recent case that you may have heard of, the Scooter Libby trial, in which he obtained four convictions out of five counts, he himself was rated as "not distinguished." He was not distinguished in the eyes of the Bush administration officials. And I can see why they would find such a gentleman as "not distinguished," because he did not evidence enough loyalty and obedience to the administration, but he certainly did bring forth some real accountability in government.

I am going to yield back now, but I am going to be sticking around because I have more to say about this. I am

going to yield back now; but before I do, I just want to say that accountability breeds trust in government and trust in government promotes an active, engaged citizenry which is fundamental to democracy.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Thank you, Mr. ELLISON.

I think that, again, the example you gave is something that is on our front pages. We are hearing about it and we are listening.

Some people have said, well, what is the difference if someone is coming forward or if they are coming forward under oath. Well, I like to see, when someone comes forward, that they put their hand up and say, I swear to tell the whole truth. I can't imagine somebody wouldn't want to do that and what are they hiding if they are not prepared to do that. That seems to be a little battle going on between the Congress and its investigative authority and the President. But, again, I think you put your hand up, we are expecting the truth anyway, and I think that is an appropriate thing to do.

Mr. WELCH, our representative from Vermont in our class, why don't you share with us some of your thoughts on this.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. You know, it is very elemental: you get what you pay for, you account for what you buy, you are responsible to the people that hire you, you are responsible to the voters.

The opportunity that I have had about addressing some of these issues of accountability, maybe I can just tell a few stories about some of the hearings we have had, because it is worse than I expected. I come from Vermont, where we don't know how to waste things. We do it over recycle, reuse, do all of those things. But, you know, I am on the Oversight and Government Operations Committee, and we have had a number of hearings. And let me just tell a few stories, because I think rather than have me give some conclusions, let people just hear what some of the facts are.

We had some hearings on Iraq expenditures, Iraq relief money. And the Government Accountability Office has come up with an audit that suggests that a minimum of \$10 billion was wasted. But a couple of graphic examples came forward that just stunned me, frankly. One was that our Federal Reserve, at the orders of the government, sent \$12 billion in taxpayer money, in cash, loaded in skids, shrink wrapped in plastic cellophane over to Iraq. Now, why did that happen? It wasn't accounted for, but it was sent over there to pay salaries for people who were working in Iraqi ministries. And of course it happened at a time when there was a desperate effort on the part of the administration to show some progress in Iraq. And one of the ways of trying to show progress is that we have these ministries up and running and we have employees who are working and doing the basic jobs of

providing electricity, of dealing with pensions, and the things that are the functions of government.

Most of that money went missing because it turned out that some of it was literally handed out from the back of pick-up trucks in Baghdad, and it went to employees who were ghost employees. There were these various ministers in the Iraq Government who had a position of influence and saw an opportunity and they took it and made millions and millions of dollars of taxpayer money.

Now, you know, there is no Republican, there is no Democrat, there is no Independent who can fathom the idea of literally loading 347 tons of 100-dollar bills on C-147 transports and sending it to a foreign country to be handed out on street corners. At home, when I go to Vermont and I tell this story, I almost pinch myself because it is so astonishing that I am wondering whether it is true. Unfortunately, it is true. That is something that is happening with taxpayer dollars.

Another example: \$57 million was spent, Madam Speaker, awarded a contract to a Falls Church company that was going to construct housing in Baghdad, I think it was outside of the airport, it was going to be for, Congressman HODES is on that committee, so if I get some of these details wrong, you can correct me. But basically it was a housing contract that was going to provide housing for trainees of the Baghdad police. Not a bad idea. One problem: the housing was never built. The only residue of the \$57 million are hundreds of mobile homes that are now parked, unoccupied, on a tract of land outside the Baghdad Airport.

Now, even our government got embarrassed at this. And someone in the State Department suggested that what we should do, since we had all these homeless people in Baghdad but they couldn't live there, we didn't have housing units set up, we just had these facilities, the suggestion was why don't we donate these mobile homes to the victims of Katrina. And I had the opportunity to ask the question everybody else would ask, was it their plan to move the folks in New Orleans to Baghdad or was it their plan to move the mobile homes from Baghdad to New Orleans? That actually happened, all right.

A third example: this isn't so much about wasting taxpayer dollars; it is about violating basic rules of political integrity really.

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This whole question of global warming that people now recognize is real, it is urgent, and it is immediate. And I believe it is becoming a bipartisan consensus. We are not arguing whether it is true.

Well, we were arguing whether it was true. In our committee we had before us a press person that worked for the administration, and his job was to edit reports. Editing apparently included

taking scientific conclusions that were reached by scientists doing a scientific method, experimentation, drawing conclusions, maintaining academic integrity, and then putting them through what was an edit that was a political filter that actually changed the outcome of the scientific conclusions. And it was all intended to meet the political agenda of the administration that wanted to resist the conclusion that global warming was real, urgent, and immediate.

There are certain lines you can't cross, and that is one of them. The people of this country, obviously, are entitled to the benefit of honest science. Then we have to make a decision, all of us, about what to do with it, what policies should we pursue. But, bottom line, we have to have that integrity.

So these are just a few examples that I was exposed to as a Member of Congress serving on committees. And I think it reinforces the point that you are making because every American wants and is entitled to accountability, honesty in whatever element of the government we are working in, with our finances, with the services of scientists, and every other sector.

So my friend, Mr. KLEIN, those are a few of the experiences I have had serving on a committee here.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. The examples obviously go right back to what I think we all believe in strongly as Americans: common sense. Use common sense when you do anything. When you make decisions, use common sense. When you follow up, use common sense. I mean, the examples that you have cited are so extraordinary, they defy common sense.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. It is really true. And it is not a partisan thing. I am trying to figure this out because all these things did happen on the Republican watch. And it is a Congress that I think turned its back on its responsibility. But I sometimes wonder whether that concentration of all power and a reliance on ideology meant that if you had an ideology and you had a set of facts and if they didn't fit, you would throw the facts out and stick with the ideology. But it is not a productive and winning strategy. So I have been mystified by it.

And, Ron, you and I come out of State legislatures that are smaller, where Republicans and Democrats tend to work together. You have this close relationship and a lot of this stuff just doesn't happen there. So it is mystifying to me how it happens here. But I think it is a lot less likely to happen now that there is a cop on the beat and that our committees are just checking under the covers to see what is going on.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I am glad to see, Mr. WELCH, some of the legislation coming forward. Mr. WAXMAN and others have proposed eliminating or limiting no-bid contracts and putting all this out there. And I think this is a bipartisan issue. Nobody seems to have

any problem with it. But I think, as you said, it is long overdue.

Madam Speaker, we are joined by another Member of our freshmen group, and it is Mr. PERLMUTTER from Colorado. We are now geographically dispersed from the Southeast to the East to the Midwest and the West.

So why don't you give us some of your thoughts from the Colorado perspective.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Good evening to my friends from the freshmen class. And I just want to say I listened to my friend from Minnesota as well as my friend from Vermont, and the reason we are here, the reason Mr. ELLISON is here, the reason Mr. WELCH is here, Mr. KLEIN is here, Mr. HODES is here is because this Nation wanted checks and balances, and checks and balances means accountability.

There has been no accountability in Washington for the last 6 years; and as a result, we have had a variety of problems that have continued to arise again and again and again and again. And we can start with the no-bid contracts in Iraq, and the fact that there is some \$10 billion that has evaporated into the ether. That is the kind of thing that we have to stop, and that is the kind of thing that the people of America voted to bring a Democratic Congress into being so that there were checks and balances to these no-bid contracts; checks and balances to a loss, a complete loss, of \$10 billion, the whereabouts of which we are going to try to find, as the Congress of the United States of America is supposed to do, so that we act as a counterbalance to the executive branch. We aren't just here as a rubber stamp.

So start with Iraq. Let us talk about Katrina and the response that was just a horrible failure by this administration to a massive disaster in the United States of America, and the response after the disaster occurred has also been a disaster. As a member of the Financial Services Committee, it is clear that now we are 19 months after the hurricane which basically decimated New Orleans and many cities along the gulf coast, and yet we have not reconstructed, renovated, rebuilt much of the housing that was completely obliterated in that storm. So not only was the initial response a poor one, but after that the response has been very minimal and has to be improved. That is what checks and balances are about.

Checks and balances are when an administration, for whatever reason, releases the name of a CIA agent to punish her, to punish her husband, to whatever. It is completely wrong and needs to be stopped. And that is why people expect accountability in our government and they like checks and balances.

We have had revelations, Mr. KLEIN, over the past 2 or 3 weeks as to some of the conditions, particularly at Walter Reed but other veteran hospitals. Again, checks and balances and accountability would rein in excesses or

neglect, one or the other. We have seen far too much of it. And we, as part of this freshmen class, are bringing those checks and balances back.

Now, obviously the other side doesn't like it. My friends on the Republican side, today they have been complaining with no end as to the approach we are taking to bring benchmarks to this war in Iraq. And they are complaining and complaining and complaining. But, finally, there are going to be checks and balances on this President and the way he has conducted the war in Iraq.

We are supporting our troops. We are supporting the veterans, and we are bringing conditions and accountability to the administration and accountability to the Iraqi people, as it is time for them to pick up what we have been carrying now for the last 4 years.

The American people understand checks and balances. They were tired of one-party government that led to excesses and neglect. We are here to provide accountability. That is exactly what we are doing. The administration doesn't like it. My friends across the aisle don't like it. But that is what the people sent us here to do, and that is precisely what we are doing.

And with that, Mr. KLEIN, my friend from Florida, I would like to yield back to you or to any of our other friends who are on the floor with us tonight to talk about why we are here.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Thank you, Mr. PERLMUTTER. And I think we have heard from some of our friends and we have a lot of others within the Democratic side of the freshmen class. There are 41 of us. It is a big class this year, along with the rest of them, Republicans as well. And I think the message is pretty clear, the things you are talking about, the checks and balances. And, by the way, we have our checks and balances with the President. There are also checks and balances with all the agencies. And those are some of the things we are talking about tonight, to be sure things are operating the way they should. A big budget. A lot of money. It has to be spent properly. We feel very committed to that.

Mr. HODES, I know you want to add another thought here.

Mr. HODES. Madam Speaker, I was thinking about what our colleague Mr. WELCH talked about in terms of the investigation into the way in which the administration may have interfered for political purposes with the administration of justice by the United States Attorneys, causing the firing of United States Attorneys for political purposes. And it is interesting to me.

I come from New Hampshire, a small State. And probably many of the folks who may be listening tonight and many people in this Chamber, although there aren't too many, have heard of the name Daniel Webster. And Daniel Webster said a very important thing. He said: "There is nothing so powerful as the truth." And, really, that is what we are talking about.

Our colleague Mr. ELLISON talked about trust, and what we are really

talking about is bringing truth to government, bringing integrity to government, bringing openness, bringing transparency, authentic honesty back into the Halls of Congress and wherever oversight and accountability take us. And in terms of what is happening with the United States Attorney scandal, if we have learned one thing about this administration, it is how it responds to its critics. When someone says something they don't like, they get rid of them. The current U.S. Attorney scandal is really just the latest example.

And now folks are probably seeing that there is a conflict. The White House doesn't want people from the White House to come to Capitol Hill in the open light of day under oath to tell the truth to committees in Congress and committees in the Senate. And the question you have got to ask is, what is there to hide? Why not come, take an oath, tell the truth, and deal with the issues?

I started my legal career in New Hampshire as a prosecutor. I was hired by a good Republican, a man named David Souter, who is now sitting on the United States Supreme Court. And what I learned as a prosecutor from David Souter was that the critical thing about the prosecutor's role was that the prosecutor serves the people. My job was to stand up and serve the people of my State. The job of the U.S. Attorney is to stand up and represent the people of the United States. U.S. Attorneys don't represent the President. They don't represent any particular politician. They represent all of the people. And so their judgment has to be independent judgment in order to see that justice is done because what we are after is justice, not political retribution.

So you can imagine what happens in our great system of justice if instead of thinking about truth and justice, the United States Attorney is motivated by political influence. It perverts the system of justice. It means no justice can be had. So the investigations that are going on now, the accountability and oversight over the administration having the folks come down and talk to our committees is absolutely critical. It is fundamental to the preservation of the democratic fabric of this country, because if an administration, if White House officials can exert pressure on the United States Attorneys and remove their independence, then the people can't depend upon our system of justice.

So this may be one of the most important of the investigations and the new accountability that we are seeing in Congress. And, frankly, what I have said to folks back home is we are not going to let this go by without getting the answers. So when folks see the battle over the subpoenas, when they see the White House resisting having its people come down, folks are asking why. What are you afraid of? Let the truth come out. Let's find out what

happened. Now, that is accountability. That is oversight, and that is why the American people sent us here.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Well said. I know that Mr. ELLISON wanted to add something to that also.

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I would like to see if the gentleman from New Hampshire would yield to a question.

Mr. HODES. Absolutely.

Mr. ELLISON. Are you familiar with the terminology "a chilling effect"?

Mr. HODES. Absolutely, sir.

Mr. ELLISON. If a prosecutor, a minister of justice, is required to make sure he doesn't step on any toes of the administration or a particular political power or to make sure that he is not supposed to offend a particular party and if such a prosecutor were to do so, they might lose their job, could that have a chilling effect on the zealous prosecution of anybody who might violate the law?

Mr. HODES. Mr. ELLISON, that is called a Siberian express. That is not just a chilling effect. That is ice cubes in your shoes. That puts the fear in the prosecutor. Now, prosecutors are brave people, and these U.S. Attorneys were brave people standing up to do their job. But it has to have a chilling effect, and it is exactly what we are talking about. The independence of our United States Attorneys is the hallmark, the foundation of the Federal system of justice, and it has to be preserved. And that is why it doesn't matter whether the White House is Republican or Democrat. If this was a Democratic administration that was doing this, we would be doing the same thing if we were following Woodrow Wilson's advice and doing our job here in the Congress.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Mr. PERLMUTTER is about to jump through the microphone.

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Mr. PERLMUTTER. Madam Speaker, I do have a point that I want to make. The power of the Federal Government is awesome, and if anybody is on the receiving end of the power of the Federal Government, you have a tough hill to climb. So the reason the people expect their U.S. attorneys and their government to operate in truth and honesty and in justice is because that power is so great, and when it is abused, the trust of the people goes right out the door, and without the trust of the people, we don't have much of a government here.

The people, in their unbelievable wisdom, maybe that is a little over the top, but the people in their wisdom chose to elect a Democratic Congress and a Democratic Senate because they know checks and balances can stop that kind of abuse. And we are seeing it now.

It is a shame that we see that U.S. attorneys, who could have been fired for any reason except for reasons that might ultimately be unethical, were

being let go and were being threatened. That is just wrong, because the administration wanted to see the power of the Federal Government come down on somebody they didn't like.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Madam Speaker, we have one of our senior Members present, you can tell because the rest of us freshmen have dark hair, one of the senior Members who is a mentor to all of us. Mr. LARSON of Connecticut is one of the people that truly all of us look up to. Please join us.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for pointing out my age, but I am here primarily to salute you for continuing to do this kind of work.

I think, as Mr. PERLMUTTER pointed out, that the American public, who is always further ahead than the Congress is, found its voice in the November election, and you have given voice to the American people here in the people's Chamber, especially in the area of accountability. Because, quite frankly, as we debate today and throughout the remainder of this year, what we hear from our colleagues on the other side, and I don't question their patriotism or their love of country, and hopefully they don't question ours, but I do question their judgment.

Prior to you getting here, there has been a surrender of judgment on issues of oversight and review. So you are a breath of fresh air. You are the sunshine that needs to shine into every corner of this great institution of ours, because the people you are sworn to serve and who you have come here to represent, we are clearly proud in the leadership, of the efforts of this majority-making class that has set a new direction and a new course for this great country of ours.

I thank each and every one of you. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. We appreciate your guidance and counsel. As we are listening to many of the things, we are glad to add a new energy to the process here. You can see it here tonight.

I want to bring Mr. ELLISON back in. He was really making a passionate statement.

Mr. ELLISON. I also want to add my voice to great things to our leadership, which includes Mr. LARSON from the great State of Connecticut. He is an able and well-qualified leader, and it is just great to see him setting the proper tone for our class.

My question was this. We have several Members of the bar who are now in Congress, and I just wanted to throw a question out.

The President has offered to make a deal, and the deal is that the Democrats could interview, not under oath, not on the record, certain White House aides about this scandal regarding the firing of the U.S. attorneys who have been, it appears, perhaps fired for prosecutions they did do and for prosecutions that in their discretion they did not do that could somehow benefit

somebody who was running on the other side.

My question is, how does this deal stand in the light of this new spirit of accountability? This deal that would say, yes, White House aides can come in, no going on the record, no under oath, no transcript, behind closed doors, how does that deal stand in the light of this new spirit of accountability?

Mr. HODES. You know, I can give you a perspective on that. I won't take too long to do that.

My experience, and I had many years as a prosecutor and also many years as an attorney in court, is that the oath that you take to tell the truth is a powerful thing. It is a meaningful thing, and it is an important thing, because when a person swears to tell the truth, it has the effect of opening one's eyes to the importance and the majesty of the process that is involved in coming before a body, whatever body that is, and holding up your right hand and swearing to tell the truth.

What happens then is, frankly, the person who is going to tell the truth and swears to tell the truth is subjected to a host of requirements and possible penalties if they don't tell the truth. That also turns out to be a powerful motivator.

In this country we have trial by jury where witnesses come to tell the truth. We have investigations by Congress where witnesses come to tell the truth. And that really has proven to be the best, clearest, most open way in an open, transparent democratic government, like the one that we want to have and want to preserve, to get to the truth.

That is all we are asking. We are not intending to ask folks to say or do anything they didn't do or to tell us something that isn't so. We just want to get to the truth.

So a deal that has people behind closed doors without a transcript of the proceedings, with no way to review what has been said and no ability to do anything if they don't tell the truth, just doesn't cut it.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Obviously there are so many things to talk about in terms of the oversight and accountability. One of the things that I think really hit hard for a lot of the people, particularly if you served in the military, was the Walter Reed Hospital revelation.

Many of us have not served in the military. We may have some family members that receive veterans benefits and things like that. We think of people we ask to serve our country or may have served in the past. They are American heroes on so many levels, and they deserve the highest level of care. So it was shocking, and then shocking even more so when we found out this has been going on for a while.

I think this oversight we have been talking about, the accountability, the proper funding, the proper level of care, doctors, nurses, things like that, so

many people in the system are doing good jobs, but there are clearly deficiencies.

Mr. WELCH, you have some thoughts on that.

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Yes, I do. Every American is appalled at what was revealed, the degrading circumstances for our troops at Walter Reed. There were many things that were obviously disturbing about it, the vermin, the rodents, the peeling paint, the unsanitary conditions.

But that is the tip of the iceberg. What was really heartbreaking when you met the veterans was that they were completely lost and abandoned. We had people with head injuries that had very severe cognitive problems who were in an administrative morass and nightmare. They were abandoned really for 4 months before anyone knew that they were there.

We had amputees who were a mile away from where they needed to be without prosthetics and were supposed to somehow find a way to walk to where their doctors' appointments were. The administrative breakdown was enormous, and it really reflected a culture of disregard.

One of the things that came out as we started investigating this situation out at Walter Reed was that the breakdown of services was very predictable because there was a substantial reduction in the number of personnel that were needed to provide the services.

Step one, you know that if you are having significant increased military activity in Iraq and Afghanistan, you have to anticipate you will have an increasing need for services to treat injured soldiers.

Two, in response to that, the government, the Bush administration, following its ideological hard line about privatization, put to bid certain services that were being offered at Walter Reed. It turned out that the government workers who were government workers had an opportunity to bid on that. They had the lowest bid. Mysteriously, and we still haven't gotten to the bottom of this, Madam Speaker, their bid was adjusted upward \$7 million, not by them, but by the reviewer of bids. They then came in second, and the contract was awarded to a private company, IAP Worldwide Services.

Now, we don't know what the bottom-line connection is. What we do know is the following: Number one, what had been personnel of 300 went to 50. Now, it is cheaper to have 50 people on the payroll than it is to have 300, but you also don't get the job done, especially when the number of wounded soldiers is increasing. So that is shocking right away.

Number two, this company, IAP, had all kinds of problems, even though it received millions and millions of dollars doing Katrina relief.

Number three, the head of the IAP Company is a former very high executive in Halliburton, a company that I just have to say has ripped off the

American taxpayer and made billions of dollars on this war in Iraq.

Now, how is it that there is a disposition that is so powerful that you put privatization and ideology ahead of a bottom line, the nonnegotiable bottom line that you are going to provide the services that our men and women in the service returning from Afghanistan, returning from Iraq need? It is absolutely and completely unacceptable. That shouldn't be a bipartisan thing. We ought to be doing whatever it takes to make certain that our men and women do get the services that they need.

Lack of accountability makes people lax. They are not looking over their shoulder knowing that somebody is going to be checking to find out if they are getting the job done, if they are ripping off taxpayers, if they are performing up to standards.

That is a major responsibility. We are candid with one another. We know that people are pretty fed up with government. The reason, there are a lot of reasons for it, but one of them is they don't have confidence that we are taking care of their taxpayer dollars. That gets so embedded in people's sense that they lose faith that the government will be there when there is a Katrina, when our soldiers are coming home from Iraq. Our job, together, is to restore that confidence by performance, not by talk; by accountability.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I agree with that.

Mr. PERLMUTTER, I think you wanted to add something to that as well.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. I think I was elected to bring change to this Nation, a new direction to the Nation and positive things to this Nation, whether it is energy independence or assist with a whole variety of things concerning change in the direction in Iraq. I did not come looking to go on a witch hunt and to continue to do that.

The people obviously wanted checks and balances. They wanted oversight and accountability. Something like Walter Reed or something like we have just had with the Justice Department, those are things that just appeared now. These are not us going back and trying to dredge up old issues. These are things that have happened because of the neglect of the administration. These are things that appear, and we need to deal with them now.

I think the question is judgment. Before there wasn't good judgment. There wasn't oversight. There wasn't accountability. There weren't checks and balances. The people expect this from its Congress and from its Senate with respect to the White House.

Walter Reed is a shame. It is a shame. It is supposed to be one of our finest medical institutions anywhere in America or the world. It is there for our bravest men and women who have served us valiantly and have been harmed and hurt in a variety of ways, psychologically, physically, and we need to make sure that a place like

Walter Reed really does provide the care and the service and the best quality of medical services that we can provide, and not what has occurred.

The Congress today is something that gives Americans a chance for accountability, gives us a chance to deal with this administration on a straight-up basis, and the fact we are here, we are going to see improvements, just the fact that we are here, because it isn't just a rubber stamp anymore. There really is oversight.

□ 2045

Mr. ELLISON. Madam Speaker, let me say in these final few moments tonight, I want to say there have been over 91 hearings on Iraq alone. But we have also had oversight hearings on Hurricane Katrina. Several of them, in fact. Subcommittee Chair Waters went down to New Orleans to get the real story from people who are living it.

On the Committee on Financial Services, we are going to be talking about predatory lending. Today we talked about executive pay and shining some light on that issue.

On the Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee Chairman NADLER held a hearing on civil rights enforcement, what is the Attorney General's civil rights division doing in the area of civil rights enforcement.

I have participated in hearings on the increase in immigration fees and how those fees are going up in a precipitous manner and questions were asked and officials were made to answer.

So as I said before, this is a time of accountability. We are slowly trying to restore the public's faith in government. They have a right to believe that their government is honest, fair dealing, accountable and transparent. I couldn't have been prouder in the committee hearings I personally have been a part of on issues from the National Security Letters and the FBI executive pay, civil rights enforcement, immigration; there has been a whole range.

I think the story is not necessarily one thing like the Valerie Plame incident or Walter Reed or the U.S. Attorneys; but there is a prevailing, systematic reexamination of how government does business. I am proud to be associated with it.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. Thank you, Mr. ELLISON. Mr. HODES.

Mr. HODES. Thank you, Mr. KLEIN. It has been a pleasure to be with you here tonight and have this conversation with the people of this country about what oversight and accountability brings to government.

I started my remarks this evening with a quotation from former President Woodrow Wilson. And I want to go back further in time to end my remarks with a quote from John Stuart Mill who said: "The proper office of a representative assembly is to watch and control the government, to throw the light of publicity of its acts, to compel a full exposition and justification of all of them which anyone considers questionable."

And it is that light of publicity, the light that we shine with accountability that helps preserve this government and leads to an open and transparent government. I am privileged to serve on the Information Subcommittee of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee. One of the things that we did which is essential in terms of the accountability of government, we brought to the floor and passed in this Congress in a bipartisan way much-needed reforms to the Freedom of Information Act. It is an act which every citizen can take advantage of to gain information about the government, to hold the government accountable, find documents and information that is the citizens' right to have.

What we did was we restored the Freedom of Information Act to its rightful place where there is now once again a presumption in this government that the government should be open and disclose to its citizens what is going on, what it has for information and documents unless those documents fit into certain narrow exemptions. This has been a critical thing that we have done in this Congress.

I am proud to be a new Member and working hard for accountability. And when the American people see that they truly have an accountability Congress working for them to eliminate waste, fraud, abuse and corruption, to save taxpayer money, they will once again regain trust in their elected officials and in the people's House.

Mr. KLEIN of Florida. I thank you, Mr. HODES, for being part of our freshman class and our working group that is going to be here every week. The 110th Congress is strengthening oversight, and the proof is in the pudding.

People can say, I have lost confidence in Congress, but look at what we are doing. We have had dozens of hearings in the Foreign Affairs Committee just on the ability of working with our diplomatic efforts and all of the strategies in dealing with Iraq on the nonmilitary side. In the past, there have not been enough opportunities to do that.

We've had hearings on the veterans health care crisis and Walter Reed, the politicalization of the Justice Department and how wrong that is and that needs to be cleaned up, the Hurricane Katrina response and the things we are doing right now, passing legislation to truly get people back up on their feet. Global warming and energy independence was mentioned, and the fact is that we are getting down to the things we need to do as Americans to deal with our energy needs and the fact that there is an environmental impact. And, of course, upcoming hearings of oversight on everything from Valerie Plame to oil and gas royalties and National Guard and intelligence.

This is part of the mandate of the last election. I look forward to working with our freshman class. We will be doing this every week. We certainly want input from our constituents back home. Tell us what you think we can

be doing. We look forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats to build on this theme of accountability and oversight.

DEMOCRAT BUDGET AND TAX INCREASE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. SCHWARTZ). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, I want to talk about two issues tonight. I am going to start out by talking about the Democrat budget and the tax increases that they are proposing, and I want to talk a little bit about the emergency supplemental. The two are tied together in many ways in terms of the hypocrisy we are seeing come forth from the Democratic leadership.

The House Budget Committee is in the midst of marking up the fiscal year 2008 budget resolution. As it currently stands, the proposed budget assumes the expiration of the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, which have given us this vibrant economy that we have. It is going to create, therefore, a \$392.5 billion tax increase, the largest tax increase in American history.

It proposes no changes to slow the exploding growth of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid that would result in deficit reduction.

Those 2001 and 2003 tax cuts, as I have said, have helped create a very vibrant economy. They produced real tax decreases in the tax burden on North Carolina's married couples, single parents and families. Almost every taxpayer in North Carolina, low income, single, married or self-employed would lose valuable tax cuts under the assumption in the Democrat budget proposal.

It is not a real surprise, though. We knew this was going to happen. It is business as usual for the Democrats and proves that their promises to be fiscally responsible are just empty rhetoric. I have said before this is a smoke-and-mirrors Congress, and that is exactly what it is.

It would return us to the Democrats' beloved tax-and-spend model for government. They have willfully abandoned their pledge for fiscal responsibility. They pledged to do PAYGO budget rules and spending restraint to curb the deficit, and they have done none of that.

Last year, Republicans rejected \$14 billion in nonemergency spending that the Senate tried to attach to the emergency troop funding bill, but the Democrats are doing just the opposite.

Now I want to talk about the supplemental. The emergency supplemental, the Democrats said they would never try to coerce people into voting for legislation they didn't want to vote for. Last week they said they weren't whipping this bill, they were just trying to talk people into voting for it. Well, if this is gentle persuasion, I would hate