

violence, in 1996, a few miles north of where my family lives, a man in my district was gunned down while he was driving up a road called Silver Strand by two hitmen who had the gall to stop and finish him off at point-blank range and then throw the gun into the car and proceed to turn around and drive back into Mexico.

This is a drug war that Americans have to wake up to. This month the President will consider about certifying Mexico and seeing if Mexico is doing enough. Mexico, Mr. Speaker, has sent troops to the border. They have armed military personnel at the border to fight the drug lords. They have disbanded their old police force and replaced them with a whole new system, because they are serious about drug interdiction. Mexico is intercepting guns and drugs every 50 to 100 miles in Mexico.

What are we doing? The administration has only hired half of the authorized border patrol agents that this Congress has asked them to hire. The administration refuses to talk about doing on the American side what Mexico has done on their side, and that is to bring the troops into the works. We who have talked so much that we are serious about the drug traffic have not done as much as Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, today there are 10,000 troops, American troops, in Kosovo and Bosnia for peacekeeping. What my family would like to know and my neighbors would like to know is when are we going to get some peacekeeping troops? When is our neighborhood going to be given the priority to fight the drug lords and the alien smugglers?

It is time that we need to emphasize that American resources have the first obligation to defend Americans on American soil and also to protect them from, not only the violence of the drug smugglers, but also the drugs themselves. This is a war that we cannot stand alone on, and we cannot point fingers south of the border.

I hope that the President certifies Mexico, not because they are doing as good as they should. They should do more. But I think we should certify it at the same time we point to ourselves that we need to do more. I hope the President joins with us.

The gentleman from Florida (Chairman MICA) is going to have a hearing in San Diego, California, on March 7. I hope that a lot of my colleagues will consider coming to that hearing so they get firsthand experience of what is really happening on the frontline of the drug war.

The gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) have been very, very supportive on this. But, Mr. Speaker, let us remember Alfredo; and let us remember the people who are dying on both sides of the border, and let us not talk about we are willing

to fight the drug war, but we are not willing to do half as much as our colleagues in the south.

I ask us to make the commitment of using our military, using our resources, using whatever it takes to win this war so nobody else will have to be killed, no one else will be slaughtered, and America can look up and look at our neighbors to the south and to the north and say we are doing everything we humanly can to stop this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say sincerely my condolences to the De La Torre family. There is nothing that can cover up the pain and the suffering that they are seeing on their streets. Hopefully, we can keep it off our streets.

REFORM OF OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS

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

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Congress and past member of the Maryland State legislature, I have witnessed and been engaged in numerous debates on how to reform our Nation's classrooms. I certainly believe we do everything we can to ensure that we provide adequate funding and employ effective teaching techniques that will raise the academic output of our students.

However, even the most funding and the best teachers will not produce successful students if there are significant discipline problems that distract students from their studies.

So I come to the floor of this House to pay special tribute to a group of men and women that play a crucial role in keeping students in my district on track, the Baltimore City Police School Force.

Under the leadership of Chief Leonard Hamm, this public school police force is charged with providing protection and safety services to 108,000 students, 12,500 personnel, 187 schools, and 1,300 acres of land around Baltimore City, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. As a result of their efforts, there has been a dramatic drop in the amount of assaults and arrests in the Baltimore City school system.

During Chief Hamm's first year on the force in 1997, the number of arrests in Baltimore City schools dropped 45 percent from the first half to the second half of the school year. Assaults are down 34 percent and arrests are down a remarkable 57 percent.

During the last 2 school years, there have only been six incidents involving a gun. This is a remarkable turnaround from 1994 when there were 77 incidents involving firearms. Looking at individual schools, the change is even more dramatic. We have seen the number of

disruptive incidents and violence drop by as much as 70 percent in some of the City's most troubled schools.

As we look back on the past year, filled with school violence, this turnaround gives me hope that our Nation's schools can be safe havens and productive learning environments that our parents expect.

Moreover, our youth should be stimulated by more than just reading, writing, and arithmetic. I cannot imagine any school experience without various afterschool activities, clubs and special events. Sadly, our school halls have become increasingly void of such activities, but an amazing thing has happened in Baltimore as a result in the drop in crime and fear of crime: school social activities have made a comeback.

School pep rallies and dances have been banned for several years because of safety concerns. But this past November, Southern High School had its first pep rally and dance in 6 years.

Dances, pep rallies, and sporting events foster pride in the school. If students have a sense of pride in their school, they will be less likely to want to disrupt it. These activities also enrich our students' overall experience.

So what is the secret to Chief Hamm's success? You might think success has something to do with high-tech surveillance cameras and metal detectors, but you will not find any metal detectors or cameras in Baltimore City public schools. Instead, Chief Hamm has installed a policy fostering mutual respect between police, students, and faculty.

He believes that when police earn the respect of students, students will respect the police and the school. Chief Hamm has also made it his mission to nurture a sense of ownership of the school by students. He believes that crime in school can be reduced when students respect their school in the same way they respect their own home. This strategy has led to the safest school environment in Baltimore City schools in many years.

In light of these successful efforts and hard work, I will be presenting the Baltimore City School Police Department with an Elijah E. Cummings U-TURN award. This acronym, U-TURN, has the obvious meaning of changing direction. However, each letter in this award describes what has taken place on the police force; U, unique; T, techniques; U, used; R, restore; and N, non-violence.

The Baltimore City School Police have certainly responded to a problem in a manner deserving of recognition and praise. I applaud Chief Hamm and his force and look forward to a further reduction in crime and disruption in our schools.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I stand ready and pledge to do everything I can as a Member of this body to help the Baltimore City School Police force and

other forces throughout the Nation to ensure that our children can safely prepare for their promising futures. As someone once said, our children are the living messages we send to a future we will never see. Congratulations, Chief Hamm, and congratulations to the Baltimore City School Police Force.

CONCERN REGARDING RELIGIOUS DEBATE IN OUR COUNTRY

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

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my very deep concern about the character of the debate in our country today with regards to religion.

For the past 5 years, I have been very involved in the Irish peace process, and at the root of the hatred and the mistrust in northern Ireland is the differences in religion. We can see what damage and the trouble that it has caused to that country. Indeed, our own troops have been involved in Kosovo separating warring religious and national groups.

We are witnessing a war in Russia that has a great deal also to do with religion between Christians and Muslims. To continue this debate in our country with elected leaders criticizing religious leaders and religious leaders criticizing political leaders and political leaders criticizing other political leaders for taking sides with other religious leaders, I thought we had put that behind us. I thought that that sort of debate in this country was over, but obviously it is not.

Hubert Humphrey said a long time ago, the great happy warrior Democrat, he who throws mud loses ground. Unfortunately, there is a lot of mud being thrown around today, and a lot of it regarding this issue of religion.

I would like to address my comments to the choice by Speaker HASTERT of our chaplain. I do not understand why anyone, anyone would be critical of the Speaker's choice. It is a very personal decision. He made a choice and now he is being accused of being anti-Catholic.

I cannot fathom why anyone would raise that issue. He is an honorable man. He is a decent and honest man, and he made an honest decision. And we should respect that decision.

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But it seems that people will reach at anything to get political gain, and it is a downward spiral. If this debate continues, we are headed nowhere but down with a very difficult situation ahead of us and no way to get out of it.

Let me just give my colleagues a little history regarding the choice of chaplain in the Congress. For the first 100 years of this country, we had 50

chaplains. Basically, one chaplain for each Congress. For the last 105 years, since around 1895, we have had five chaplains. Five. So the duration of their term in this position has become much, much longer. It is a different position than it was. And I am not so sure that the original Congresses did not have it right, one chaplain per Congress, one Congress per chaplain.

But to make the political points here, the Democratic party, the modern Democratic party, which began in the middle of the 18th century, has appointed 20 chaplains in its time. Republicans, the modern Republican Party, beginning around the same time, has appointed eight chaplains. In none of those cases, those 28 chaplains that were appointed, was there a Catholic priest appointed. There has never been an outcry before. Never been an outcry.

There are Members of this Congress currently criticizing Speaker HASTERT for his choice of a Protestant minister, a Presbyterian, criticizing him for that choice when they were seated in this House when other speakers appointed Protestant chaplains. Where was the outcry then? Where was the Democratic party, the criticism then? Why is it coming now to Speaker HASTERT? I think he made a wise decision. I think he made a wise choice, and I think we owe him the respect and the honor of making that decision.

The Speaker tried to open this process up. He appointed a committee to help him to make the choice. The committee came back, it was a bipartisan committee, with three names. Three individuals. No rank, no unanimous support for one, but they gave the Speaker three choices. He made a choice among those three, and he picked Reverend Wright. Maybe it was a mistake to open it up to a so-called democratic process.

Obviously, I could talk a lot longer about this, but suffice to say that we owe the Speaker the respect that he is due. We owe the choice that he has made the respect that that is due. And I would urge people to stop throwing mud and to stop this downward spiral of anti-religious talk in our country.

ALLEGATIONS OF RELIGIOUS BIAS AMONG REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP IS PURE BUNK

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

Mr. FOLEY. Mr. Speaker, I want to follow along with the words echoed by my colleague from New York.

I am a Roman Catholic as well, and I do not understand this all of a sudden finger pointing over choices of chaplains or questioning people's beliefs. I personally work very closely with the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT)

as Speaker of this House. In fact, he was the one that nominated me to be on the Committee on Ways and Means, considerably one of the most important committees of this Congress. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARMEY), another fine gentleman who I work with every single day as majority leader, and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), and others who occupy the office of majority whip. I am a deputy whip. So I can assure every American that is interested in listening that none of these leaders indicates any bias towards anybody of any faith.

Now, I have a disagreement on at least the position of chaplain, and I long ago advocated we not have a chaplain; that we allow visiting chaplains from around the country so we would have the opportunity to have a Rabbi and have a Protestant minister or a Baptist minister and a Catholic priest. I personally go to my own church for salvation, and I do not choose to use the services of the chaplain.

At times I question having one, inasmuch as we do not allow kids to pray in school yet we start every day with a prayer. So I find it a little complicated. But at the same time I do not doubt for one minute that the choice made by the Speaker was a valid, genuine choice on that gentleman's part to serve this entire body, not to single out and not to ratchet up the debate.

It is amazing. I hear the other side of the aisle all of a sudden acting as if they are for all Catholics. If we look at the voting records of most of the Members, we would probably have to question considerably whether they maintain the very principles and edicts that the Catholic churches espouses. There is a complete virtual disagreement on virtually every issue the Catholic church uses and would be measured on a scorecard if you had to have one on that basis.

I ask the Members to please stop this finger pointing. Stop the finger pointing and questioning people's values and beliefs. When Spike Lee made the comment about going to shoot Charleton Heston, I did not see any long-standing parade of speakers urging the rejection of this kind of thought. They sat quietly by and allowed that to be part of the mainstream dialogue.

When I hear Louis Farakhan on the mall marching against people and calling people names, I do not hear this outrage from Members on the other side of the body screaming about how intolerant people are. No, they are silent. But they can use something like this as a wedge issue.

George W. Bush goes to Bob Jones University certainly not to espouse or advocate positions held by one man that leads that church. There were thousands and thousands of students that wanted to hear the nominee, potentially, of the Republican Party address the issues that are important to