Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to your attention the outstanding career of Chuck Kurtz, who on July 20th concludes a distinguished 33-year career with The Olathe Daily News, which serves my congressional district. Chuck started with The Daily News as a photographer, and later moved to sports writer, sports editor, features editor, seniors editor, and concluded his career as managing editor.

At a retirement party that will be held at The Daily News’ office on this Friday, the following letter will be presented to Chuck on my behalf. I am pleased to have this opportunity to share this correspondence with my colleagues:

DEAR CHUCK,

I want to add my voice to the chorus of those who are praising you on this occasion of your retirement.

I am using the term “retirement” loosely, because I think we all know that though you may enjoy a few weeks of fishing or travel, you will soon return to making a positive impact upon the lives of those around you—just as you have done for so many years at The Daily News.

I have enjoyed working with you over the years, first as Johnson County District Attorney, and now as a Member of Congress. Needless to say, we have often found ourselves on opposite sides of the issues. You wouldn’t be the Chuck Kurtz I know if we would have agreed on everything!

But no matter the issue or whether or not we agreed, you always understood that there were at least two sides to every story, and that there may be good reasons for individuals to believe and act as they do. I have seen this not only in your writing, but also in your fictions—you listen, ask questions, provide different points of view, and have always given me an opportunity to make my case. I appreciate the fact that, if you disagree, you do so in a reasonable and civil way, and do your best to reflect every side of the issue for the benefit of your readers.

You have not only brought a sense of civility to your profession, but you have also brought something of which those in my line of work are often in need—common sense. This is why I will miss you most, and why I think the readers of The Daily News will, also.

Common sense says you shouldn’t forget why you do what you do, and you never have. One can tell you are a journalist because you think the readers of The Daily News will, also.

As regard Columbia, our government chose the latter, carrying out a classic end-run around the prohibition by funding a war conducted by mercenaries—hundreds of U.S. citizens working for private military contractors like DynCorp, Airsnc and Military Professional Resources Inc.

At the moment, the number of these mercenaries is capped at 500. But the first new provision, if it becomes law, does away with these restrictions. The other provision removes language that says “weapons or ammunition” while engaged in narcotics-related activities. It’s a deadly cocktail: unlimited private forces armed with unlimited weapons.

For more than a year, critics of our government’s drug-war aid package to Colombia (now hovering at $2 billion) have been warning of the mission creep that threatens to embed us ever deeper in that country’s 4-decade-old civil war.

Well, the slippery slope just got greased. The House of Representatives is about to vote on the $15.2-billion foreign operations spending bill. Buried amid the appropriations for many worthwhile projects such as the Peace Corps and international HIV/AIDS relief is a legislative land mine. It comes in the form of a couple of innocuous-sounding lines that could lead to a massive escalation of U.S. involvement in Colombia’s unwinnable war.

Contained in the section of the bill earmarking $676 million for “counterdrug activities” in the region are the following eye-glazing provisions: “These fund are in addition to amounts otherwise available for such purposes and are available without regard to section 3204(b)(1)(B) of Public Law 106–246. Provided further, that section 482(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 shall not apply to funds appropriated under this heading.”

“Got that? I didn’t think so.”

Legislative gobbledegook does not get any gobbler, but once the meaningless numbers and letters are decoded, and the statutory dots connected, the ominous significance of those provisions becomes all too clear. If approved, they make possible the unlimited buildup of “mercenaries” and the removal of any constraints on the kinds of weapons they can use.

Under current law, the number of U.S. military personnel that can be deployed in Colombia is limited to 500, and they are prohibited from engaging in combat. But as politicians discovered long ago, there are two parts to every law: the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Provided further, that section 482(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 shall not apply to funds appropriated under this heading.”

Well, the slippery slope just got greased.

Of course, it’s not just the numbers that are deceptive. The Colombia provision is just one of hundreds of similar provisions. The bill is a virtual catalog of them,的规定. It’s a deadly cocktail: unlimited private forces armed with unlimited weapons.