

world and toward the spread of democracy has occurred under the extraordinary leadership of our President. We had a chance last night to celebrate that and to commend him for a job well done in last night's State of the Union.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina is recognized.

PROVIDING FOR INJURED AND FALLEN SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Mrs. DOLE. Mr. President, we must do everything possible to show our military men and women and their families how much we appreciate and honor their service. Last week I was proud to cosponsor legislation introduced by Senators ALLEN, SESSIONS and LIEBERMAN reaffirming the commitment of this Congress to our military men and women and their families. This effort has received my strongest support, and thanks to the endorsement of the Leadership and the work over the past years by many of my other colleagues, an increase in financial support to the families of men and women killed in combat could soon be a reality.

When a soldier pays the ultimate sacrifice, no amount of money can ease the grief of his or her family, but a significant increase in the benefits paid to our military families sends a strong message of our gratitude and support.

Currently, when a service member is killed in combat, the family receives only \$12,420. This is simply unacceptable. We are a strong, prosperous Nation, a Nation that honors and respects our sons and daughters in the Armed Services. We can and must do better to provide for the families of those who've lost their lives. The current proposal to increase what is called the "death gratuity" to \$100,000 is most certainly a step in the right direction.

This increase, retroactive to October 2001, is critically important not only to the families who lose loved ones, but to soldiers currently serving or those who are considering enlisting. It sends the message that we value their service, and should something happen to them, their families will be generously cared for.

Maxine Crockett of Fayetteville, NC, lost her husband, Staff Sergeant Ricky L. Crockett, to a bomb blast in Baghdad in January of last year. She and her 15-year-old daughter were left not only grief-stricken but worried about surviving financially with the loss of a provider. Maxine told the Raleigh News & Observer, "When it comes down to just one income, this [increase] would really help by giving you the time to get back on your feet."

When a family does receive the heartbreaking notification that a loved one was killed in action, they are understandably overcome with grief. In

the midst of their devastation, they are required to make many decisions. Casualty Assistance Officers play a critical role in helping them through this process. I had the privilege of meeting many of these dedicated, impressive men and women personally at Fort Bragg last year. These officers are there with the families following notification, through funeral preparations, burial and the process of determining benefits and compensation. They assist when any problems arise and literally go above and beyond their job description. And long after, these families know these officers can be contacted as concerns arise. This is the kind of service and compassion these families deserve.

We also have a responsibility to assist those servicemen and women who are seriously injured and their families. With the improvements in body armor and heroic efforts of our military medical teams both in theater and at home, so many more of our soldiers are surviving, but often with debilitating wounds. We must ensure they are taken care of, physically, emotionally and financially.

I am so pleased that the Department of Defense today launched a new operations center for these deserving heroes and their families to provide them with the necessary support as they transition back to active duty or into civilian life. This center will integrate the programs currently sponsored by various military and Government services, making it easier for these individuals to access the medical, counseling, educational, and financial services they need and deserve.

Our injured and fallen heroes and their families must be a top priority. They deserve no less.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, last night we had the occasion on the House floor to hear a speech from the Commander in Chief, the President of the United States of America—a speech that to me was about two overriding themes—one, freedom, and the other, security—and two primary subjects—one, the war in Iraq and its liberation, and the other, the security of the American people and their retirement.

To the first, I simply say, as eloquent as the President's speech was, as dramatic as his words were, and as many of them as there were, the most powerful message last night was not words, but a picture. For when Janet Norwood embraced Sofia, the President stopped speaking, the Chamber erupted, tears flowed, but not a word was said. If the saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" was ever appropriate, it was on that occasion.

I am very proud of our men and women in the Armed Forces, I am proud of this Congress, I am proud of this President, and I am proud of the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, and all freedom-loving people.

The second subject the President addressed was Social Security, which is all about freedom and security, and it is the subject about which I will make my few remarks on this morning.

I would like to begin these remarks by asking you to visualize another picture. Think about how powerful Sofia and Janet were, and think about this picture. Picture the year 2042 or 2052, if you like. Picture you in your living room or your den. Picture you looking at your son or your daughter and their grandchildren squarely in the eye, and picture explaining to them that when you had the chance 37 years earlier, you did nothing to secure their future.

There are those who say Social Security does not have a crisis today, but it has a big crisis tomorrow. When I entered into my campaign for the Senate, I ended every speech by saying "I will soon be 60"—and I am 60 now—"and the rest of my life is about my children and my grandchildren." So it is true about all of us in this room. To do nothing is unacceptable if you visualize that picture 37 years from now, if you look at your daughter or your son or their grandchildren. I want to talk about Elizabeth Sutton Isakson and Jack Hardy Isakson, both born last year, both of whom will be 37 in 2042 when I would have to give them the "good" news—if this Congress did nothing—that America's promise on Social Security is gone, that by law their benefits are lowered and, by absolute practice, their taxes will be raised.

I heard someone in opposition to reform last night criticize the President for saying it is their money. They said it is not their money. They said, "It is my mother's money." That is what is wrong with the system. We have robbed Peter to pay Paul. We are running out of Peters, and we are getting a greater number of Pauls.

Now, personal accounts and a nest egg in the future are a viable decision that should not be criticized and rejected out of hand. In fact, I will tell you an interesting little fact. Had the United States of America 70 years ago invested the surpluses of the payroll tax paid by the American workers throughout that time, we would not have the problem today. But we robbed Peter to pay Paul.

There are those who say personal accounts are a gamble. Arithmetic is a fact, and facts are stubborn. In the 70-year period since the advent of Social Security, pick any 20 consecutive years that you like and pick any traditional conservative investment model that you like, and in that 20-year period of time, it exceeded the return on Social Security four to five times.