

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague from Ohio to get to those e-mails. I want to make sure we talk about if someone starts in a company with a hammer and two nails, and then works for that company, not own that company, but that paid into Social Security, and maybe became the foreman or forewoman or whatever it may be, the supervisor, that that individual is counting on one thing. They may not be able to count on the company pension plan, but they can count on Social Security being there for them. Democrat, Republican, Independent, Green Party, what have you, it is there. And that is what it is intended for.

If my colleague from Ohio could, so we can let some of the folks know that our e-mails, of course we cannot bring in the reams of paper and e-mails, and I am not being funny, I am just saying that I want to commend those that have e-mailed in and voiced their opinions.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, just to remind everyone of the e-mail real quick: 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov. Send us your thoughts on this.

We have a couple here: one from a Harvey Johnson from Baltimore, who says the "issue of privatization of Social Security hits home with my mom, the age of 81, recently widowed, now lives on a total income of \$1,000 a month from just Social Security. When you factor in the cost of much-needed medicine, bare essentials such as rent, utilities, and food, I still supplement her income nearly 50 percent just to make minimal ends meet. The thought of a drastic reduction in her benefit would force us to make even further tough decisions, including possibly the loss of some of her independence if she were to need to move again. Frankly, the more I hear of the President's proposals, the more upset I get."

That is from Harvey.

Earl watched on C-SPAN last week. He wanted us to make sure to mention that the "current system also provides disability and survivor benefits."

Earl, we did talk about that. We took note of your e-mail here, and we did make sure we mentioned that here tonight. "If a younger worker becomes disabled for any reason, he or she would be guaranteed a disability benefit, including benefits to their dependents."

That is the thing. We are borrowing the money from China, and we have to compete with this great rising power in the world. And if we do not have every person on the field playing for us, we are at a disadvantage. This is also an economic argument, not even about compassion. Although some of us may feel that way, this is an economic argument. If one of your parents dies prematurely and society does not come in

and step in and try to help, that is one less person on our team.

One last one here, Mr. Speaker, from Karan who says she watched the '30-Something Dems' last week and related to a lot of the topics: taxes, deficits, veterans, and said "after watching last week's talk, I feel more at home with the Democrats and would love to know more about how to become involved."

So we are getting people engaged in the process.

Mr. WEINER. And let me just reiterate, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps I have a less cynical perspective than my colleague does.

I think something good is coming out of this in that our generation is remembering again that there was a time in this country, in the early to mid-1930s, where we had a poverty rate among seniors that was approaching 40 percent; that we had just come through the tremors of the Great Depression that had left, frankly, our economy in a shambles, and there were certain things we did that made fundamental sense that have endured throughout time.

People sometimes do not understand what the Social Security is and what it is supposed to be. But if we can start to animate a discussion in this country among people of all generations about why this is important and why we should not be so sanguine about the idea that we are paying for a lot of this by borrowing out of Social Security today. If the President was so concerned about how solid the Social Security would be, one thing he could do is stop borrowing from that trust fund today.

So I think, frankly, having this discussion is going to turn out to be very salutary if we prevail. If we do not prevail, and if the President is successful in pulling hundreds of millions of dollars out of the Social Security system, we are quite literally, our generation, will be the one to live to regret it first. Every other generation since the 1930s, our parents and grandparents, have benefited from this program, and we are the ones that will wind up having to fix it.

Mr. Speaker, so much of what we do around here, unfortunately, is going to be left to others; my colleague's young child is going to be left to clean up the mess being created by the 107th, 108th Congress; and it is very important that we keep doing this.

It is also important that people continue to send their e-mails to 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, because for every letter that we get, there is evidence that there are 100 or 200 that we are not actually receiving.

One final point on this: for those of a generation who are not yet ready to get Social Security, this is an economic issue for you today, but it is also an economic issue for you tomorrow. Just the same way you would be

smart in investing in your 401(k), we should be smart about legislating.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their time and for being allowed to address the American people.

IRAQ WATCH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CONAWAY). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, we are moving swiftly into the Iraq Watch time, and many other Members will be down here shortly to talk about a couple of different issues, one would be the issue of Iraq that has been going on for some time in a working group here.

Congress has been talking about this issue over and over and trying to bring some awareness and some clarity to many of the people of this country who are very concerned with what is going on in Iraq. I would also like to, since we claimed the time here, I would also like to talk a little bit about the veterans and a little bit about what is going on here with the budget.

As we just talked about, and as the gentleman from New York articulated and the gentleman from Florida articulated as well, there is some real pressure being put on the budget here in the United States Congress, and I did mention it towards the end. One of the programs that is going to take a real beating here in the 2005 budget is going to be the issue of veterans.

Now, the President has made a formal request of this body for another \$80 billion to help fund the Iraq war, and this will take the grand total over \$300 billion that we will spend on the Iraq war. And that is just today. That is up to this point. This \$80 billion may get us through the year, but some analysts say it may not. We are going to be over \$300 billion in what we have spent in Iraq.

Now, there is nobody in this Chamber who will not support the troops, who need our support. Many of us have argued, and I was on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in the last Congress, many of us argued vehemently that we need to fully fund veterans health care in the United States of America. If we are going to continue to say there are other priorities in the budget, or that a certain amount of people who make a certain amount of money, a lot of money, the Bill Gateses of the world, should somehow get a tax cut and that we should do it on the backs of the veterans of the United States of America, and tell them their copay is going to go from \$2 to \$7, \$7 to \$15; that their annual fees are going to be increased up to \$250 if they are a category seven or eight veteran, then this is an issue that I think as much as Social Security attacks some of the fundamental concepts and promises of this country.

Is there anything more despicable than to go out and tell a veteran who has left a limb somewhere across the world that somehow he is not going to be able to get the kind of benefits he was promised? That is what is happening with the irresponsibility of the budgeteering that is going on in the United States Congress today.

We showed the deficits: \$450 billion. We are out borrowing money, paying interest on it, and eating up a bigger share of the budget in years to come. And we are not challenging the top 1 percent, or people making \$1 million a year or more to somehow pay their fair share, to say they do not have to on the backs of the veterans.

And no one can squirm out of this one. This is one you just cannot get away from. You can maybe talk private accounts will yield more interest and at least get people thinking, but how can you not ask people who benefit the most from the capitalistic system to pay and meet their obligation to the rest of society? Because if it were not for those people, if it were not for the veterans of the United States military, there would be no capitalistic system for anyone else to make money off of. That is the fundamental premise. So we need to make sure that we find the resources in the Congress to do it.

I would like to just take this opportunity to acknowledge the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), who was the Republican chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, who was a great advocate for veterans in this country and who was removed from the chairmanship of the committee because he was too strong of an advocate because he wanted more resources put in.

I live in Ohio, and a lot of those folks have moved into the State of Florida, south Florida, Miami, and they have some sun and fun; but there are a lot of veterans who have stayed in my community and who are having a lot of difficulties accessing the system. So I think it is appropriate that we are here following this debate, the generation that gave us Social Security, the generation that freed Europe, the generation that saved southeast Asia in many ways, and who created a lot of the opportunities that we have here today and set us on this path of democracy and fiscal responsibility for years to come, social justice. I think we have an opportunity to honor those folks, especially as we have more people from our generation coming back.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK).

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Ohio for his comments, and I am very excited about the fact that some Members of the Congress are watching out for our veterans, making sure our veterans are receiving what they deserve.

We talk about silver and blue hair once again, but there are a number of veterans that were in the first Gulf War, in Korea, even some in Grenada, definitely in Vietnam and World War II, and other conflicts that we have been involved in over the years; and it is important they receive the care they need not only at our veterans hospitals but also because these veterans were told when they signed up and they went into harm's way on behalf of this country, on the philosophy of our leadership and this Congress, that we would provide those kind of benefits.

That is the reason why in the President's budget, as we heard in the last hour where we said how can we talk about Social Security and not talk about the budget, that it is important that we realize that this budget is deplorable as it relates to keeping our promise to our veterans and to our young veterans. We have a lot of young veterans out there that are trying to raise families and dealing with real issues. Some are on 50 percent benefits, some are on 100 percent benefits because they laid it down for this country, Democrats and Republicans.

□ 2115

I will tell you once again, when you see the land of milk and honey, when it comes down to the top 1 percent and what they get and the promise that is kept to them by this administration and by the majority side, it is really night and day. If you are in the top 1 percent, you are in good shape right now. You are receiving every tax cut that you could possibly get at this particular time, and I am pretty sure there are some Members of this body that would have some other great ideas for you. But what happens to that individual that works every day? What happens to that individual that puts it on the line every day?

We are talking about Iraq Watch, and this is the hour that usually our colleagues come to the floor to talk about Iraq. I just recently returned with a bipartisan group going to Iraq and Afghanistan to visit our troops and also to visit some of the civilians that are over there. I will tell you that news reports are not even covering half of what is happening there. Tomorrow we will have the opportunity on the Committee on Armed Services to hear from Secretary Rumsfeld. We will have an opportunity to hear the administration's vision as it relates to Iraq, and also to talk about this budget in the Department of Defense. But it is important that we have past statements and hopefully not to say that we want to have the Secretary responding to misstatements or anything of that nature, but we want to make sure that we are giving voice to those future veterans and we are giving voice to the troops that are over there in harm's way right now. There are individuals,

and God bless them, they want to do and they are doing the right thing that they are being told to do. But we just had the Iraqi elections. New elections are going to be coming up in December. Hopefully the Iraqis will be ready or close to being ready for taking responsibility for their country and for the security of their country.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Just as we are talking about this and all the sacrifices that are being made over there and all the questions that are coming up and what is going on, before I yield to the gentleman from Ohio, there are a couple of statistics that I think we need to share with the American people about the investment in our veterans, because we have to focus on the ones that are coming back and new veterans that are being created every day. I know the gentleman has been out to Walter Reed and I have been out to Walter Reed several times. There is nothing more tragic for any of us who serve in this body than to go over there and see some of these soldiers and the sacrifices that they have made for the country, and to come and look at some of what is happening here in the Congress, where our President's budget for health care programs provides only 106 million more dollars than last year, \$3.5 billion less than the veterans service organizations that come here and testify before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and meet here say they need. The veterans groups, the American Legion, they are not going to come before Congress and ask for anything more than their soldiers that they served with need. And they say they need \$3.5 billion more. And so when you are telling us that you are only going to increase it by \$106 million in the President's budget, it is outrageous.

I yield to the fine gentleman from Ohio whom I split Mahoning County with in the great State of Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. I thank the gentleman from Ohio for yielding. We also have with us tonight the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE). There are some things that I think the American people need to understand about what is happening here in Washington, D.C., especially as we discuss the budget and its relevance to the veterans population. I am amazed. I am truly amazed and puzzled. I really do not understand why the President and why the Republican leadership in this House would choose to treat veterans with such disdain.

Why do I say that? I will share with you some recent history with this administration. One of the first things the President did after becoming President during his first term was to increase the cost that a veteran pays for a prescription drug from \$2 a prescription to \$7 a prescription. I introduced legislation to repeal that increase but unfortunately I was unable to get that legislation passed. So now many veterans, thousands of veterans, pay \$7 for

each prescription they get through the VA. Seven dollars may not sound like a lot of money, but many of the veterans who are in need of medication take 10 or more prescriptions a month, and many of these people are on fixed incomes. Many of them have fought our wars. In fact, you can be a combat-decorated veteran and you can be a priority 8 veteran. That is the veteran that the administration says makes too much money to currently qualify to participate in VA health care. Or you can be a priority 7 veteran, and a priority 7 veteran is a veteran that has a medical need but the medical need is not a direct result of the military service, and so they are charged more for the VA health care they receive.

So the President increased the cost of a prescription drug from \$2 to \$7. Shortly after, the VA issued a new policy. It was in the form of a memo that went to all the VA health care providers. It said basically, and I am summarizing, but it said too many veterans are coming in for service and we cannot afford to treat all these veterans and consequently there are waiting lines; and so we are going to solve this problem by rationing care to veterans, and we are going to ration care by prohibiting our nurses and social workers and physicians from proactively informing veterans of the services they are entitled to receive under the law.

We are talking about services that lawfully were made available to them by the actions of this Congress. I thought that was egregious. I have filed suit against the Veterans' Administration in conjunction with the Vietnam Veterans of America to try to overturn this egregious policy. That suit is currently before the court. I am hopeful the court will recognize that the VA is in violation of law and will force them to withdraw this onerous gag order.

We see a pattern developing here. Because then the VA decided that they were going to create a brand-new category or priority group for veterans, and they called that new category priority group 8. They said, this group just simply can no longer enroll and receive VA health care. And why? Well, because they make too much money, so they should not be able to get health care. The formula that is used to determine if a veteran is high income and no longer entitled to receive VA health care is based on a Housing and Urban Development formula.

In my district, you can make as little as \$22,000 a year and the VA will consider you high income and tell you that you can no longer receive VA health care. Think of that. Those of us who serve in this Chamber, the American people have a right to know that, make over \$150,000 a year. Maybe we can pay \$7 a prescription for our prescription medications if we need to. Maybe we

can find the ability to afford the kind of health insurance that will take care of our medical needs if we need to. But I submit to you that if you make \$22,000 a year, you are not high income. I think it is shameful, I use that word, but it is shameful that this government would make a decision to treat our veterans in that manner.

And now, before I yield back to my friend from Ohio, the Republican leadership in this House has done something just very recently that the American people have a right to know about. Because over the last Congress, Democrats and Republicans worked together on the VA Committee to preserve adequate funding. It was not as much as I wanted it to be, but at least it was enough to maintain at least the current level of services. And we did that with the help of some of our Republican colleagues. The chairman of the VA Committee in the last Congress really enabled us to keep VA funding at a level that enabled current services to continue. That Republican Congressman's name was CHRIS SMITH. He is a Republican Congressman from the State of New Jersey. Many people who watch C-SPAN know CHRIS SMITH because he frequently stands in this Chamber and he argues and advocates for an end to abortion. I would call CHRIS SMITH, at least in my judgment, he is the most pro-life Member of this House. I just point that out to emphasize that he is a true conservative. He is a true conservative.

CHRIS SMITH had served on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for 24 years, nearly a quarter of a century. He had been the chair of the VA Committee for the last 4 years. But because he was an advocate for veterans, Speaker HASTERT and the leadership in this House decided they were going to strip him of his chair's position. Not only did they do that, they removed him from this committee that he had served on for 24 years, and they did that in the face of opposition from 10 of the national veterans service organizations. I am talking about the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the AMVETS, the Vietnam Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Noncommissioned Officers, the Jewish War Veterans. All of these veterans organizations wrote Speaker HASTERT a letter, they all signed their name to that letter, and they said to Speaker HASTERT, it would really be a shame for CHRIS SMITH to be taken out of the chair's position and to be removed from this committee because he has been our friend. He has been an advocate for veterans. What was Speaker HASTERT's response? CHRIS SMITH was stripped of his chair's position, removed from the VA Committee.

I am asking my friend from Ohio, do you see a pattern here? It seemed that time after time after time, this admin-

istration and the leadership in this House of Representatives, they are taking steps that are harmful to veterans.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We just had an hour where we discussed Social Security and the private accounts, not to get back into it, but this many Members on the other side are willing to borrow \$5 trillion over the next 20 years to pay for the privatization plan. If you had come here and said, you know, we maybe need to borrow \$3.5 billion to fully fund veterans, I think many of us on this side of the aisle would say, well, we think we should balance the budget, we probably think that there is a better way of doing it, but what a much better reason to go out and borrow money, \$3.5 billion compared to \$5 trillion granted, to meet the obligation that we have.

I thought it would be interesting just to show since 2001, I have these charts working tonight so I am going to do one final chart. This is the increase, funding increases since 2001. This is the percent of increase in funding. The red is defense, the lavender is homeland security, and the blue is 9/11 response, New York City, international and airline relief. This is 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001. In 2004, 69 percent of the increase in funding from this Congress went for defense, 9 percent for homeland security, and 12 percent for 9/11.

These are three priorities I think the whole Congress could agree on. But to have a 70 percent increase in the military? You are telling me we could not find \$3.5 billion that could not get to Halliburton in order to fund some of this for our veterans? My point is that this is an issue of priorities. This comes down to one word, choice.

□ 2130

What is the choice that this Congress wants to make?

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, what the gentleman says is true. There are several ways we can find the money to pay for veterans health care. For one thing, we can cut back on these tax cuts that have gone to the richest people. There are people in this country who have never served in the military, never put their lives on the line; and yet this President, during this time of war, has decided to give them a huge, huge tax cut, while our veterans, many of them becoming increasingly elderly and disabled, are being deprived of adequate health care, having to wait for weeks and months to get a doctor's appointment. That is just wrong.

So the President had a choice: tax cuts for the richest people in America or adequate funding for VA health care. He chose tax cuts for the richest among us.

There is something else I would like to share with my friend from Ohio. We

are spending in Iraq today about \$1.25 billion a week. Think of that. And we cannot find an additional \$3.5 billion for our veterans, all of our veterans. I do not want to choose among our veterans. I do not want to say this veteran is worthy and this veteran is not worthy. All of these people have served the country. They are in need of help and health care, and I am getting sick and tired of hearing about focusing on the core constituency. Of course we need to focus on the core constituency. But that does not mean that we should neglect other veterans as well. And that is what is happening. And I hope the people in this country, especially the veterans and the families of veterans, are paying attention because we are treating our veterans in a shabby manner.

The President's budget that he sent us a couple of weeks ago is a shameful document. It cuts back on nursing home care for veterans. It is a shameful document. And I do not want to hear my colleagues over there say these are tight budgetary times, we just do not have the money.

We have the money, Mr. Speaker, to pay for what we think is important. We have the money for that. The fact is that President Bush and this leadership do not consider America's veterans a priority. They cannot run from that fact. And I would just invite any of my Republican friends to come to this floor and let us discuss this openly. Let us discuss the fact that President Bush is asking that our veterans pay increased costs for medications, that he wants to impose a \$250 annual user fee for many of our veterans to use a hospital. I think it is shameful. I really think it is shameful.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I appreciate the comments, and I have just got to say it is stunning. We are down here a lot and we get wrapped up and frustrated and upset about this; but I mean, when we take a step back, this is stunning what we are doing. It is absolutely stunning that we can somehow expect the American people and the veterans that are sitting at home tonight who make \$22,000 a year, who struggle and many people in our community in northeast Ohio who have lost their steel jobs or their rubber jobs and have moved into the VA health, they have moved into VA health because they do not have anything else. But they made the sacrifice. When the bell rung, they were there.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, as I say, I would invite any of my Republican friends to come down here and challenge what we are saying because what we are saying is the truth.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, let me add just to what the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) was saying. He was asking why this administration cannot make veterans a priority, but I would suggest that we are not so much even asking the administration to recognize veterans as a priority, but just asking them to give them a decent kind of regular order priority, because the fact of the matter is this administration, and it is sad to say, has not only failed to give the veterans priority. They have really treated them like about second- or third-class citizens.

The administration really has decided to put veterans, some of whom have lost limbs and health and their lives in Iraq, on a second or third tier below other folks that the administration values more highly. That is a fairly dramatic thing to say, but let me back up what I mean by that.

The administration has decided to put people who earn over \$400,000 a year and got about almost a third of the tax breaks that the President handed out, the President refuses to ask any of those folks to contribute in any way to the Iraq war, and so basically the administration has put veterans behind those folks on a lower tier. He has not just put them on a lower priority. He has put them on a second-class tier, but it is not just folks earning a high income.

The President has also put Halliburton on a higher tier than the veterans who have actually fought the wars. We have not seen this administration really get aggressive about the misuse of funds in Iraq.

We Democrats had to hold sort of a rump hearing. The gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) and the Senator from North Dakota had a hearing to find out what happened to all this money that disappeared into the financial swamps of Iraq.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, the fact is that, as I understand it, about \$9 billion is unaccounted for.

Mr. INSLEE. Exactly, Mr. Speaker. And if the gentleman will continue to yield, three times, three times the amount of money it would take to fix this problem with veterans so they would not have to stand in line for 6 months to get treatment when they come back from Iraq, this administration lost three times as much money in the financial netherworld of Iraq, and they refuse to do anything about it because it is embarrassing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would just like to say that that would not be the least embarrassing thing about this war.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, let me mention maybe one of the most embar-

assing things, and I read about this today. When I said that this administration has put veterans on a lower tier of value, let me tell my colleagues the sort of icing on the cake. Today, I read that a group of veterans from the first Persian Gulf War who were tortured by Saddam Hussein in the Abu Ghraib prison brought a lawsuit in the American courts against Iraq, the Iraqi Government, and they were granted a significant judgment, several millions of dollars for the abuse, and it was horrendous abuse. These were fliers who went down in the first Persian Gulf War, were captured by Saddam's forces, and were terribly tortured; and they won a judgment that seemed to me to make the right decision considering what they went through. They now are attempting to enforce that judgment against Iraq and against the oil revenues that are generated in Iraq.

So what did the administration do? Did it come to the aid of these veterans who were so terribly tortured at Abu Ghraib? No. This administration went to court to refuse to pay these veterans the judgment they had received against the Iraqi oil field money, essentially, which is now pouring into Iraq.

And the irony of this is pretty amazing because our Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld, has said we are going to pay damages to the Iraqis who were subject to the abusive conditions in Abu Ghraib by our forces. The same defense Secretary who said we ought to pay the Iraqis who were abused in Abu Ghraib, unfortunately, in our situation, in our custody, now steps in and refuses to allow our Americans to get payment when Saddam Hussein tortured them. What kind of convoluted cockamamie, knuckleheaded policy is that.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, I have introduced legislation to make this government stop what they are doing, stop fighting these veterans, these tortured veterans. The gentleman explained it well, but I would like to just take a stab at it as well because what we have here is these are soldiers that were captured during the first Gulf War, and they were terribly tortured under Saddam Hussein's regime. This government, as my colleagues recall, had held on to billions of dollars that were Iraqi dollars, and when these tortured Americans sued and won their suit, they were laying claim on those dollars that this country had possession of, and this administration returned that money to Iraq and literally used the Justice Department to go to court to try to set aside that judgment that would compensate these soldiers.

And the gentleman from Washington State is right. At the same time, here is Secretary Rumsfeld speaking of the

Iraqis who were abused at Abu Ghraib prison saying they are going to be compensated. So our Secretary of Defense is willing to use American dollars to compensate Iraqis who had been abused by Americans, and at the same time this government is fighting to keep our American troops who were tortured in Iraq from being compensated with Iraqi dollars. How can one explain that to the American people? It is unbelievable.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, there is an explanation, and it is very clear what the explanation is. The explanation is that this administration puts on a higher tier of value the Iraqi provisional government in dollars than these American veterans who were tortured. They put them on a higher tier, number one. Number two, the administration puts Halliburton on a higher tier than veterans because they refused to give this \$9 billion back that could be used to finance veterans, number two. Number three, this administration puts people who earn over \$400,000 a year and got a tax cut that the administration refuses to even talk about now, it puts them higher than the people who went to Iraq and came home sometimes without legs.

I do not believe that is consistent with American values on how we ought to look at respective contribution by Americans to our freedom, which was the ultimate contribution of these veterans. But it shows a skewed value judgment by the administration. That explains why this administration takes the position.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, I think it shows a moral blindness. I really do. I mean, we are talking here about decisions that are made that affect the lives of American soldiers, and in this case soldiers who were tortured. There is no question that they were tortured. There is no question about that. There is no question as to who was responsible. It was the Iraqi Government under Saddam Hussein.

Now this administration is trying to play, I think, word games because they are saying, well, that was the government that existed under Saddam Hussein and now that Saddam Hussein has been removed from office, this new government is not responsible for what happened under Saddam Hussein. But I would remind the gentleman from Washington State the money that we were holding on to here was money that was from the Saddam Hussein government and regime. So I would like to ask the President if I had a chance to talk with him, I would like to say: Mr. President, why do you think Iraqis who were mistreated at Abu Ghraib deserve to be compensated

with American tax dollars and at the same time you do not believe that American soldiers who were tortured when they were captured and held in Iraq should be compensated with Iraqi dollars? That seems like a fairly straightforward question, and I just wonder how the President would answer that.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, I think I know, if I can posit a hypothesis, in general how the President would answer, perhaps in more diplomatic terms than I will offer, but I think he would say: Mr. STRICKLAND, with all due respect, you just do not get it. Our administration has made a decision for the first time in American history to fight a war, but the only people we are going to ask to sacrifice are veterans. Nobody else is going to have to sacrifice.

Mr. STRICKLAND. And the soldiers that are active duty.

Mr. INSLEE. And the soldiers that are active duty.

Mr. STRICKLAND. And Reservists and Nation Guard.

Mr. INSLEE. And Reservists, some of whom are going to have to go back for a second and third deployment. These are the only Americans that we have asked to suffer and sacrifice because I, as President of the United States, do not think this is worth fighting enough to ask any other Americans to sacrifice rather than that small, less than 1/2 percent of the population. So as a result, I, as President, have made a decision that if the veterans get in my way by needing health care or if the veterans get in my way by having a judgment because they got tortured by Saddam Hussein and if they get in my way because they want to get Halliburton to pay the 9 billion bucks back that was fraudulently used by at least somebody over in Iraq, then it is just tough.

□ 2145

They are not going to get in my way, because I as president am not going to touch tax cuts, I am going to do deficit spending, I am going to continue to cut these veterans off from getting payment, because if I get away with it, that is good enough for me. That is the only answer I can think of.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, we are standing here and talking about this, and there are probably Americans watching and perhaps a few listening to us, and what we are saying sounds almost unbelievable.

I understand how someone listening to this may be puzzled, because there is no rational explanation, as far as I am concerned. Why should this government put a greater value on compen-

sating Iraqis than on compensating tortured Americans? It just does not make sense. And it does not fit the image that is usually presented to the American people by this administration, because you hear a lot of rhetoric about how much we appreciate our soldiers, how much we appreciate what the military does for us, but the world now knows, and certainly most Americans that have paid attention, that we did send our soldiers into battle without adequate body armor, and we have them driving around in vehicles in Iraq that are not properly armored, and we have people over there conducting patrols and driving long distances and taking fuel from one part of Iraq to the other part of Iraq without night vision goggles. So we know there has been that kind of neglect.

But what my friend has brought to our attention here tonight regarding these tortured Americans and the administration's fighting them through the courts to keep them from getting compensated by the Iraqi government is nearly unbelievable.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I think if you are sitting at home listening to this debate that we are having here, the discussion we are having here, there is a real key component, and I mentioned it earlier and I think it is worth reiterating: Every major veteran's service organization is against what the President and this Congress is doing.

This is the most noble generation in the history of our country. They are fiscally conservative. They are Republicans and Democrats. They are frugal. They saved. They never had the kind of personal debt that our Nation has today, not their generation.

They are not going to ask for money just to ask for it. They need it, and they see the need with their friends, within their organizations, and they are asking for it. If you do not believe the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND), the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE), the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) or the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK), believe all the veterans organizations that are out there sticking up for their membership. If there is anybody you should believe, it is them.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, I want to tip a hat to these veterans groups, who are really one of the least demanding groups of people I have ever worked with, considering how they have been mistreated since this Iraq war started and since this administration started to cut health care. Incredibly, they have been respectful in bringing this to our attention. But, frankly, if they were yelling at the top of their lungs and circling the White House with pitchforks and torches, I think that would be, frankly, understandable.

I was talking to somebody the other day saying if you are a World War II

veteran right now and you have a urological concern and you want to get an exam, you have to wait like four months in the State of Washington to get in for an examination. That is just not right. Those lines are getting longer, and they will continue to get longer because of these cuts in the general VA budget.

The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. STRICKLAND) has talked with some eloquence about raising the deductible that individual veterans have to pay. Now they are also trying to soak veterans for \$250 up front before you get your first dollar of health care payments, if you make the enormous sum of \$22,000, which puts people right up in the Donald Trump category, I am sure.

They are also cutting the general budget, or not raising it to the level it demands, for the whole hospital system, which means these waiting lines get longer, just as the number of people who need them get larger. So it is a multiple. It is like a death by a thousand cuts.

Let me suggest one reason why we do not hear as much as we should about this issue. If you look at the pictures of our Iraqi veterans who are coming home, and we in Congress on both sides of the aisle have visited with them and know how courageous these mostly young and not-so-young people are, if you look at pictures of them, they are a lot of times alone. They have gone back a lot of times to a small town and are living in somebody's basement, and you see them sitting on the edge of a chair with a missing limb. They are kind of alone. There is not a big group around them except maybe their immediate family. They do not have a blaring group of bugles and a press corps to advocate their cause. Maybe that is what we ought to be doing here tonight, and in some small way I guess we are.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, why is there not an outcry about this? I think one of the reasons is that the American people are not fully aware of what is happening and find it hard to believe. I can understand why someone listening to us tonight would find it hard to believe what we have said, because it is so outrageous.

It is outrageous. As I said a little earlier, it is contrary to the public image we get from this administration, because if you listen to rhetoric coming from the White House and coming from the leadership in this House here, you would think that they really appreciate the veterans and they care for veterans and they were going to do everything they could to care for veterans. But the facts just do not match the rhetoric.

You could also wonder why is there not an outcry from many of the Republicans who I know care about veterans? I have friends on that side of the aisle

that I know are veterans themselves, and they deeply in their hearts care for veterans. The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) was one such person that I mentioned, the former Chair of the committee. But I think there is a hesitancy to speak out, because if you speak out and you challenge the leadership over there, there is a price to pay.

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) found that out. When he spoke up for veterans, he was stripped of his chairman position and he was taken off of a committee that he had been on for 24 years. That is almost unbelievable. Twenty-four years, a quarter of a century almost, this man had served on that committee.

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, when they stripped the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) of his chairmanship, he was sort of politically decapitated, if you will, because he had a dissenting voice in the Republican caucus. He wanted to bring to the country's attention the fact that veterans were not getting their due. That was a courageous step by him. As a result, the leadership essentially lynched him and excommunicated him from the leadership position he held, after 25 years.

Think of what that message is to Iraq. We saw Iraqis really courageously go to the polls. That was amazing. They had a 58 percent or 60 percent turnout, almost 82 percent in a lot of the Shiite areas. There were people who walked through violence to get to the polls. This was a lot of personal courage there that we should respect in a lot of ways. One would think we ought to honor that and send some messages to Iraq about how to run a democracy.

Well, look at just three examples, how under the leadership of the current House, what our lessons to Iraq are. Number one, to the Sunnis, we want the Sunnis to come into the Iraqi government. We want the minority group to participate in the government, because if we do not get the Sunnis involved in the Iraqi government, this insurgency is going to continue to bloom. So our message is to the Shiites, embrace the Sunnis. Let them come in and have a voice in your government. Let dissent have a voice. Reach a consensus through embracing the minority.

What do they do here in the House of Representatives? To their own Member, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), who had a dissenting viewpoint, kind of the position the Sunnis are in as a minority, boom, off with his head, silence him. Take him out of the political discourse here by removing his chairmanship. That is not a good message to the Iraqis about how democracy ought to run.

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, I do

not think it is a good message to the rest of the Republicans who serve there. The message is if you challenge us, you are in trouble. So it silences even their own Members. It keeps them from having the ability to speak up and speak out.

I have said before, we are elected to come here to represent the people who vote for us and make us their representative. We do not come here to serve the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT). We do not come here to serve the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY) or the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI). We come here to represent the people who send us here.

If my Republican friends do not have the freedom to speak up and speak out about what they think is right for their constituents without getting a committee taken away from them or getting a position taken away from them, well, then they become impotent, quite frankly. They are not able to be a true representative.

I ask this question: Where are the friends of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH)? Where are they in the Republican caucus? I want to tell you, if that happened to my friend from Washington State, if our Democratic leadership did that, or if our Democratic leadership did that to my colleague from the State of Ohio, I would be outraged, and I think Members of our caucus would be outraged. We would not stand for it.

But there is a silence over there that is very, very troubling. What it means is there is one or two or three people who are in charge of what happens in this House, and the others go a long to get along.

I quoted this statement from Ben Franklin before. I think it is good and applicable. Ben Franklin said, "If you act like sheep, the wolves will eat you." I wonder if my colleagues over there are not acting like sheep? They are being awfully quiet. They let an honored, respected, hard-working, committed, devoted, dedicated member of their caucus be treated in that manner, be treated in that manner, and I did not hear any public outcry at all. None at all.

I think it must be because of fear, because I know there are people over there who respected the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), who believed he was right in his thinking and in the position he was trying to take as an advocate for veterans. Yet I did not hear any public outcry.

I think it is a shame that this House would be so constrained out of fear of what the leadership may do if the individual members speak up and speak out.

Mr. INSLEE. If the gentleman will yield further, the President had some eloquent language about freedom around the world, which is something

we all aspire to. I guess we are saying people ought to have freedom in the House of Representatives to stand up for veterans, and not be punished as the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) was. That is wrong, and we are going to continue to be a voice for veterans so this administration does not cut their health care.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I would like to thank both gentlemen tonight and just say we are willing to work with the other side to find the \$3.5 billion, whether it is out of the \$500 billion or \$600 billion increase to the Medicare program that we just found out about, we could squeeze \$3.5 billion out of that, or whether it is asking the wealthiest to help. We are willing to work with them and follow the veterans organizations and do what is right to our veterans who made the sacrifices.

CORRECTION TO THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD OF TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2005 AT PAGE 1097

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

448. A letter from the Congressional Review Coordinator, APHIS, Department of Agriculture, transmitting the Department's final rule—Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy; Minimal-Risk Regions and Importation of Commodities [Docket No. 03-080-3] (RIN: 0579-AB73) received January 4, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Ms. ESHOO (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week.

Mr. STUPAK (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and the balance of the week.

Mr. WAMP (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today on account of a family commitment.

Mr. MILLER of Florida (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today on account of weather-related travel delays.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. WOOLSEY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DEFazio, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CUELLAR, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. KAPTUR, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. EMANUEL, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. THOMPSON of California, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CARDOZA, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. MALONEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. GINGREY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. OSBORNE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. ROHRABACHER, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BARTON of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GUTKNECHT, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GINGREY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana, for 5 minutes, today and February 16 and 17.

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. POE, for 5 minutes, February 16.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 58 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, February 16, 2005, at 10 a.m.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 8 of rule XII, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

799. A communication from the President of the United States, transmitting a request for FY 2005 supplemental appropriations for ongoing military and intelligence operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and selected other international activities, including tsunami relief and reconstruction; (H. Doc. No. 109-9); to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.

800. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulations; Corpus Christi-Port Aransas Channel-Tule Lake, Corpus Christi, TX [CGD08-05-009] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

801. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulations; Gulf Intracoastal Waterway — Bayou Boeuf, Amelia, LA [CGD08-05-007] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

802. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department

of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulations: Newtown Creek, Dutch Kills, English Kills, and their tributaries, NY [CGD01-04-157] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

803. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulation; Houma Navigation Canal, Houma, LA [CGD08-05-004] (RIN: 1625-AA09) received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

804. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulation, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Houma, LA [CGD08-05-003] (RIN: 1625-AA09) received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

805. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Drawbridge Operation Regulations: Newtown Creek, Dutch Kills, English Kills, and their tributaries, NY [CGD01-05-004] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

806. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Safety Zone; Delaware River [CGD05-05-006] (RIN: 1625-AA00) received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

807. A letter from the Chief, Regulations and Administrative Law, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting the Department's final rule — Safety Zone; St. Johns River, Jacksonville, Florida [COTP Jacksonville 04-133] (RIN: 1625-AA00) received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

808. A letter from the Program Analyst, FAA, Department of Transportation, transmitting the Department's final rule — Modification to Class E Airspace; Mena, AR [Docket No. FAA-2004-19405; Airspace Docket No. 2004-ASW-14] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

809. A letter from the Program Analyst, FAA, Department of Transportation, transmitting the Department's final rule — Establishment of Class E Airspace; Lexington, OR [Docket No. FAA-2003-16137; Airspace Docket 03-ANM-07] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

810. A letter from the Program Analyst, FAA, Department of Transportation, transmitting the Department's final rule — Modification of Class E Airspace; Cozad, NE [Docket No. FAA-2004-17422; Airspace Docket No. 04-ACE-23] received January 31, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

811. A letter from the Program Analyst, FAA, Department of Transportation, transmitting the Department's final rule — Establishment of Class E Airspace; Melbourne, AR [Docket No. FAA-2004-19406; Airspace Docket