

Do we think for a moment that if we in fact move forward on that, and I tend to believe that we have to do that, but do we think for a moment that there will not be ramifications in the United States? Do we think for a moment that Saddam Hussein believes he can win a war in Iraq against our military might? No. He knows that is not possible. He knows that we are most vulnerable here. And he will try to bring the battle to us.

We are told every day that another attack in the United States is imminent. Well, how logical does it seem to you or any of our colleagues, I wonder, that we will spend an enormous amount of our treasury and our human resources in places thousands of miles away which, again, I am not going to argue right now as to whether or not it is appropriate. I tend to think it is. But we are doing nothing significant on our own border. Is this not the height of folly?

Is this not so irresponsible to us to not recognize that we are laying ourselves bare, laying ourselves open to greater attacks? And, yes, we are looking internally on how to deal with it. Maybe we will try to find them when they are here. Why not try to stop them before they get here? We may not absolutely be able to do it for every single person, for every single threat, but we can do far more than we are doing.

□ 1430

Just that, if we do that, if we commit to it. If we put the troops, if we use the military on our border to help support the Park Service, the border patrol and the forest service, we will have done, I think, a service to Kris Eggle and to the others who face danger every single day down there, and we will be doing our job. It is our responsibility here. It is not asking us to go the extra mile, for heaven's sake. It is asking us and the President of the United States to do exactly what we are supposed to do as well as the folks who are supposed to direct the resources of the Nation to its defense, and I fear that we are not doing it today.

I, of course, represent Columbine, the school in which such a tragedy occurred just a few years ago, and it was the most horrendous event I have ever gone through in public life, and I keep thinking about the fact that there were some good things that happened, and in every single horrible event something good does come out of it. We have to pray that this is the case, and it usually is.

Out of Kris's death, something good has got to happen here, and that is that we will, in fact, redouble our efforts, triple our efforts to protect his colleagues and our constituents from the forces of evil that are directed against us. I feel that that is what he would want us to do, and I do not mean just the al Qaeda agents, the cells that are operating. I mean the forces of evil that are importing drugs, sex slaves,

all the rest that are coming across this border for the purposes of poisoning our children and our culture.

We also have a responsibility internally to do what we can to restructure the culture, to reinvigorate our own culture and to imbue it with what is good and right and just, but at the same time, we must do everything we can to make sure that these people cannot just come into the country at their will; just as my colleague said, what he was talking about the fact that this is our, as a Congress, it is our responsibility. We cannot ignore it. We cannot walk away from it, and it would be the best possible memorial we could give, I think, to Kris Eggle.

OUR NATION'S ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OTTER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I have come to the floor to speak this afternoon because of my concern about the nature of the conversation about our country that is taking place at this time.

This is a complicated country. I have prodded myself on serving in this body in no small part because this body and the other body have been so good at grappling with the full range of issues that confront our country. Yet, as I stand back and look at the kind of conversation we were having before we recessed, conversation about corporate abuse, about the economy and about world affairs, I see a very different picture from the picture I see now.

All of the oxygen in this place and in the media has been taken up with Iraq. Iraq is a matter of major concern. I have not heard or read a single analyst or member of this body that does not believe that Saddam is a man to be taken seriously and to have a serious strategy for dealing with. There may be differences about how to deal with him, but the danger he poses ultimately is not a matter of debate. What to do about him is, of course, a matter of serious debate.

The fact is that there is almost no chance wherever a person stands on Iraq and Saddam Hussein that we will enter Iraq before the election. That kind of wag-the-dog approach to foreign affairs is something I do not believe this President would engage in. Indeed, Mr. BIDEN of the other body has indicated that in his conversations with the administration he certainly does not believe that there would be some quick entry of our country into a preemptive strike. That is why we are having a conversation now that I predict will go on for some time, because the case has not even begun to be made.

Our President is going to the U.N. only tomorrow or this week. Yet, talk

of Iraq has completely displaced what I think my colleagues at home have found is what the American people believe is a clear and present danger now. The clear and present danger now is the absence of a domestic agenda on the screen for them to see as we approach November.

As for Iraq, the President himself has said he has not even made up his mind what to do. The President says he thinks we will have to strike Saddam at some point, but then is quick to say but I have not made up my mind what to do.

My question is, has the President made up his mind and have we made up our mind what to do about what confronts the American people each and every day, and that is the economy that drives how they live their lives. We cannot allow debate about the possibility of a war abroad to foreclose debate about urgent issues right here at home.

Unless my colleagues have not been listening to their constituents, I know they are hearing what I am hearing. Is this a jobless recovery? Because we still see people losing jobs. Some people do not like the use of the words jobless recovery, but even the most conservative analyst will use the words slow recovery, and there is a reason for that.

We have got unemployment now at 5.7 percent. That is a huge jump up from this time a year ago, 9.6 percent for blacks. People are seeing shifts in the cost of health insurance from their employer straight to them so that they are having to bear more of the cost of health insurance than they had to bear this time last year, always a danger signal that there is something happening in the economy that I better be careful about.

Perhaps the greatest and most conclusive evidence that something is wrong with the economy is what is happening to States and localities throughout the United States faced with huge deficits. My own city has found that the effect of the slow recovery or this recovery in many places, people no longer pay the kinds of capital gains they were paying, for example, no longer have the kind of disposable income yielding taxes of various kinds to State and local government. The effect of that is that State and local budgets are plummeting all over the country, and States are scrambling simply to find enough money to make it through with the bare necessities that State and local governments must provide.

That is something that virtually every State and local government in the United States is experiencing now. We have it in this region which is one of the most prosperous in the country. We have it in Maryland. We have it in Virginia. We have it in the District of Columbia, and we have it in virtually every State of the Union.

We know why there is this effect on State and local budgets, the effect on

our own deficit which is growing like Topsy. We know it from bankruptcy and airlines. We know it from the fact that companies employ a million people less than they employed a year ago. We know it from layoffs in major sectors. Layoffs continue in manufacturing. Layoffs continue in retail.

We know it because of the higher cost of terrorism insurance, something we must get completed before this House and Senate go home for the elections because every place now which is exposed to the public is beginning to experience increases in the insurance, increases that are quite extraordinary, not only here in the Nation's capital where some might have expected it, but anyplace there is a facility where large numbers of people meet or even in rural areas where there may be some sensitive facilities nearby.

I am particularly concerned that in the face of this situation, with virtually no conversation going on in the media or in this body about the economy, we see that the American people turn on the television and say when is somebody going to talk about me. Our claims for unemployment were 33 percent above what they were a year ago. Most States have not kept the recommended reserves in their unemployment trust funds, just when they are most needed, and pathetically, 19 States have increased the earnings requirement in order to qualify for unemployment insurance while only 1 State has reduced the earnings requirement. This at a time when in a recent article we learned that if a person makes less than \$50,000 per year, their chance of being laid off is 43 percent greater than if they earned more than \$50,000 a year. I do not know how the lower middle class and low income people make it in times like this, and I do not understand why we would not be talking about these issues, why they are off the radar screen, because they are on the minds of all of our constituents.

Last year, only 38 percent of the jobless even qualified for unemployment insurance. If a person is a part-time worker, if they are a lower paid worker, if they are a temporary worker, they have been written off for unemployment insurance very often because when the great statute was passed, those kinds of workers were far less numerous, and we have not done our job to revise our own statutes, to take into account the new employment trends, employment trends that have been with us now for a full generation.

One of the reasons, of course, for this jobless recovery is that after September 11, the economy seemed to ride along just fine, and we thought, well, is not this something, they hit us and it did not make much difference. We owe a lot to the American people for making sure that they continued to live their lives, including live their lives in the economy, because this economy was driven or has been driven along for some time by consumer spending and consumers continue to stand after September 11.

It is clear as the nose on our face, however, that consumers have now lost confidence in the economy, and the reason we know it is because they have stopped spending. Consumers account for two-thirds of all the economic activity in our economy in the first place, so let them stop spending and we begin to feel it very quickly, and that is what they have stopped doing.

□ 1445

And I say to my colleagues, have you not stopped spending as much as you were spending? I do not know anybody who is spending the way they were 5 years ago, because there are too many uncertainties in the economy. And there is too little discussion here or elsewhere about what to do about those uncertainties.

After 9-11, in order to keep people spending, we had all kinds of approaches among retailers, reductions, the no-interest financing on cars; but it seems pretty clear that consumers have had it up to here, and I can understand why. Household debt is now 75 percent of the gross domestic product. When you get that much debt, I do not care how much you want to spend, you are probably going to think very hard before continuing on the all-American spending spree that the country has been on for some years now.

Now, I am not at all criticizing Americans either for spending or for deciding that the time to spend should end. I believe that they have a right to expect guidance from us on what we are going to do about it, and I believe they are getting guidance neither from us nor the Bush administration. We have to look forward and not only look backward to the good old days when the economy was so flush it looked like it would never stop expanding. The economy has been jolted to understand that that kind of expansion cannot go on forever. And if it cannot go on forever, we have to explain to the American people what to expect.

One thing we can expect is that the terrible budget cuts that the States and localities are having to do this year will continue for the indefinite future. Because when we cut this year, we find the problem rolls over for 2, 3, maybe even 4 or 5 years. In my own district, the chief financial officer has said that he thinks that the city must have a 5-year plan that indicates that our budget will be balanced not only this year, by making the kind of terrible cuts that we here and all across the country are having to make, but that we will not simply roll over the problem to other years. And so we have to look at a series of cuts that are going to continue for some time, because the kind of exuberance one saw in the market was indeed reflected in State and local budgets, and, yes, in spending by the American people.

I do not come to the floor today to say to my colleagues, all right, what is the answer? Let us write the answer clearly so the American people can see

it. What I do come to the floor to say is that we should be debating not only foreign affairs but domestic affairs. We should not only be debating what should happen in Iraq, in Afghanistan, where we still have a theater of war, in the Middle East. All of these are of top concern and priority, but there are equal priority concerns on the domestic front.

When we have been at our greatest has been when we have shown the world we know how to walk and chew gum at the same time. That is the challenge before us today, not to short-change the domestic agenda at a time when we have a slow recovery, when Americans do not know where their next health care premium is coming from, when the corporate abuse statute we will pass has yet to prove itself, when companies are still coming forward with restatements of earnings. All that is still on the screen and our constituents still need to hear from us a balanced debate: What are you going to do about Iraq and what are you going to do about home?

So I come to the floor as we ask that we initiate that debate; that the relevant committees help us to become involved in that debate; that we ourselves take on the role of restoring confidence in the consumer so that the consumer feels that it is safe again to spend because they have in Washington a Congress and a President who knows how to guide us during troubled times. They do not have that now.

When we have a balanced conversation and a balanced debate about the two great bookends, the domestic and the foreign, I think we will restore the confidence in the economy that we know now has vanished.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mrs. KELLY (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) for September 11 on account of congressional business.

Mr. WALSH (at the request of Mr. ARMEY) today and September 9 on account of congressional business.

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. JACKSON-LEE of Texas) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. FILNER, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. SCHIFF, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD, for 5 minutes, today.

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

Mr. NUSSLE, for 5 minutes, today.