

health insurance and how people in her community are smart enough to know we need to do that. Those kids end up in the emergency room much sicker than they would be if they had some preventive care. What we are advocating for is to make sure we provide this kind of care for those kids, to make sure we save the taxpayer money in the long run.

So as this is probably our last 30-something for 2005, Happy Chanukah, Kwanzaa, Merry Christmas.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. A joyous holiday season.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Have a very happy, joyous holiday season, because we are all Americans. And I would like to now give the e-mail address here: 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

That is 30, the number, somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

Does the gentleman from Florida have any final words to share with the American people and his colleagues?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, first Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I look forward to coming back and joining my colleagues in the 30-something Working Group next year.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I just want to say to my colleagues here, and Mr. SPRATT, who was here earlier, that it has definitely been a great joy and honor to be a part of this group that we have that is working so hard, and also Mr. DELAHUNT and many other members of the 30-something Working Group. On behalf of all of us, we want to thank not only the Speaker-to-be, hopefully in the next Congress, Leader PELOSI, but also our Democratic whip, Mr. HOYER. And I want to congratulate Mr. BOB MENENDEZ on being appointed to the Senate in the very near future, and also to Mr. CLYBURN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And also Mr. Tom Manatos, who keeps us all together down here. Tom, you are the man.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And, Mr. Speaker, we wish you a Merry Christmas, too, sir.

#### FOREIGN POLICY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, our country faces major problems. No longer can they remain hidden from the American people. Most Americans are aware the Federal budget is in dismal shape. Whether it is Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, or even the private pension system, most Americans realize we are in debt over our heads. The welfare state is unmanageable and severely overextended.

In spite of hopes that supposed reform would restore sound financing and provide for all the needs of the people, it is becoming more apparent every day that the entire system of entitlements

is in a precarious state and may well collapse. It does not take a genius to realize that increasing the national debt by over \$600 billion per year is not sustainable. Raising taxes to make up the shortfall is unacceptable, while continuing to print the money needed will only accelerate the erosion of the dollar's value.

Our foreign policy is no less of a threat to us. Our worldwide military presence and our obsession with remaking the entire Middle East frighten a lot of people both here and abroad. Our role as world policeman and nation-builder places undue burdens on the American taxpayer. Our enormous overseas military expenditures, literally hundreds of billions of dollars, are a huge drain on the American economy.

All wars invite abuses of civil liberties at home, and this vague declaration of war against terrorism is worse than most in this regard. As our liberties here at home are diminished by the PATRIOT Act and national ID card legislation, we succumb to the temptation of all empires to spy on American citizens, neglect habeas corpus, employ torture tactics, and use secret imprisonments. These domestic and foreign policy trends reflect a morally bankrupt philosophy devoid of any concern for liberty and the rule of law.

The American people are becoming more aware of the serious crisis this country faces. Their deep concern is reflected in the current mood in Congress. The recent debate over Iraq shows the parties are now looking for someone to blame for the mess we are in. It is a high-stakes political game. The fact that a majority of both parties and their leadership endorsed the war and accept the same approach towards Syria and Iran does nothing to tone down the accusatory nature of the current blame game.

The argument in Washington is over tactics, quality of intelligence, war management, and diplomacy, except for the few who admit that tragic mistakes were made and now sincerely want to establish a new course for Iraq. Thank goodness for those who are willing to reassess and admit to those mistakes. Those of us who have opposed the war all along welcome them to the cause of peace.

If we hope to pursue a more sensible foreign policy, it is imperative that Congress face up to its explicit constitutional responsibility to declare war. It is easy to condemn the management of a war, one endorsed, while deferring to the final decision about whether to deploy the troops to the President. When Congress accepts and assumes its awesome responsibility to declare or not declare war as directed by the Constitution, fewer wars will be fought.

Sadly, the acrimonious blame game is motivated by the leadership of both parties for the purpose of gaining or retaining political power. It does not approach a true debate over the wisdom

or lack thereof of foreign military interventionism and preemptive war.

Polls indicate ordinary Americans are becoming uneasy with our prolonged war in Iraq which has no end in sight. The fact that no one can define victory precisely, and most Americans see us staying in Iraq for years to come, contributes to the erosion of support for this war. Currently, 63 percent of Americans disapprove of the handling of the war, and 52 percent say it is time to come home. Forty-two percent say we need a foreign policy of minding our own business. This is very encouraging. The percentages are even higher for the Iraqis. Eighty-two percent want us to leave, and 67 percent claim they are less secure with our troops there.

Ironically, our involvement has produced an unusual agreement among the Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis, the three factions at odds with each other. At the recent 22-member Arab League meeting in Cairo, the three groups agreed on one issue. They all want foreign troops to leave. At the end of the meeting, an explicit communique was released: "We demand the withdrawal of foreign forces in accordance with a timetable and the establishment of a national and immediate program for rebuilding the armed forces that will allow them to guard Iraq's borders and get control of the security situation."

Since the administration is so enamored of democracy, why not have a national referendum in Iraq to see if the people want us to leave? After we left Lebanon in the 1980s, the Arab League was instrumental in brokering an end to that country's 15-year civil war. Its chances of helping to stop the fighting in Iraq are far better than depending on the United Nations, NATO, or the United States.

This is a regional dispute that we stirred up, but cannot settle. The Arab League needs to assume a lot more responsibility for the mess that our invasion has caused. We need to get out of the way and let them solve their own problems. Remember, once we left Lebanon, suicide terrorism stopped and peace finally came. The same could happen in Iraq.

Everyone is talking about the downside of us leaving and the civil war that might erupt. Possibly so. But no one knows with certainty what will happen. There was no downside when we left Vietnam. But one thing for sure, after a painful decade of the 1960s, the killing stopped and no more Americans died once we left. We now trade with Vietnam and enjoy friendly relations with them. This was achieved through peaceful means, not military force.

The real question is how many more Americans must be sacrificed for a policy that is not working. Are we going to fight until we go broke and the American people are impoverished? Common sense tells us it is time to reassess the politics of military intervention and not just look for someone to blame for falling once again into the trap of a military quagmire.

The blame game is a political event designed to avoid the serious philosophical debate over our foreign policy of interventionism. The mistakes made by both parties in dragging us into an unwise war are obvious, but the effort to blame one group over the other confuses the real issue. Obviously, Congress failed to meet its constitutional obligation regarding war. Debate over prewar intelligence elicits charges of errors, lies, and complicity.

It is argued that those who are now critical of the outcome are just as much at fault since they too accepted flawed intelligence when in deciding to support the war. This charge is leveled at previous administrations, foreign governments, Members of Congress, and the United Nations, all who made the same mistake of blindly accepting the pre-war intelligence.

But complicity, errors of judgment, and malice are hardly an excuse for such a serious commitment as a preemptive war against a nonexistent enemy. Both sides accepted the evidence supposedly justifying the war, evidence that was not credible. No weapons of mass destruction were found. Iraq had no military capabilities. Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were not allies. Remember, we were once allies of both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. And Saddam Hussein posed no threat whatsoever to the United States or his neighbors.

We hear constantly that we must continue the fight in Iraq and possibly in Iran and Syria because it is better to fight the terrorists over there than here. Merely repeating this justification, if it is based on a major analytical error, cannot make it so. All evidence shows that our presence in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries benefits al Qaeda in its recruiting efforts, especially in its search for suicide terrorists.

This one fact prompts a rare agreement among all religious and secular Muslim factions, namely, that the U.S. should leave all Arab lands. Denying this will not keep terrorists from attacking us. It will do the opposite. The fighting and terrorist attacks are happening overseas because of a publicly stated al Qaeda policy that they will go for soft targets: our allies, whose citizens object to the war, like Spain and Italy. They will attack Americans who are more exposed in Iraq.

It is a serious error to conclude that fighting them over there keeps them from fighting us over here or that we are winning the war against terrorism. As long as our occupation continues and American forces continue killing Muslims, the incentive to attack us will grow. It should not be hard to understand that the responsibility for violence in Iraq, even violence between Iraqis, is blamed on our occupation. It is more accurate to say the longer we fight them over there, the longer we will be threatened over here.

□ 2145

The final rhetorical refuge for those who defend the war not yet refuted is the dismissive statement that the world is better off without Saddam Hussein. It implies no one can question anything we have done because of this fact. Instead of an automatic concession, it should be legitimate, even if politically incorrect, to challenge this disarming assumption. No one has to like or defend Saddam Hussein to point out, we will not know whether the world is better off until we know exactly what will take Saddam Hussein's place. This argument was never used to justify removing murderous dictators with much more notoriety than Saddam Hussein such as our ally Stalin, Pol Pot whom we helped to get into power, or Mao Tse Tung. Certainly the Soviets, with their bloody history and thousands of nuclear weapons aimed at us, were many times over greater a threat to us than Saddam Hussein ever was. If containment worked with the Soviets and the Chinese, why is it assumed without question that deposing Saddam Hussein is obviously and without question a better approach for us than containment?

The "we are all better off without Saddam Hussein" cliché does not address the question of whether the 2,100-plus American troops killed or the 20,000 wounded and sick troops are better off. We refuse to acknowledge the hatred generated by the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens who are written off as collateral damage. Are the Middle East and Israel better off with the turmoil our occupation has generated? Hardly. Honesty would have us conclude that conditions in the Middle East are worse since the war started. The killing never stops, and the cost is more than we can bear both in lives and limbs lost and dollars spent. In spite of the potential problems that may or may not come from our withdrawal, the greater mistake was going in in the first place.

We need to think more about how to avoid these military encounters rather than dwelling on the complications that result when we meddle in the affairs of others with no moral or legal authority to do so. We need less blame game and more reflection about the root cause of our aggressive foreign policy. By limiting the debate to technical points over intelligence, strategy, the number of troops and how to get out of the mess, we ignore our continued policy of sanctions, threats and intimidation of Iraqi neighbors, Iran and Syria. Even as Congress pretends to argue about how or when we might come home, leaders from both parties continue to support the policy of spreading the war by precipitating a crisis with these two countries. The likelihood of agreeing about who deliberately or innocently misled Congress, the media and the American people is virtually nil. Maybe historians at a later date will sort out the whole mess. The debate over tactics and diplomacy

will go on, but that only serves to distract from the important issue of policy. Few today in Congress are interested in changing from our current accepted policy of intervention to one of strategic independence. No nation building, no policing the world, no dangerous alliances. But the result of this latest military incursion into a foreign country should not be ignored. Those who dwell on pragmatic matters should pay close attention to the result so far.

Since March 2003, we have seen death and destruction, 2,100-plus Americans killed and nearly 20,000 sick and wounded, plus tens of thousands of Iraqis caught in the crossfire. A Shiite theocracy has been planted. A civil war has erupted. Iran's arch nemesis, Saddam Hussein, has been removed. Osama bin Laden's arch nemesis, Saddam Hussein, has been removed. Al Qaeda now operates freely in Iraq, enjoying a fertile training field not previously available to them. Suicide terrorism spurred on by our occupation has significantly increased. Our military-industrial complex thrives in Iraq without competitive bids. True national defense and the voluntary Army have been undermined.

Personal liberty at home is under attack; assaults on free speech and privacy, national ID cards, the PATRIOT Act, National Security Letters, and challenges to habeas corpus all have been promoted.

Values have changed, with more Americans supporting torture and secret prisons. Domestic strife, as recently reflected in arguments over the war on the House floor, is on the upswing. Preemptive war has been codified and accepted as legitimate and necessary, a bleak policy for our future.

The Middle East is far more unstable, and oil supplies are less secure, not more. Historic relics of civilization protected for thousands of years were lost in the flash while oil wells were secured. U.S. credibility in the world has been severely damaged, and the national debt has increased enormously, and our dependence on China has increased significantly as our Federal Government borrows more and more money.

How many more years will it take for civilized people to realize that war has no economic or political value for the people who fight and pay for it? Wars are always started by governments, and individual soldiers on each side are conditioned to take up arms and travel great distances to shoot and kill individuals that never meant them harm. Both sides drive their people into a hysterical frenzy to overcome the natural instinct to live and let live. False patriotism is used to embarrass the good-hearted into succumbing to the wishes of the financial and other special interests who agitate for war. War reflects the weakness of a civilization that refuses to offer peace as an alternative.

This does not mean we should isolate ourselves from the world. On the contrary, we need more rather than less interaction with our world neighbors. We should encourage travel, foreign commerce, friendship and exchange of ideas. This would far surpass our misplaced effort to make the world like us through armed force. This can be achieved without increasing the power of the state or accepting the notion that some world government is needed to enforce the rules of exchange. Governments should get out of the way and let the individuals make their own decisions about how they want to relate to the world.

Defending our country against aggression is a very limited and proper function of government. Our military involvement in the world over the past 60 years has not met this test, and we are paying the price.

A policy that endorses peace over war, trade over sanctions, courtesy over arrogance and liberty over coercion is in the tradition of the American Constitution and American idealism. It deserves consideration.

#### BLUE DOG COALITION

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

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor this evening as a member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition, a group of 37 fiscally conservative Democrats that are concerned about our Nation and its future due to the rising cost of our debt, our deficit. We believe it is time to restore some common sense in fiscal discipline to our Nation's government.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today on the floor of the United States House of Representatives as a voice for the people of Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District.

It is one thing for all of us to have the title U.S. Representative, but it is another thing to be one, and I believe it is important that we go back to our respective districts; I go home every weekend to places like Hot Springs and Texarkana and Pine Bluff and El Dorado and Mena and Hope and Arkadelphia, and throughout the 29 counties and 150 towns that I so proudly represent, and listen to the people. And then I do my best to bring their voice back here to the floor of the United States House of Representatives.

The people are telling me that it is time that our Nation get its fiscal house in order and stop this reckless spending that has resulted in the largest deficit ever in our Nation's history for a fifth year in a row and has resulted in a debt that totals \$8.137 trillion. That is \$8 trillion, 137 billion and some change.

In fact, for every man, woman, and child in this country, if we all had to

get our checkbooks out tonight and retire this debt, everybody, including the children, the babies being born today, would have to write a check for some \$27,000.

You hear a lot of talk these days about this being a Democratic idea or this being a Republican idea. And, Mr. Speaker, I am here to tell you that I believe the people in this country like me are sick and tired of all the partisan bickering that goes on at our Nation's Capital.

It should not matter if it is a Democratic idea or a Republican idea. In fact, the American people are concerned not about petty partisan politics, but they are concerned about paying for the high cost of their children's college education, the skyrocketing cost of health care and how to pay for prescription drugs. They are concerned about their retirement security, about privatizing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, skyrocketing natural gas and energy prices, the war in Iraq and thousands of Katrina victims who nearly 4 months after the devastating hurricane still today remain homeless.

Let me tell you about my America. My congressional district back home in Arkansas ranks 415 out of 435 among congressional districts throughout the country in average income per household. Half the children in Arkansas are on Medicaid. Eight out of ten seniors in nursing homes are on Medicaid. One in five people in my home State of Arkansas are on Medicaid. Yet, around 1 o'clock in the morning on November 18, Congress nearly passed the so-called Deficit Reduction Act that would directly and adversely impact the poor, the disabled, the elderly. This bill mandates nearly \$50 billion in spending cuts, including \$11.4 billion in cuts to Medicaid, the only health insurance plan for the poor, the disabled, the elderly; \$14.3 billion in cuts to Federal student aid programs; over \$3 billion in cuts to our farm families; and over \$700 million in cuts to food stamps. Then the Republican leadership turns around and passes \$56 billion worth of tax cuts, \$50 billion in spending cuts, \$56 billion in tax cuts. Only in Washington do you add \$6 billion to the Nation's debt and call it the Deficit Reduction Act.

Mr. Speaker, I will never stop fighting for the conservative smalltown values that I was raised on and still believe in, and I cannot help but reflect on one of the memory verses that I learned growing up at Midway United Methodist Church just outside Prescott, Arkansas. It is from Matthew 25:40, and it goes like this: I tell you the truth. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

Mr. Speaker, the idea of cutting programs that would negatively impact the poorest among us does not resonate with the principles on which this country was founded. These budget cuts are indicative of misguided priorities and do not reflect the values I learned growing up in places like Emmet, Prescott and Hope, Arkansas.

As members of the Blue Dog Coalition, we believe we have the answer to this massive debt, this ongoing deficit, and we believe we can get it under control without harming and cutting programs for the poorest among us. It is called the Blue Dog 12-Point Plan. It is 12 simple points, quite frankly, that, if implemented, would truly restore some fiscal discipline and common sense to our Nation's government. This evening, Mr. Speaker, we plan to spend the remaining part of this hour going over these 12 points. So many people criticize what is going on, but they do not offer up a solution, and what we are trying to do as members of the Blue Dog Coalition is offer up an alternative, offer up a solution to this massive debt and deficit, this budget problem our Nation has today.

With me to help do that I am real proud to have JOHN TANNER, one of the founding members of the Blue Dog Coalition from the State of Tennessee; DENNIS CARDOZA, one of the co-chairs of the Blue Dog Coalition from California; and Allen Boyd from Florida, one of the founding members, longtime members, former chairman of the Blue Dog Coalition. So we come to you this evening from all across America, from Arkansas and Tennessee and California and Florida, to offer up what we believe are commonsense ideas to truly try to get this Nation's fiscal house back in order. As 37 members of Congress, we have come together, and we have written this 12-point reform, and we are encouraging Democrats and Republicans to join us as we try to get this Nation back on track.

□ 2200

And the reason this is so important and why this should matter to everybody across our land, \$8.137 trillion in debt. That is very important for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is our Nation today. The first \$500 million we collect every day in taxes from taxpayers does not go to better roads, better education, better health care. It simply goes to pay interest, to pay interest on the national debt.

It is not getting any better. In fact, our Nation is borrowing another \$907 million every 24 hours. As Members of the Blue Dog Coalition, we want to fix this, and we can do it with our 12-point plan.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlemen from Florida (Mr. BOYD).

Mr. BOYD. Madam speaker, I want to thank my friend from Arkansas for organizing this hour to give the Blue Dogs a chance to talk to the Nation about our 12-point plan. I came here 9 years ago and have been a part of the Blue Dog Coalition since that time and am real proud of the work that they do in trying to bring a message to this Congress and to the country that fiscal responsibility and fiscal discipline does matter.

Now, as our friend from Arkansas, Congressman ROSS, said earlier, he grew up in a small town in Arkansas. I