

It has sometimes appeared that the efforts in Afghanistan have trudged along, with success measured in part by the areas in which we have gained some measure of control versus the price paid in human lives both civilian and military. The casualties suffered aren't just numbers to me; each name, each face, represents a family who is paying the ultimate price, the loss of a son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother; a family that will never be the same. Therefore, I wholeheartedly support the formation of an Afghanistan/Pakistan Study Group in the hope that it will help to turn the tide of this war and lessen the number of casualties as well.

I, too, have a deep respect and confidence in Gen. Petraeus and would not want my comments to be construed as being critical of the leadership of our military. I have no formal training in political science or history so please accept these comments as simply the perspective of an American mother with children glad to serve our country.

God bless you and give you wisdom as you serve in the leadership of our country.

Sincerely,

P.S. It meant so much to see my sons receive a standing ovation when introduced during last week's luncheon. It is these very Lance Corporals, Corporals and Sergeants who are almost daily listed among the casualties. My son, ——— remarked that listening to your speech "restored his faith in the republic." Thank you again for recognizing their service.

□ 1040

FISCAL SOLUTIONS AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, the political parties are missing an opportunity to deal with both the discontent and the fundamental causes we see in the political process today. You don't have to identify with the tea party to be frustrated with the tax system. It is incomprehensible, expensive, unfair, and unsustainable. People of all parties and philosophies understand that the long-term debt of the United States and the fiscal practices that drive it are heading for a train wreck.

The answer is not to ignore real problems, change the subject, or make it worse. A tax discussion should, frankly, address why the system is incomprehensible, the lack of certainty, how it doesn't pay for what America needs, and how we spend through tax breaks about what we collect overall.

There are real problems that we should be zeroing in on, like the alternative minimum tax. It was a millionaire's tax some 40 years ago that now threatens 30 million American families, not the billionaires. They won't pay it at all. It will be the near rich and the middle class. It was a system that was actually made worse the way the Bush tax cuts were structured.

We should deal with the corporate tax. Yes, it is the second highest stated rate in the world, but few companies pay the full amount because of a Swiss

cheese of exemptions and special provisions. It actually penalizes people who manufacture here in the United States.

I would suggest that, if we can borrow trillions of dollars for tax changes, shouldn't the trillions be used to fix the broken system and not to push problems ahead a couple of years?

Instead, the debate is largely about extending \$3.5 trillion in expiring Bush tax cuts or maybe about only extending \$2.8 trillion, not to mention the cost of borrowing that money from the Chinese, the Europeans, or the Japanese. Missing in the debate is how much of that we can afford at all, not just the borrowed money and the deficit, but the lost opportunity to get the tax system right.

Yet it is not just about taxation. We must also look at the expending side of the equation, which is widely acknowledged. Our defense budget can be reduced and redirected. There are hints of this in the Obama administration, but we can do far more. We cannot continue to spend above the rate of inflation, not counting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while we spend billions of dollars to protect West Germany from the Soviet Union, neither of which exists anymore.

We lavish agricultural subsidies on the richest agribusiness, but it doesn't help most farmers or ranchers. We can help far more for far less.

There is the bottomless pit in the name of homeland security. Dana Priest's brilliant writing in The Washington Post pointed out: It is out-of-control spending, layer upon layer of activities, that doesn't make us any safer. Perhaps we may be less safe with all the expenditure.

There are some on the other side of the aisle who talk about eliminating health care reform. No. We should actually accelerate the reforms that are in the health care bill so that they won't just save money but will actually improve health care. We can invest in value over volume. We must not ignore why the long-term picture is such a problem and certainly we don't want to make it worse.

Many tea party sympathizers and Jon Stewart fans could agree on this path forward. It would be nice, instead of campaign documents that get people past an election but that don't solve a problem, to work on areas of agreement with the public which start us on a path to fiscal solutions and economic recovery.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 45 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CUELLAR) at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Roy Bennett, Calvary Assembly of God Church, Jefferson City, Missouri, offered the following prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we come to You today, asking Your divine blessing upon this House of Representatives. As they are called upon to make many decisions, we ask for Your divine direction for not only this House, but for our President and all others that are called upon to lead this great Nation.

Lord, help them to remember we are not great because of our vast resources or our manufacturing abilities, but because our forefathers believed when Your word said, "Blessed is the Nation whose God is the Lord." And as they looked to You, Lord, You led them, and Your blessing was upon this great land.

But today, Lord, we need Your divine direction and blessing to be upon this Nation more than ever. And now, Lord, let Your blessings be upon each one of these men and women that are leaders today. This we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. SKELTON led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 3847. An act to implement certain defense trade cooperation treaties, and for other purposes.

WELCOMING REVEREND ROY BENNETT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.