Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I do not know what we wrought just a few minutes ago. And it is interesting to listen to my colleagues talk about defending the troops and saving lives. But if they would have read the resolution that we had before us just a few minutes ago, although I am not challenging the conscience of those who express themselves, this is where we should do it. That is why we have a democracy.

But it is interesting, Mr. Speaker, that just a few minutes ago we voted not to support those troops who have their lives on the line, who engage in the military air strikes, just as our Senate colleagues voted a couple of weeks ago to say we support their efforts in bringing about peace, in bringing about a resolution in fighting for the refuges.

I am not sure what we thought we were doing, but the message that goes out to those who have to leave right now and engage in war and conflict on behalf of the freedom of those of us here in the United States and of those refugees being murdered and raped is that we are not in support of their efforts.

I hope that we will not say to the POWs we do not want them home. I hope that we will correct this mistake that we have made. But most of all, I hope the clear message will be that we, as Americans, stand united behind freedom, behind justice, and behind the safe return of the refugees and the POWs.

PRESIDENT NEEDS TO CONSULT CONGRESS AND AMERICAN PEOPLE WHEN SENDING TROOPS TO WAR

(Mrs. FOWLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. FOWLER. Mr. Speaker, I just want to address the House in relation to some of the comments that my colleagues have just made.

This has been a very serious day today. We have had some serious debate. Some people really have really been struggling with their consciences and their decisions because we have been talking about young Americans' lives, because we have young American lives at risk today. There are young men and women from my district that are flying over Yugoslavia tonight, dropping some of those bombs.

The message that I think was sent today was twofold. One was to the President of the United States, that whenever he is going to send our young people into harm's way, he needs to come to this Congress, he needs to consult with the Congress, and he needs to go to the American people.

This is not a unilateral decision that should be made by the President. He needs to come to the Congress, the representatives of the people. This is not about whether we support the troops or not. We all support our troops, and we are going to give them every resource they need. But the President of the United States needs to come to this Congress.

And second is that we do have a democracy that works. Our forefathers were so wise because this is an institution that works. And while we disagree and sometimes we like the way the vote comes out and sometimes we do not, the institution of our government works and it will continue to work for as long as this country lasts.

CONGRESS SUPPORTS AIR WAR IN KOSOVO

(Mr. SHERMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, this has been a momentous day. And it is important that the Nation, and especially the leaders in Belgrade, do not misinterpret what happened here.

America will continue the air war, and that air war has the support of this House. America demands the resettlement of the Kosovars in safety in Kosovo, and that has overwhelming support. And that is all indicated by our rejection of the resolution to withdraw all military efforts from the Yugoslav theater.

We also voted clearly, and the White House should not misconstrue this, that before massive ground forces are deployed, Congress must be consulted.

And finally, in what I fear will be a confusing vote, and I use this speech to avoid such confusion, we voted 213–213 on a resolution that seemed restricted to the air war, but those who understand our legal system will recognize that the reason we voted that way was to make sure our own courts did not misinterpret that vote as a vote in favor of a carte blanche to the President. We support the air war by a large vote in this House.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WAMP). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

BLIND EMPOWERMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. EHRLICH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EHRLICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Blind Empowerment Act, which will impact the lives of nearly a quarter of a million blind people.

The Blind Empowerment Act, Mr. Speaker, restores the long-standing linkage between blind people and senior citizens under the Social Security Act. This bipartisan legislation, which currently has over 230 cosponsors, will restore this historic link and empower blind people.

For nearly 20 years, the blind and senior citizens were linked for purposes of the Social Security earnings test. Generally, the test has been a part of our Social Security program since its inception. The test reduces the benefits of recipients who earn above a certain amount of income from their work.

In 1977, the Social Security amendments established the earnings limit for the blind who receive disability benefits. This exempt amount was linked to the identical exempt amount as applied to seniors 65 and over.

In 1996, we did the right thing by raising the earnings limit for seniors from $11,500 to $30,000 by the year 2002. That was the Senior Citizens Freedom To Work Act. Giving seniors the opportunity to increase their earnings and keep their benefits was the right thing to do.

During the process, however, this historic link between the blind and the seniors was ended, which aided in balancing the budget. As a result, by 2002, when the exemption for seniors becomes $30,000, the lower limit set by Congress for the blind will be half that amount.

It is also important to note that when blind individuals earn more than the earnings limit threshold, they lose all of their benefits. The senior citizens in the same situation would only have their benefits reduced by a rate of $1 for every $3 earned over the limit.

We should not roll back the progress of the last 2 decades by continuing a policy which discourages working individuals from becoming self-sufficient and making a contribution to their communities.

It is my belief that ''delinkage'' occurred because our priorities in 1995 were to rein in deficit spending and not to provide a disincentive to the working blind. The blind want to work and take pride in doing so.

In an era of budget surplus, need for capable workers in a tight labor market, and a clear opportunity to demonstrate fairness and equity, it is time for Congress to restore this historic link. The increasing number of working blind Americans will produce additional tax revenue and contributions to the Federal Treasury and the Social Security Trust Fund.

Approximately 70 percent of working-age blind people are underemployed or unemployed. Accordingly, blindness is often associated with adverse social and economic consequences. It is difficult for blind individuals to find sustained employment or, for that matter, employment at all.

□ 2045

This is especially good, commonsense legislation during this favorable economic time. When I listen to business owners back in my district, one thing they tell me is that their priority is to find and keep quality workers.