

If I am offended by what you say or do or by what the government says or does, I can go to court and sue you because I am offended. This atheist was offended by a bunch of school kids, by their mere utterance of the Pledge of Allegiance. So he goes and sues and convinces a judge to protect his right not to be offended. So no more offended words, so no more pledge. This is an example of the new phantom constitutional right of freedom from being offended.

Mr. Speaker, I was a felony court trial judge in Houston for over 20 years. I heard thousands of cases. All of those were based on the United States Constitution. But the last time I checked in the Constitution, freedom from hurting someone's feelings was not included in the Constitution. So in truth this is the right that was allegedly violated by those kids in California. They offended someone, they hurt someone's feelings, and now they have to stop.

This is a dangerous movement, but this mysterious right is not in the Constitution. But the right of free speech, Mr. Speaker, is in the Constitution. And I say to those kids in California, your right of free speech was violated by the pledge policeman when he issued his pronouncement against you mentioning "under God."

So now you may proudly say the pledge each morning in a closet or in silence, and when you get to that phrase "with liberty and justice for all," just remember you lost some of your liberty by this ruling, and it certainly is not justice for all but only for those who are offended. Mr. Speaker, this ought not to be.

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IRAQ HEARING

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FORTENBERRY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, September 15, we held an informal congressional hearing to discuss and explore a military withdrawal from Iraq. It was called "The Bipartisan Congressional Forum on How to Bring the Troops Home." It was the first of its kind and it was about time.

I had hoped that the House Committee on Armed Services or the House Committee on International Relations would have taken up the matter, but repeated calls for such hearings have fallen on deaf ears. So, with the help of my colleagues and with many others and also my wonderful staff, we went about putting together this very needed hearing.

In so doing, we knew absolutely that opposition to the war is a stance that is firmly in the political mainstream. Less than 40 percent of Americans, according to the recent polls, approve of the President's handling of Iraq, and

roughly half want to see our troops come home as soon as possible. With this being an American sentiment comes responsibility to be more than a protest movement.

We also knew that we needed to offer sound, thorough policy proposals that could turn our deeply held convictions into operational reality, and that is what Thursday's hearing was all about. This was not an opportunity for placard waving, though there is certainly a time and a place for that. We were more interested in how to bring our troops home, rather than why.

We heard from a broad range of experts, from scholars and military strategists. We heard from Senator Max Cleland from Georgia.

We started with an overview of the situation on the ground, including a perspective on the lives of Iraqis under U.S. occupation. Later, we heard about specific ways that we can pivot away from the current policies, ending our military presence in Iraq and bringing our troops home. From there, we transitioned into a discussion of what next. I have always insisted that ending the war does not and cannot mean abandoning Iraq and its people.

Believing in the principle underlying Colin Powell's "Pottery Barn Rule," and that even if it was the Bush administration policy that broke it, at the very least we must play a constructive role in the rebuilding of Iraq.

Most of all, Thursday's hearing was designed to inspire a long overdue national conversation about alternatives to the current Iraq policy.

Our goal was to fill the policy vacuum and break the silence on Capitol Hill where, frankly, Members of Congress have been slow to embrace the fresh thinking and new approaches to Iraq that their constituents are eager to discuss and are eager to hear. For too long, for a number of reasons, this debate has been ceded to the Bush administration, even as they have produced a bloody and ruinous debacle.

Thursday's hearing demonstrated that we want to do more than just say no to the war in Iraq. We want to say yes to a new, intelligent, progressive, peaceful Iraq policy that will both protect the American people and fulfill our obligations to the Iraqi people. Chief among these obligations is to ensure that the United States does not maintain a long-term military presence in Iraq. That means no permanent bases and no control over Iraqi oil.

From our witnesses, it was clear: We need to engage in an open and robust dialogue, both at home and in Iraq. They agreed that multiparty peace talks are the best way to convince all factions of Iraqis that we are serious about allowing them to dictate their country and rebuild it, and, most important of all, the need for a commitment to bring the U.S. troops home. The truth is that our military presence in Iraq is contributing to the chaos there, not alleviating it. By bringing our troops home, we can save both

American and Iraqi lives and we can reunite thousands of American families in the process.

Mr. Speaker, my hope is that last week's hearing will serve as a catalyst for elected officials, for think-tanks and others around the country to join in a dialogue about military disengagement from Iraq, that the hearing will start a discussion that has been long, long overdue. The time for action in Iraq is now. So let us start taking action.

UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share one of the many stories of human compassion and generosity that have emerged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Organizations across the 11th District of Georgia are working hard to assist Katrina's victims, and the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton is a shining example. As evacuees from the gulf coast began making their way north into our State, the University of West Georgia community realized these victims needed shelter, food, and support immediately.

So the university arranged to house 180 evacuees, including 80 children, in Roberts Hall, an empty dorm in the middle of campus. Dormitory living is now providing these families with the privacy and security they need to begin piecing their lives back together.

But the State University of West Georgia did not just house these evacuees. The community understood that shelter was only the first step to helping these victims get back on their feet. So the university and Carroll County community mobilized all their resources to assist their adopted residents.

The health services staff and nursing department faculty worked to provide the victims with health care services. The university opened its computer labs, and volunteers helped victims locate family members and find relief resources. The community came together to provide food, clothing, personal necessities, and home items for their guests, and local organizations are helping many of these victims find work in the area.

Mr. Speaker, it would have been more than enough for the University of West Georgia and Carroll County residents to house, feed and clothe these victims, but this generous community wanted to do more. They wanted to help these victims get their lives back together and start them on the path to recovery.

So the Carrollton public school system quickly registered children so they would not fall behind in their education. Because a college dormitory is only a temporary living situation, the Carroll County Housing Authority is