Development Fund, their executive directors, several pre-eminent scientists from major organizations, public and private sector universities, talking about the illnesses that plague people today as a result of this huge catastrophe. And then, finally, those who have served as ambassadors to our country and ambassadors from the affected nations will address what we can do in the way of additional international response to meet today's challenges still arising from the Chernobyl catastrophe.

I have never seen birth defects as I have witnessed among the children affected by this continuing tragedy in Chernobyl. The thyroid cancers, the conditions to the heart, the distortions of the human form related to radiation resulting from Chernobyl are horrendous.

The southern part of Belarus is largely depopulated, though some people who are refugees from Afghanistan are moving into the area, incredibly, and eating and planting seeds in the ground and eating contaminated food and infecting themselves even until this day. There is so much for the American people to understand. Though it was 20 years ago, Chernobyl lives as it will for thousands of years to come.

USING HISTORY AS A GUIDE

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

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that bothers me is how some of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle come down here and paint a picture using history as a guide that is totally inconsistent with what I, as a Member of Congress for 24 years, have seen and believe.

The President of the United States and the Congress's number one responsibility is to protect this country from enemies, both domestic and foreign. After the attack on 9/11, the President of the United States went after the bad guys, the terrorists. And Saddam Hussein, we were told, was building weapons of mass destruction. In the early 1980s the Israelis attacked a nuclear production site in Iraq because he was trying to build a nuclear weapon. In the Iran/Iraq war he used chemical weapons to kill Iranians during that war. He killed thousands and thousands of innocent women and children, Kurds, using chemical weapons. And in just the last couple of days, some of our expert military personnel in Iraq have found 800 canisters, 800 canisters of chemical weapons, the type that were used to kill Kurds and kill people in the Iran/Iraq war. That is a weapon of mass destruction. We just found it. And so people that say that there are no weapons of mass destruction, or were none, we are starting to find those. And we believe that many of those weapons were carted out of the country before we invaded.

And when I hear my colleagues say there was no connection between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, and we had no reason to go in there, the fact of the matter is we know that Uday, Saddam Hussein's son, had leaders of the al Qaeda movement in Baghdad in the hospital and at other get-togethers many, many times. There was a loose-knit association between the Taliban, al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and others who want to do the Free World ill. That is a fact. And how we see people trying to distort history to say, oh, my gosh, America's made a terrible mistake by going into Iraq really bothers me. The President is doing his dead level best to defeat the terrorists and protect this Nation and the world. There have been attacks in Spain, in France, in England, the United States and other places, in Bali, the terrorists in Egypt just recently. And we cannot back down to the terrorists. We cannot appease them. The President is doing the right things.

Now, regarding Iraq, we are turning the war over to the Iraqis. Eleven million people went to the polls and voted for freedom, democracy and a government; and that government will be formed. It is being formed as we speak.

But we are reducing our troop forces. I understand we have gone from 161,000 just recently to a troop reduction of 30,000 down to 131,000. So we are reducing our forces, and we are turning it over to the Iraqis as they are able to take care of the problems themselves.

The terrorists are going to continue to try to tear up jack over there. They are going to try to drive everybody out and destroy democracy. But it is in our interest and the Free World's to stay the course. And if we don't, we will rue the day that we didn't.

And I want to end up one more time by saying to my colleagues who were talking about Iran early today, the gentleman from Washington, Iran is a terrorist state. We cannot allow them to develop a nuclear capability. And if we do that, we will be dead sorry we did.

IRAQ DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the notion that the Iraq war is all about building freedom and democracy across the broader Middle East has been a staple of White House talking points for nearly as long as we have had our troops in harm's way.

But a few weeks ago, courtesy of a front-page story in The Washington Post, we learned something interesting about the President's actual nuts and bolts commitment to democracy. He doesn't have one. That April 5 story by Peter Baker reveals that when it comes to promoting democracy, the bottom line reality doesn't match all the fancy rhetoric.

The administration, in fact, is dramatically reducing funding for programs and organizations that do the nitty-gritty work of helping nations train their people to build and sustain a democratic infrastructure, political parties, unions, a free press and other institutions.

The National Democratic Institute of International Affairs and the International Republican Institute will, according to The Post, be running out of USAID grant dollars in a matter of days. Only a special earmark is keeping them open for business.

The U.S. Institute of Peace has seen funding for its democracy programs in Iraq slashed by nearly two-thirds. The National Endowment for Democracy recently received its last $3 million to spend in Iraq. As one vice-president at the U.S. Institute of Peace pointed out to The Post, the combined cost of all the programs dedicated to encouraging Iraqi democracy amounts to less than what we spend on the military occupation in Iraq in a single day.

Of course, in addition to being expensive in treasure, this military campaign has carried a devastating human cost, namely, 2,390 American men and women killed, all in the name of democracy that is in danger of never taking hold. It is not surprising, I guess, that this administration would short-change democracy promotion. After all, these are the folks who thought there was no hard work involved in creating a free society. They thought all you had to do was drop a few bombs, kick out a brutal dictator, and democracy would miraculously and spontaneously spring from the oil wells or something. That is one of the reasons their post-war planning was so tragically inadequate.

But this war was never really about building democracy in any real sense. If that had been the justification presented to the American people in 2002, this body and our colleagues on the other side of the Capitol would never have authorized the President to use military force.

No, it was only after the whole weapons of mass destruction thing turned out to be a fraud that the administration started casting about for another rationale. And they came up with this fanciful notion that the war would give rise to democracy, not just in Iraq, but among its neighbors and across the region.

Mr. Speaker, we can encourage democratic elements in Iraq without a military campaign that is killing Americans, killing Iraqis, and fomenting a civil war. It is time to bring our troops home and start investing in true democracy building efforts.

I have offered a new approach to national security called SMART. This stands for Sensible Multilateral American Response to Terrorism. And its core is the notion of investing in nations' democratic potential without resorting to military force.

There are many elements to SMART. It calls for fighting terrorism and stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction through stronger multilateral relationships and improved intelligence. It demands that the United States live up to its nuclear nonproliferation commitments. It would redirect money we are spending on obsolete Cold War weapons toward homeland security and energy independence. But perhaps most important of all, it is a humanitarian program designed to improve living conditions in troubled regions of the world, to address the oppression and the deprivation that often give rise to terrorism in the very first place. That means supporting programs that promote sustainable development; human rights education; peaceful conflict resolution, educational opportunities, particularly for women and girls; and democracy building.

It is time for the United States to actually put its money where its mouth is on promoting democracy.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. BLACKBURN addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

MEDICARE PART D

Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from Tennessee.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. FITZPATRICK of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, as we stand here on this Chamber floor, thousands of seniors in my district and millions across our country are suffering through piles of Medicare drug plan offers; and in far too many cases, these seniors are faced with a difficult dilemma. They are suffering under the weight of too much information, with too little time in which to make a choice on what drug plan they will use under the Medicare prescription drug program.

□ 2015

Their decision is by no means simple. The drug plans our seniors choose will define their health care options for years to come. If they do not make a decision and wait until the May 15 deadline passes, they will face penalties and higher prices for the drugs that they need.

This week the Bucks County Courier Times, a daily paper in my district in Pennsylvania, mentioned the drug program dilemma faced by one senior. Mary Ann Morgan was fighting through the details and complications of the new program. She said, ''It's the same as if you're going to buy a stock. The fine print is hard to figure out.''

Traditionally, Medicare's assurance has been that for the elderly and persons with disabilities that they will not be alone when confronted with the full burden of their health care costs. However, the Medicare prescription drug benefit has changed, and if the nearly 3,000 seniors I have met through 12 town halls can represent a sample of opinion, many seniors do not yet understand the prescription drug program and do not plan to sign up for coverage.

Despite the administration's long public information campaign, for many months polls have consistently indicated only 37 percent of those eligible for Medicare say they only partially understand the program. Sixty-one percent state they simply do not understand the program. Approximately one in four seniors, 24 percent, say they plan to join the program, while 54 percent say they do not plan to join, and 22 percent have no opinion.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services projected that 39.1 million Medicare beneficiaries would have creditable prescription drug coverage for 2006. Of this total, HHS projected that 29.3 million beneficiaries would be enrolled in part D plans, and nearly 10 million beneficiaries would have creditable drug coverage under qualified plans such as employer- or union-sponsored plans.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent enrollment figures released just last month indicate that only 19.7 million beneficiaries are enrolled in a Medicare part D prescription drug plan, a number that falls short of the hoped for estimate of 29.3 million. This rate of enrollment cannot be viewed as a success. Members of Congress must act to modify the original plan.

Mr. Speaker, I contend that there is a simple solution to this problem. Our seniors need more time, and Congress should provide it to them. Congress changed Medicare to give our seniors more choice in what has historically been a highly structured government program. Congress cannot in good conscience allow thousands of seniors to suffer penalties simply because they could not make an informed decision for their health care coverage and do so in time.

It is for these reasons that I introduced H.R. 4399, legislation that will extend the initial year's enrollment period an additional 6 months, until November 14, 2006. My legislation would also extend the enrollment period for an additional 4½ months for all subsequent years. And, finally, under my legislation penalties would be suspended for 2 years when seniors enroll late in the program.

I call on my colleagues to join as a cosponsor of H.R. 4399 to give Mary Ann Morgan and thousands of seniors like her more time to make the best use of the choice that they have been given.

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

(Mr. BROWN of Ohio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

ROGER TOUSSAINT AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEE PENSION BENEFITS

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the Special Order time of the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

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

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, Roger Toussaint, the president of Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union, is in jail in New York City tonight. Toussaint's crime is that he took a stand against New York Governor Pataki's sneak attack on public employee pension benefits. When the Governor's puppet appointees on the New York Metropolitan Transport Authority Board had already reached agreement on all other items during labor contract negotiations, the Governor ordered that a cut in pension benefits be added as a new demand. Although it was a cut proposed for the future employees, Roger Toussaint said, ''No. I will not be a party to an agreement that sells out the unborn.''

Roger Toussaint would not allow the Governor to set a precedent for all future State, city, county, and later on it would spill over to Federal employees, and they would have shoved in their face at the bargaining table this precedent of having cut public employee pension benefits. A domino effect would roll right across the entire Nation, and no public employee pension benefits would be safe. ''Strike'' was the rallying cry at that moment, and that rallying cry deserves the support of all working families across the Nation.

The private sector, the corporate butchers, have been carving up private employee pension benefit funds for some years now. Indeed, those of us who serve on the Education and Workforce Committee know that there is an impending pension bankruptcy crisis which may produce shock waves similar to the savings and loan scandal. Private pension benefits for workers we know are endangered, but we have all assumed repeatedly that pensions for public employees are safe, they are secure.

Roger Toussaint's confrontation with the Metropolitan Transit Authority dramatically exposes the fact that public employee pension benefits are also