Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to the so-called “National Strategic and Critical Minerals Production Act,” a bill that has very little to do with development of rare earth elements or minerals that are vulnerable to supply disruption.

The bill before us today is so broadly drafted that it would reduce or eliminate environmental review for almost all type of mines on public land, including common materials like sand, clay, and gravel. It needlessly limits judicial review of mining activities. And it arbitrarily prioritizes mining over every other use of public lands, including hunting, fishing, grazing, and conservation.

If the majority would like to encourage production of truly strategic and critical minerals on public lands, we should work together on a targeted solution that develops our natural resources while protecting our environment. Today’s bill is not that solution. I urge a no vote.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF KAISER PERMANENTE’S SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PHYSICIANS MEDICAL GROUP

HON. JUAN VARGAS
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, September 19, 2013

Mr. VARGAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Kaiser Permanente’s Southern California Physicians Medical Group (SCPMG) on their 60th Anniversary. As a leading provider of health care services for more than 500,000 San Diegans this is truly an historic occasion for their organization. Since its modest beginnings in 1953, SCPMG has grown to become the nation’s second largest private multi-specialty group practice. In 1967, Kaiser Permanente introduced the “integrated” model of healthcare to San Diego with the opening of its first hospital and medical center.

With over 1,100 SCPMG physicians in the San Diego service area, they provide care at two medical centers and 24 outpatient offices and annually see more than 2.9 million patients. They have established San Diego Medical Center as a premier destination for the treatment of strokes as well as having been certified a “baby-friendly” hospital. SCPMG sites also serve as academic institutions where SCPMG physicians help mentor Kaiser Foundation graduate medical residents and fellows.

SCPMG is helping to shape the future of health care in our nation through the use of advanced technology and the creation of innovative solutions that will have a lasting impact. I would like to commend SCPMG on their 60th Anniversary and thank them for their contributions to the community.

IN PROCLAMATION OF NATIONAL GEAR UP WEEK IN EL PASO, TX

HON. BETO O’ROURKE
OF TEXAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, September 19, 2013

Mr. O’ROURKE. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize the week of September 23, 2013 as National GEAR UP Week at Socorro Independent School District and Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso, TX.

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded, competitive grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP serves low-income, minority and disadvantaged students and their families from underrepresented communities who might be the first person in their family to go to college. The program provides multi-year grants to states to deliver resources to students and their families, starting in middle school and onward, to help them achieve their dreams of attaining a postsecondary education.

GEAR UP includes interventions such as tutoring, mentoring, rigorous academic preparation, financial education and college scholarships to improve access to higher education for low-income, minority and disadvantaged first-generation students and their families. The program is built around public-private partnerships, enlisting resources from government, business and community groups to support low-income students as they prepare to enter and succeed in college.

The GEAR UP-Soar (Solutions for Optimal Academic Readiness) and GEAR UP-Proyecto MAS is a partnership of the Socorro Independent School District, Ysleta Independent School District and the University of Texas at El Paso. Over 8,000 El Paso students have benefited from their participation in these GEAR UP Projects focused on college readiness.

The program helps the University of Texas at El Paso, Socorro Independent School District and Ysleta Independent School District fulfill their missions to provide a quality education for all students, helping them achieve their highest potential. I thank GEAR UP for increasing the number of low-income and minority El Paso students who are college ready, and helping these students enter and succeed in higher education.

IN PROCLAMATION OF NATIONAL GEAR UP WEEK IN EL PASO, TX

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THE HON. CHERI BUSTOS
OF ILLINOIS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, September 19, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about Lieutenant Colonel Harold Fritz of Peoria, Illinois, who is one of only three living Medal of Honor recipients in Illinois today. The Medal of Honor is our Nation’s highest military honor and is awarded for personal acts of valor that go well above and beyond the call of duty.

Lieutenant Colonel Fritz, who went by “Hal,” was born in Chicago and currently lives in Peoria. He was awarded the Medal of Honor due to his brave service in Vietnam.

During a jungle firefight, then First Lieutenant Fritz displayed exemplary leadership despite suffering serious wounds. Lieutenant Colonel Fritz was leading his 7-vehicle armored column to meet and escort a truck convoy when they suddenly came under intense fire from enemy combatants. Lieutenant Colonel Fritz’ vehicle was hit, and he was seriously wounded. Realizing that his men were completely surrounded and outnumbered, Lieutenant Colonel Fritz leaped to the top of his burning vehicle and directed the positioning of his remaining vehicles and men.

Without thinking of his own safety, he ran from vehicle to vehicle in complete view of the enemy gunners in order to help his men. Armed only with a pistol and bayonet, he led a small group of his men in a charge which inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Despite being wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Fritz assisted his men and refused medical attention until all of his wounded soldiers had been treated.

Lieutenant Colonel Fritz is currently the President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society and resides in Peoria. I wish him all the best and want to thank him again for his brave and dedicated service to our Nation.

NATIONAL STRATEGIC AND CRITICAL MINERALS PRODUCTION ACT OF 2013

SPEECH OF
HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
OF MARYLAND
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, September 18, 2013

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 761) to require the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to more efficiently develop domestic sources of the minerals and mineral materials of strategic and critical importance to United States economic and national security and manufacturing competitiveness.

This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.
SEEEKING A VIABLE U.N. PATH FORWARD ON SYRIA
HON. RUSH HOLT
OF NEW JERSEY
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, September 19, 2013

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer for the record and the benefit of my colleagues a recent op-ed in the Huffington Post by international affairs expert Jeffrey Laurenti. It outlines a sound broader approach to bringing the tragic civil war in Syria to an end. Although some of the circumstances have changed since he wrote this piece, the wisdom of his analysis and recommendation still shows.

[From the Huffington Post, Sept. 12, 2013]

PUBLIC consternation in the United States and abroad about Obama’s planned “targeted, limited, and effective” punitive strike against Syria confirms the wisdom of his overall approach to the Syrian crisis the past two years.

In facing down the caws from Washington hawks for arming rebels, bombing missile sites, and trying to impose no-fly zone, Obama has gauged perfectly what Americans—and the world—expected of him: restraint. As he acknowledged last week, “I was elected to end wars, not start them.”

The apparent use of chemical weapons by the forces of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad certainly adds a new factor to the calculus, both for Obama’s personal credibility and international concerns about weapons of mass destruction. It may be enough to sway a critical margin in the Congress to let the president proceed with his plan. But history has repeatedly shown how quickly a hasty rush to war might accomplish its objective without widening the war.

But there is a good chance the public and Congress will remain immovable and reject any kind of military involvement in Syria. With the prudent counsel that St. Luke (19:12) nor leader traveling to face an impossible defeat, the president’s team should already be working now on Plan B: an ambitious effort to shut down the Syrian civil war altogether.

Perhaps the administration conceives air strikes as the lever to push the Syrian resistance to the long-promised negotiating table with Assad’s government. That might be a plausible strategy for wrestling peace from the jaws of wider war. But even if this is the game plan, the administration should be laying the ground to travel a diplomatic denouement to come—which might even help it on Capitol Hill—in the U.N. Security Council.

Ah, the United Nations. The institution whose resolutions—and, by extension, whose Charter restrictions on the use of force—Obama seemed to dismiss last week as “hocus pocus,” delighting his right-wing enemies and shocking the political support base at home that won him his party’s nomination and the many publics abroad that cheered his election.

(Those most shocked presumably include the Nobel Committee that awarded him its Peace Prize in 2009 for having “created a new climate of hope” with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions can play.”)[1] “Dialogue and negotiations...are instruments for resolving even the most difficult international conflicts.”)

Ambassador Samantha Power, a committed multilateralist now representing America at the United Nations, last week declared, “there is no viable path forward in this Security Council.” If the path we want the Security Council to take is a U.S. military strike against Syrian government forces for the grotesque use of chemical weapons, she is likely right that Russia and China would veto it. But even so, simply securing a nine-vote council majority would itself indicate to the Congress and American people that the red line that U.S. action would be uphold in the world’s, not just Obama’s. And it would justify a General Assembly call for limited action, giving it the gold-standard international legitimacy when discord paralyzes the Security Council.

Perhaps those votes are just not there. President Bush abandoned the effort to win a Security Council majority after the invasion of Iraq when he couldn’t get more than four votes. But that was surely the canary in the mineshaft in 2003, warning about what proved to be a disastrous war.

There is another viable path that the United States could usefully pursue right now, taking advantage of both the shock of the Ghouta gas attack and the fear of a U.S. strike’s unintended consequences. It could take a page from the Security Council’s first successful initiative as the Cold War wound down: its Resolution 598 that forced an end to the Iran-Iraq war (in which, coincidentally, Iraqi gas attacks against Iranians also figured).

These might be core elements of such an initiative:

A demand for an immediate ceasefire by all forces in Syria—the government and the various insurgent factions—with a short deadline for compliance;

Impression of full-spectrum sanctions, especially on arms, on any party that refuses to comply with the ceasefire, investigate and report violations, and protect U.N. weapons inspectors;

Establishment of a U.N. commission of inquiry to determine responsibility for the Ghouta attack and any other reported chemical weapons use, with a demand that the government and, in rebel-dominated territory, insurgent groups permit full, unfettered access for U.N. weapons inspectors to take their investigations of alleged attacks—much as Resolution 598 created a commission to certify officially who had started the Iran-Iraq war (surprise: Saddam).

Referral of the commission’s findings of responsibility for chemical weapons use to the International Criminal Court, or less ideally an internationally vetted Syrian tribunal, for criminal prosecution;

A demand that Syria declare to U.N. inspectors its chemical weapons stocks for their provisional surveillance;

A reaffirmation of the need to kick-start the delayed conference on elimination of WMD in the Middle East that was promised at the 2010 nuclear nonproliferation treaty review conference.

It does not help President Obama’s global credibility for Washington to appear to discard U.N. inspectors—especially when his one Western partner, France, now insists on waiting for it. And it is certainly awkward for the president to be perceived as having high moral ground when the pope is past leading prayer vigils and writing to world leaders decrying the planned attack.

It may be that the world community places a thicker red line on unilateral use of force than is on punishing those who violate the more reason for having Plan B in place to pick up the pieces.