

dangerous substances that may be in the food we eat for nourishment or the pharmaceuticals that we take to cure our ills. Only our FDA in this country can assure the safety of drugs for American citizens. I think this House would be shirking its duty if we created a system that relied upon the actions of regulatory officials in Canada, Thailand, Belize or Barbados to ensure the safety of American patients. Allowing drug reimportation from foreign countries would only be a signal to foreign drug counterfeiters that it is open season on the health and safety of Americans citizens. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, these foreign counterfeiters are very clever; and with all due respect to my colleague who held up the package this evening, packaging in and of itself does not guarantee that that has not been tampered with and that that is not a counterfeit item. I could relate to you stories from my own medical practice from a few years ago where patients had what might be politely described as therapeutic misadventures by the ingestion of drugs which were imported, illegally, from Mexico.

The House can approach the drug cost issue through far less shortsighted solutions than permitting drug importation from foreign countries. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, the pharmaceutical companies in this country also have an obligation to control the cost and be certain that their profits are reasonable. Without this, we will continue to hear the arguments for reimportation nightly on the House floor. The purchasing power of the Federal Government should bring down the cost of safe pharmaceuticals in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we should remember the admonition of a long-ago physician, to first do no harm. In this House, we would do wise to heed that advice.

NATIONAL RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

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

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise in support of investing in our Nation's rail infrastructure and making rail transportation part of a strong transportation triad that includes highway, air, and rail. The freight rail industry is one that provides services that are key to the operation of practically every other industry.

In an atmosphere of mounting highway congestion and pollution, shippers ought to be changing more and more of their loads to rail. However, due to the fact that trains are not moving fast enough, these switches to rail are not being made. With 19th century signaling systems and antiquated grade-level junctions, railroads are often unable to deliver a truck-competitive service for many shippers. For example, trains that should be able to move

through Chicago in 6 to 8 hours are taking over 2 days.

While freight rail is a sensible, cost-effective way to absorb the expected increase in freight traffic, it is also becoming a major contributor to a variety of social ills, including air and noise pollution, congestion and a declining quality of life. Rail infrastructure improvements would raise the capacity of our transportation network for both goods and passengers; increase safety along the rail network; improve the environment wherever congestion is relieved; and eliminate waits at grade crossings. Since passenger rail service and rail-based transit systems typically share infrastructure with freight rail, improving freight rail infrastructure would also provide much-needed assistance to passenger and commuter rail.

In January, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials released their freight rail bottom line report that states that an additional 2.6 to \$4 billion is needed annually for capital investment in our freight rail system. Last fall, the Federal Railroad Administration and the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association commissioned a study that found short line railroads need nearly \$7 billion to upgrade tracks and structures to handle the newer 286,000-pound rail cars used by the class I railroads.

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So, how can we meet these growing rail capital needs? We cannot afford to simply rely on the railroads for these funds. The Association of American Railroads' policy position book for the 108th Congress states, "Especially over the past couple of years, railroads have become increasingly constrained in how much capital they can devote to infrastructure spending."

The answer to this rail infrastructure funding gap is the bill I have introduced, the National Rail Infrastructure Program, H.R. 1617. H.R. 1617 would create a new significant and dedicated stream of funds for rail projects. Just as we have the Highway Trust Fund and the Aviation Trust Fund, this legislation that I introduced last month would create a national rail infrastructure program. The total revenue stream in my legislation would amount to \$3.3 billion annually.

This is a Federal investment that the American public desperately wants. In fact, Strategies One, a Washington, D.C. polling firm, conducted a national public opinion poll that shows 63 percent of Americans strongly favor moving more freight by trains, especially when the alternative is adding to highway capacity larger and longer trucks.

We cannot afford to sit back as freight and passenger traffic swells. We must craft a multi-modal solution to this capacity shortfall in which we can all win, or else we will all massively lose. Therefore, I urge Members to join the 40 bipartisan cosponsors and me

and cosponsor H.R. 1617, the National Rail Infrastructure Program.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2115, FLIGHT 100—CENTURY OF AVIATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 108-146) on the resolution (H. Res. 265) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2115) to amend title 49, United States Code, to reauthorize programs for the Federal Aviation Administration, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

THE NEED FOR ASBESTOS LITIGATION REFORM

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

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, in 48 hours Congress will face the single most important pending issue of legislation to help our economy. Does your 401(k) look like mine? If so, it is due to the dot.com bust, the war, recession, and possibly even a little bit of Martha Stewart. But it is also due to another problem, and this problem is depressing the value of 900 stocks that form the bedrock of our retirement savings.

The issue is asbestos liability reform. Really. We bankrupted asbestos makers like Johns Manville and U.S. Gypsum a long time ago, but lawsuits now reach out to many companies, most companies, who have had asbestos anywhere in their ceiling tiles, walls, or in the case of Sears Roebuck, in one washer and one iron sold between 1957 and 1958.

Spending on the lawsuits might make sense if our justice system actually compensated victims suffering from asbestos poisoning. But, as the chart behind me shows, most asbestos awards go to lawyers' fees and court costs, and a minority actually goes to the lawsuit plaintiffs. Of the amount that goes to plaintiffs, only a small fraction goes to people who are actually suffering from asbestos poisoning.

When you look at this situation, as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg did, you see a system crying out for reform. Amazingly, the American Bar Association has called for this liability reform.

In this House, I introduced the Asbestos Compensation Act with 40 cosponsors, and my colleague the gentleman from Utah (Mr. CANNON) introduced similar legislation. But in 2 days, our eyes will be on the Senate Judiciary Committee, who will take up this issue with Senator LEAHY and Senator HATCH, and I think it is the best chance that we have to move a key piece of legislation forward to help our economy.

We know that two-thirds of asbestos plaintiffs have no symptoms whatsoever and they are flooding the courts to protect their rights in case they get sick sometime in the future. Meanwhile, plaintiffs who are sick are left behind. This has been a key point that the trial bar representing actually injured plaintiffs has raised.

But the financial uncertainty of asbestos liability is probably causing the greatest cost. Already 70 companies have gone into bankruptcy court, and there are approximately 900 publicly traded companies now facing asbestos lawsuits. If Congress does not act this year, we estimate 800 companies will go bankrupt over this issue. This, according to the National Economic Research Association and Rand Institute study, has cost Americans 60,000 jobs so far, and will cost 423,000 jobs in the future.

The system that we are under now has very uncertain results. Robert York has no symptoms and collected \$1,200 in his asbestos lawsuit. Half went to his lawyer. William Sullivan had undefined asbestos exposure and collected \$350,000, with his lawyer's contingency being undisclosed. Ken Ronnfeldt had exposure to asbestos and collected \$2,500, half going to his lawyer; whereas Ron Huber, who had asbestos-related illness, collected only \$14,000, and is appealing, rightly, his case.

I think the time is now for asbestos liability reform. I think this is a critical issue, not just to make sure that actual victims truly suffering consequences are compensated, but also that we remove this cloud of liability from America's companies that is depressing the value of the retirement savings of millions of Americans.

The test comes in 2 days before the Senate Judiciary Committee. My hope is that we have a bipartisan agreement to move asbestos liability reform through the Senate, and then it will be time for the House to act.

HONORING THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF DAVID LIZARRAGA

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

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise on the 35th anniversary of the East Los Angeles Community Union to recognize its president and CEO, David Lizarraga, and to commend TELACU on the 20th anniversary of its scholarship program.

TELACU is a nonprofit community development corporation dedicated to rebuilding the East Los Angeles community. Despite complex challenges, TELACU's approach is simple: to provide people with the tools for self-empowerment and self-sufficiency and to create opportunities to use those tools to improve their lives.

Under the leadership of Mr. Lizarraga, TELACU has become the largest, most successful Hispanic community and economic corporation in

the Nation. With nearly \$400 million in assets, TELACU has created thousands of jobs, brought affordable hopes to untold numbers of families, leveraged millions of dollars in small business loans, and, most importantly, provided numerous educational opportunities for young people and veterans, not only in my congressional district, but throughout the United States.

As a prominent national Latino leader, Mr. Lizarraga is a leading voice in the revitalization of inner-city communities and a beacon of hope for young people searching for a path to a brighter future.

Mr. Lizarraga is an example of the American spirit through which dedicated, hardworking, and enterprising individuals do not just get ahead, but, in striving for a better life for themselves, they empower others to realize the American dream.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to acknowledge TELACU and Mr. Lizarraga for their dedication to creating jobs and opportunities in our communities, and to wish them continued success for many years to come.

TAX CUT STEALING FROM FUTURE GENERATIONS

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

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise to speak on behalf of future generations of Americans. The needs of these children, and their children, are clear. They need a strong economy, quality education, health care and a clean environment.

The \$350 billion tax cut passed by House Republicans provides none of this. In fact, the tax cut steals from the future to feed the greedy of today.

Last-minute changes made by Republicans will prevent families, like this one, with incomes of less than \$26,000, who have 11.9 million children, from receiving the child tax credit. In fact, 1 out of every 4 families in my district in California will get no child tax credit.

Working families, like the one pictured here, who told me how hard they are working just to provide basic needs for their children, will get nothing. House Republicans claim they could not fit these families into their tax cut. Somehow they found plenty of room, however, to allow corporations such as Enron to continue to hide \$50 billion in offshore tax shelters.

How can I go back to my district and tell families such as this one that their children will get no tax relief because Republicans chose to protect corporate tax shelters instead?

In the Republican plan to rob the future, millionaires get \$90,000 in tax cuts, while working families like this one, who build and invigorate our economy, will get next to nothing.

For example, 47 percent of the people in my State of California will get a total tax cut of less than \$100. One hun-

dred dollars does not go too far in California, which has some of the highest costs of living in the country; 140,000 of those families in my district will get no child tax credit, and many of these families saw their sons and daughters and fathers and mothers go off to the war. Across the country, there are 250,000 children of active duty military families, such as these, that will receive no child tax credit.

These families all sacrifice when we ask them to protect future generations of Americans. How can I go home and tell these families that their own and future generations will get nothing because Republicans would not even sacrifice a few thousand dollars of the millionaire's \$93,000 tax cut?

Families in my district and across the country suffer from rapidly increasing rates of asthma and respiratory disease. How can I tell them the pollution that compromises their health will only get worse because Republicans made room for \$100,000 tax breaks for the largest, most polluting SUVs?

These same families, along with families of 9.2 million children across the country, already cannot get relief for their children because they have no health insurance. How can I tell them that we could have provided this coverage, but instead Republicans chose to create a \$350 billion tax cut that goes mostly to the wealthy?

Everywhere we look we see future generations in peril. We have schools that need \$300 billion in maintenance and repair, a No Child Left Behind Act that is short \$9.7 billion, 44 million people with no health care, basic water infrastructure in critical decline, and 9 million people unemployed.

With a \$400 billion deficit and 100,000 jobs lost from the economy each month, we have few resources and little time to deal with this problem. Yet Republicans spend our time forcing through a tax plan that primarily helps millionaires, offshore tax haven, and large SUVs.

This is nothing short of a crime. The future has been stolen from future generations, like this family.

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

(Ms. DELAURO addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

PUTTING THE PRIVILEGED FEW AHEAD OF WORKING FAMILIES

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, hard-working families need a break more than anyone in this country, especially since they are bearing the brunt of this very weak economy. But, for some reason, the Republican leadership feels