

as well as the Campos family, serve our community with tremendous distinction.

As a member of the Congressional Vision Caucus, I am proud to work towards elevating awareness and finding solutions to the problems that surround vision loss and vision impairment. In this pursuit, there is no better partner than that of Hope for Vision.

Started in 2005, it amazes me every day just how much Hope for Vision has accomplished. In just 4 short but very successful years, Hope for Vision has been able to raise millions of dollars for the development of treatments and cures for blinding diseases. Finding a cure for degenerative blindness and other retinal diseases holds untold promises for new treatments and all types of visual disorders and beyond, which is so important to reduce the massive cost that our Nation suffers due to vision loss.

Vision loss and impairment not only have an extraordinary financial cost, but it also carries a deep personal cost as well. When individuals suffer the inability to see clearly, they must depend on others for help. Simple tasks like locating keys or avoiding obstacles in a walkway become virtually impossible without assistance. Literally left in the dark, a person's blindness becomes an entire family's responsibility.

This is compounded by the fact that the health care costs related to vision alone are more than \$67 billion annually, and this number will only increase as the population continues to grow and age. Hope for Vision understands these issues, and they know that the biggest challenge is ensuring that this crucial work is fully funded.

By far, the most impressive aspect of Hope for Vision is the fact that over 95 percent of the money raised is given directly to research at top academic institutions. And when it comes to the administration of success for Hope for Vision, few know better than that of Alex and Stacy Campos. These two champions of vision care have served selflessly for the benefit of our South Florida community. As well, they have truly afforded many in need the blessings of renewed sight.

As goodwill ambassador, Mr. Campos sits on the board of directors for Hope for Vision and utilizes his skills gained from the financial industry to make Hope for Vision as successful as it is today. Together with his wife, Stacy, and her continued participation in many charitable foundations, the work of the Campos family has provided Hope for Vision with the means it needs to grow and succeed even more.

Without a doubt, Mr. and Mrs. Campos satisfy the roles of goodwill ambassadors. Their relentless commitment to service and their passion to help families help themselves is truly worthy of distinction. It is because of their commitment to Hope for Vision and their fight against vision loss that countless families today enjoy the freedom of sight.

Alex and Stacy Campos have been a great resource for all at Hope for Vision, and our entire community has benefited from their partnership. Hope for Vision will be sure to maintain itself among the elite organizations working to fight against blindness and retina degenerative diseases through the actions of dedicated individuals like Alex and Stacy.

I again congratulate, Madam Speaker, Hope for Vision for the great work that this young organization has already done, and I look forward to hearing many good things in the years to come from Hope for Vision and all of the brave individuals involved in this fight for maintaining vision awareness for all of our community.

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AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CONNOLLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY from Virginia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the continuing success of the Recovery Act in righting our economic troubles.

We know all too well the results of the previous administration's, the Bush administration's, lack of oversight in the financial sector and lack of focus on the Nation's domestic needs. In December 2007, the Nation entered the worst recession since World War II. Almost 7 million Americans lost their jobs on the Bush administration watch. Housing foreclosures moved to record levels, and millions more struggled to keep their homes.

When Chairman Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, testified before the House Committee on the Budget in June, he stated that the Recovery Act, specifically the government funding for infrastructure, has had a positive effect on the economy, without which we would be in worse trouble than we are now. Imagine, Madam Speaker, that when critically needed transportation and other infrastructure projects receive funding, they actually create jobs, putting Americans back to work.

Chairman Bernanke also remarked that but for government action the Nation was mere days away from a collapse of the financial sector last fall. For those who have lamented the government's involvement, I would ask if collapse and the chaos that would have ensued would have been preferable to the actions that were taken.

The last time I discussed the Recovery Act on this House floor, I mentioned its positive impact in my district, specifically on the Greater Prince William County Community Health Center. Because of the Recovery Act, we're going to be able to keep that center open. We're going to be able to create new jobs and keep people working. We're going to be able to serve a population that otherwise would not have access to health care in my district.

Today, I want to discuss another positive aspect of that act on a number of critically needed transportation projects in my district.

The Recovery Act provided funding to expedite construction of the Dulles Metrorail project, one of the largest transit extensions in the United States currently. This extension has been in the works for 47 years and will help alleviate our traffic congestion by removing up to 93,000 vehicles off the roads each day. Although the Federal Government previously committed to fund the project, the expedition of the funds made possible by the Recovery Act will allow us to save \$15 million in project costs. We hope we can accelerate funding even more.

The Recovery Act not only will allow jobs to be created more quickly but also the necessary project work to start faster and get this completed earlier than even anticipated.

The Recovery Act also provided funding for the purchase of additional buses for the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission in Prince William County. That funding will provide vital capacity for a currently crowded system, allowing workers a greater opportunity for commuting choices and taking cars off our congested roadways.

As the President highlighted when he visited Springfield, Virginia, in my district to announce the project's funding, the Recovery Act also provided funds for the completion of the long-awaited Fairfax County Parkway waiting decades to be completed. And thanks to the Recovery Act, we're going to be able to complete that parkway and make vital connections with Fort Belvoir, which was greatly expanded under the base realignment and closure process making it one of the largest employers in the region.

While the recovery is by no means out of the woods, we are beginning to see positive signs of recovery. The stock market's risen 40 percent since March. Although the total number of unemployed remains high, new filings for unemployment claims have, in fact, come down.

Retail sales rose 0.5 percent in May and 0.6 in June, the fourth month this year with gains. Consumer confidence is at a 9-month high. The meltdown in the housing market was one of the leading causes of the recession, and it's encouraging to see that housing starts in May were up 17.2 percent over April, and new housing sales, just released yesterday, are up 11.2 percent.

During the traditional business cycle over the past decades, recessions have tended to last 9 months. Madam Speaker, this recession began in December of 2007, 14 months before President Obama took office. While no one solution will cure the recession overnight, the Recovery Act is one piece of the mosaic of actions this Congress has undertaken to restore our Nation's economic health and protect the well-being of the American people. Through the Recovery Act we have seen the positive

results of our action, and we have been creating jobs in the 11th District of Virginia, providing critically needed transportation improvements to our region and putting our people to work.

I commend my colleagues for their support of this legislation and protecting the interests of all Americans.

EARMARKS IN DEFENSE APPROPRIATION BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. FLAKE. Madam Speaker, later today, the Rules Committee will be promulgating a rule for the Defense appropriation bill that I believe we'll consider tomorrow. This is, in my view, quite remarkable that we will be considering the Defense bill that spends hundreds of billions of dollars, we will be spending less than a day debating that legislation.

What is remarkable about it as well is that there are 1,087 earmarks in the bill, more than 1,000 earmarks in the Defense bill that was considered by the full Appropriations Committee for a total of 18 minutes, not 18 minutes per earmark or per section of the bill or anything else, but the full Appropriations Committee considered that bill for 18 minutes, passed, done, markup finished, and now we've got that bill on the floor tomorrow.

And unfortunately, as is the case or as has been the case with the rest of the appropriation bills this season, it will come to the floor under a structured or closed rule where the Rules Committee, the majority party, will determine which amendments the minority party and members of the majority party get to offer. Breaking from tradition that has held for decades and decades and perhaps centuries in this institution where appropriation bills have come to the floor under an open rule, this will come to the floor under a rule that only allows amendments to be offered that the majority party wants to see, not those that the minority party necessarily wants to offer.

There are 548, at our count, earmarks in this bill that will go to private companies. These will be no-bid contracts for private companies. The majority party will say, well, we're inserting language saying that these earmarks have to be bid out. The purpose of an earmark is to ensure that that contract is not bid out. Otherwise, why earmark it? Why not just let the Defense Department decide where to spend its money?

So these are earmarks. These are no-bid contracts. They're going to private companies. In many cases, those private companies will turn around, and the executives from those companies will make sizeable campaign contributions to the Members who secured the earmarks. That has been the pattern in this place for years, not just with the majority party in power but when the minority power was in power as well. It's simply gotten worse over time.

Our Ethics Committee forces Members—and it's a good thing—to sign a certification letter saying that they have no financial stake in the earmark that they are securing, that a family member doesn't work for the firm receiving it, for example. But there's also guidance issued from the Ethics Committee that says that campaign contributions do not necessarily constitute financial interest. And so Members of this body are given a green light to basically earmark for campaign dollars. It's the so-called circular fund-raising that has become the norm around here.

And if this wasn't bad enough, there are investigations swirling outside of this body. Members' offices have been subpoenaed. Some people on the outside have already pled guilty and are working with authorities involving earmarks and campaign contributions. There are allegations of straw men contributions that have been set up where individuals reimburse for contributions they make to Members who secure earmarks. There are all these investigations swirling outside. Yet we're moving through this appropriation process as if nothing were wrong, and we'll consider a bill in one day and limit the number of amendments that Members can bring forward.

Now, this isn't the perfect way to scrutinize or to vet a bill, I recognize, on the House floor. But it's all we've got when the full committee Appropriations Committee takes a full 18 minutes to approve a bill that spends hundreds of millions of dollars and contains over 1,000 earmarks, 548 of which are no-bid contracts to private companies.

We do that all in a day and then tell Members, oh, but we're only going to allow the amendments that we want to see, not necessarily the ones that you want to offer.

In this legislation that we will consider tomorrow, there's an earmark going to a company called ProLogic, and it is reported that this company is under investigation by the FBI. The status of the investigation is unknown. Reports are simply out there that there are investigations. This company, the executives and lobbyists and those associated with it, have contributed more than \$400,000 to congressional campaign committees. Yet we're still allowing this bill to go forward.

Let's have a new rule for the bill.

AMERICA'S AFFORDABLE HEALTH CHOICES ACT OF 2009

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. KENNEDY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam Speaker, this legislation, America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009, otherwise known as our health bill this year, will guarantee all Americans access to affordable health care without pre-existing condition discrimination.

Imagine that, getting health care insurance without being told that your preexisting condition is going to result in higher premiums, higher deductibles or higher copays. Imagine being able to change your job at will without having to worry that you're going to lose your health insurance. Imagine having no worry that you're going to have to exceed a lifetime cap. Imagine being able to know that you're going to have catastrophic health care coverage.

Imagine knowing that we're going to now move in our health care system from a sick care system that just is the most expensive that we know to actually a health care system where we actually pay for preventive care so that we actually get health care in this country, not sick care; where we pay for prevention, not sick care. We don't have to wait until an asthmatic gets an asthma attack before we get a doctor to that asthma patient. We don't have to wait until a diabetic gets an amputation before we get that critical care. We get prevention and chronic care management.

And what is so great about this legislation is that it includes full parity for mental health coverage. I was proud last year to author the Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. What it required is that we finally recognize that mental health and addiction equity is part of our health insurance system, meaning insurance companies can no longer discriminate if you had alcoholism or addiction or depression. Imagine that, we finally acknowledge that the brain is part of the body.

Mental illness is a big part of our country's health care system. It accounts for over 50 percent of the trauma admissions in our trauma one centers and emergency rooms every single weekend. Suicides in our country exceed homicides by two to one, suicides do. And you know what, we don't have a mental health system in this country to speak of because, you know why, there's a stigma out there against mental illness.

We still believe in this country that it's your fault if you have a brain illness. If somehow you have a lower dopamine level or serotonin level, it's your fault. We think you ought to pick yourself up by your boot straps; it's your fault. It's a moral problem.

We forget the fact that now, even to this day, we can take brain scans and tell whether someone has a differing brain or not from a normal functioning brain. But today, we are enforcing what we know to be scientifically true, what the AMA said in 1955, and that alcoholism is a disease, that there is such a thing as brain disorders, substance abuse disorders, eating disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, and things of that nature.

In this legislation, in this health care bill, we require parity in health care coverage. We say that we ought to recognize these disorders for what they are, and furthermore, we say we ought to have prevention. And even more in