

Palestinian leadership to pursue a peace agreement with Israel through direct negotiations, as they have demonstrated their willingness to do before.

Lasting peace is possible only if an agreement is accepted by the Israeli and Palestinian people—it must not be forced on either side. I have continually shared this message with my colleagues in Congress and the international community, most recently by urging members of the European Union to stand with the U.S. and Israel in opposing Palestine's unilateral action at the United Nations.

All citizen in the region deserve a peaceful and prosperous future and I am hopeful progress will be made. However, the U.S. will not ignore the serious security threat that faces Israel. The path to peace lies in working together, not exploiting differences. I will stand with Israel to support peace through direct negotiations and urge Palestine to embrace this approach.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE GRAND
OPENING OF THE BLIND REHA-
BILITATION UNIT AT THE
CLEVELAND VETERAN AFFAIRS
MEDICAL CENTER

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the grand opening of the new Blind Rehabilitation Center at the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veteran Affairs Medical Center, VAMC, on September 26, 2011.

The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center is dedicated to the quality care of all veterans. It is the fifth largest VA in the country and serves close to 95,000 veterans annually. The Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center was the first VA to receive disease specific accreditation for Inpatient Diabetes Care in 2007 and has also received a special commendation by the American College of Surgeons as a Certified Comprehensive Cancer Program.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, there are approximately 157,000 Veterans who are legally blind and more than one million more suffer from low vision. On September 26, 2011, the Cleveland VAMC will celebrate the grand opening of their new Blind Rehabilitation Center, BRC. The 28,000 square-foot, 15-inpatient-bed BRC will care for blind and low-vision Veterans from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, West Virginia and Kentucky. In addition to working with Veterans to regain their independence and quality of life, the BRC will offer support to the Veterans' families, helping them better understand visual impairment and providing support that will reduce caregiver burden.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, please join me in recognizing the grand opening of the Louis Stokes Cleveland Veteran Affairs Medical Center's new Blind Rehabilitation Center.

SUPPORT OF NATIONAL HISPANIC
HERITAGE MONTH FROM SEP-
TEMBER 15-OCTOBER 15, 2011,
RECOGNIZING THE SERVICE OF
LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALFRED
RASCON AND THE 41 MEN OF
HISPANIC HERITAGE WHO HAVE
BEEN AWARDED THE MEDAL OF
HONOR

HON. ROSCOE G. BARTLETT

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mr. BARTLETT. Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, I want to salute Army Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Rascon of Laurel, Maryland, one of the 41 men of Hispanic heritage who have received our military's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor.

Alfred Rascon was born in Mexico, but joined the Army after graduating from high school in California. He explained, "I volunteered to join the military and serve in Vietnam [before I became a citizen] because I was always an American in my heart."

While serving as a medic, Rascon's reconnaissance platoon came under fierce enemy attack in thick jungle on March 16, 1966. Rascon repeatedly used his own body as a shield against withering fire and saved the lives of two wounded buddies and tried in vain to save the life of a third. Despite wounds from gunfire, shrapnel and a grenade explosion in his face, he raced into a hail of bullets and recovered an M-60 machine gun and ammunition. That action turned the tide of the encounter and may well have saved the lives of his entire platoon. Rascon refused evacuation before other injured buddies.

Alfred Rascon served two more combat tours in Vietnam and also served additional tours since 2001 in Iraq and Afghanistan. He continues to serve our country speaking to our youth. America is blessed by generations of immigrant Medal of Honor recipients like Alfred Rascon. They are heroes who sacrificed themselves to save the lives of others and put their newly adopted country above their own self-interest. There is no greater love than a man lay down his life for a friend.

HONORING BRETT EVERETT WOOD

HON. THADDEUS G. MCCOTTER

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mr. MCCOTTER. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor Brett Everett Wood, a courageous and noble soldier, who died on September 9, 2011 at the age of 19. Army Private First Class Wood laid down his life when insurgents attacked his unit with an improvised explosive device in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

A 2010 graduate of Owen Valley High School who enlisted shortly after his high school graduation, Private Wood was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division based in Fort Wainwright, Alaska. Private First Class Wood had recently returned to active duty after recovering from head wounds suffered in a previous IED blast.

He was awarded a Purple Heart, Bronze Star and a Good Conduct Medal among several other military honors.

A hard worker, a proud and brave American, and a loving son, Private First Class Brett Wood leaves behind his beloved parents, Malissa and Chris Frye and Mitchell and Angela Wood. He is survived by his adored brothers Nikk Wood, Brandon Wood and Cory Poland and dearly loved sister Amber Poland. His grandparents, Charles and Evelyn Wood and Jim and Sandy Corns will long remember him.

Private First Class Brett Wood made the ultimate sacrifice for his country in Operation Enduring Freedom. To his fellow soldiers, his family and friends, and to everyone who knew and loved him, he was a dedicated member of his community who answered the higher calling to serve his country.

Mr. Speaker, during his lifetime, Brett Everett Wood enriched the lives of everyone around him by employing energy, leadership, and courage in everything he set out to do. As we bid farewell to this exceptional individual, I am reminded that freedom does indeed exact a heavy price and I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering and honoring his contributions and years of devoted service to his community and our country.

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF CHINA—OR TAIWAN

HON. SUE WILKINS MYRICK

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mrs. MYRICK. Mr. Speaker, October 10 marks the 100th Anniversary of The Republic of China—or Taiwan. I urge my colleagues to join me in recognizing this important occasion.

The partnership between the United States and Taiwan is vital within the international community. Both of our countries benefit from a robust trading relationship, and the support that Taiwan has shown the United States in times of need cannot be overlooked.

In recognizing the centennial of Taiwan, we are also recognizing the numerous cultural and political accomplishments of this proud nation. Within Taiwan, we see a flourishing democracy—where free speech and political discourse are encouraged—and applaud the perseverance of those who have worked to protect the civil rights of the Taiwanese people.

I ask that my colleagues join me in recognizing the accomplishments Taiwan has made over the past 100 years, and that we will all continue to foster the important relationship that exists between the United States and one of our most important Asian allies.

TRANSPARENCY IN REGULATORY
ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS ON THE
NATION ACT OF 2011

SPEECH OF

HON. STENY H. HOYER

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 22, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under

consideration the bill (H.R. 2401) to require analyses of the cumulative and incremental impacts of certain rules and actions of the Environmental Protection Agency, and for other purposes:

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chair, for decades public health has been the basis for how we enact emissions standards. The bill before us today, the TRAIN Act, represents a view of environmental protection that is simply off the rails.

Initially drafted to study the effect of new and proposed clean air rules, it has troublingly morphed into a bill blocking action on them indefinitely. First, it would prohibit the EPA from finalizing its rule to reduce mercury emissions. This rule had its origin in the 1990 Clean Air Act, which passed this House with a strong bipartisan vote of 401–25. An American Lung Association study earlier this year found that today 70 percent of Republicans still support stricter limits on mercury. Second, the TRAIN Act would prevent the implementation of new rules protecting communities from pollutants drifting over from out-of-state.

Clean air regulations are ultimately investments in our economy. They save us hundreds of billions of dollars each year in health costs from associated lung ailments. Even further, they incentivize the growth of clean technologies that will help us remain competitive and increase our innovation and manufacturing strength here in America.

While I oppose this bill overall, Congressmen CONNOLLY and MCNERNEY have proposed amendments that would refocus the bill where Congress's attention belongs—job creation. Their amendments would support Democrats' Make It in America plan by studying the job-creating effects of pollution controls. Additionally, Congresswoman RICHARDSON's amendment would prevent a cut in the program reauthorized just last year by voice vote that supports American-made technology to reduce diesel bus exhaust.

Now is not the time to debate the environmental protections supported overwhelmingly and on a bipartisan basis, which carry tangible health and economic benefits. Instead we should be focusing on serious steps to get more Americans back to work.

NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARD UNDER THE CLEAN AIR ACT

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that, according to Environment Ohio, the Cleveland Lorain Elyria area has the 14th smoggiest air among all large metropolitan areas in the U.S. Only a few weeks ago, the President announced he would prevent an update of the rule designed to reduce smog. The American people deserve clean air.

The Bush Administration failed to update National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) under the Clean Air Act for ozone pollution until 2006, when a standard was issued which was much less protective of public health than his scientific advisory board recommended; 75 parts per billion (ppb) of ozone, an air pollutant that is hazardous to fragile lung tissue. The scientific advisors' rec-

ommendation was between 60 and 70 ppb, which would have avoided up to 8,000 premature deaths; 3,800 nonfatal heart attacks; and 40,000 asthma attacks every year. The science is clear.

By invoking the industry fake argument that pulling back the update will help the economy, the Obama Administration has chosen to act in contravention of the Clean Air Act, which clearly prohibits consideration of costs in setting the standards designed to protect public health.

Everyone has a right to clean air. This abdication of responsibility affects millions of Americans every day, with every breath. It disproportionately affects the most vulnerable among us, like children, the elderly, and the ill. The story of the ozone rule is aptly told by Verna Riffe Biemel, a constituent of mine. She said:

"On Aug. 4, 2010, my mother succumbed to lung disease, pulmonary fibrosis. I vividly remember the difficulty she had breathing on bad air days. In fact, during her last year, she couldn't go outside at all on those days and felt the difference inside. No one likes to see a loved one struggle to breathe. No one should have to fight for clean air. Congress owes the American public the opportunity to breathe clean air."

She is right. If the President won't do it, Congress should.

INTRODUCING THE HIRING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2011

HON. JOHN P. SARBANES

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 23, 2011

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. Speaker, in the coming decade, close to 50% of the federal workforce will be eligible to retire, making the development of the next generation of federal workers even more vital. Yet, as federal agencies struggle to recruit and retain the next generation of public servants, we continue to force hiring managers and prospective candidates to navigate an out-dated and bureaucratic hiring process that deters the best and brightest from pursuing careers in public service.

In short, the Federal hiring process is broken. Despite increased pressure from the Administration to improve hiring and recruitment processes:

Many federal agencies still take as long as 200 days from the date of a vacancy to hire—delays that compromise federal recruitment, jeopardize government operations and waste taxpayer dollars.

The hiring process at federal agencies involves as many as 110 discrete steps and more than 45 hand-offs between managers, administrative officers and HR specialists.

In some agencies, hiring managers are required to select from the three highest-rated candidates selected by HR specialists, making it impossible for managers to play a role in recruiting their own staff.

Rather than base initial screening decisions on applicants' resume and cover letter, candidates for federal employment must provide lengthy, essay-style responses about the applicants' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs).

That is why I have joined Senator AKAKA in authoring this common-sense, good govern-

ment legislation to bring the federal hiring process in-line with private sector best practices by:

Requiring agencies and departments to develop a comprehensive strategic workforce plan focused on hiring, recruitment, skills deficiencies and potential process reforms;

Moving the federal government to a resume- and cover letter-based application system;

Shortening the federal hiring process to an average of 80 days after a vacancy has been posted;

Better integrating hiring managers into all stages of the hiring process and providing them with greater flexibility in final decisions; and

Requiring government wide data collection and reporting on the efficacy of the hiring process.

This legislation has a long, bipartisan history—in 2009, Senators AKAKA and VOINOVICH authored similar legislation in the Senate. In 2010, President Obama recognized the tremendous personnel challenges facing federal agencies and issued Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process, a Presidential Memorandum on federal hiring reform that includes some of the elements in our legislation. The Senate unanimously passed the Akaka-Voinovich Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act in the previous Congress, only to watch it die in the House.

Enactment of a substantive, bipartisan hiring reform bill is long past due. Our legislation seeks to codify and build upon the Administration's memorandum, while ensuring an unprecedented level of transparency in and oversight of the federal hiring process. The Washington Post called on Congress to pass the Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act in a July 2011 editorial, arguing that "today's antiquated hiring practices are thwarting a generation of inspired public servants in the making."

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator AKAKA for his tremendous leadership on federal hiring and recruitment issues and to thank the Partnership for Public Service for their advocacy in support of hiring reform. Whether it is a firefighter saving lives, an agent protecting our borders, a scientist pioneering new research, or a nurse caring for our veterans, we owe it to taxpayers and the next generation of public servants to build a better hiring process and to ensure that those with the desire to serve our country are able to do so.

[From the Washington Post, July 3, 2011]

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS STILL TOO SLOW TO HIRE

Less lucrative compensation and benefits aren't the only factors turning thousands of promising college graduates away from public service. The hiring process for employment in the federal government also remains impossibly long, and many recent alumni just aren't financially equipped to wait it out.

More than a year ago, President Obama launched what the administration called a "comprehensive initiative to address major, long-standing impediments to recruiting and hiring the best and the brightest into the federal civilian workforce." Mr. Obama directed the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to institute reforms—dubbed the Pathway Programs—to streamline hiring for students as well as recent graduates. As The Post reported then, "Management Director John Berry drew a rousing ovation" when the agency announced it was replacing