

number as not only is the Nation going through an economic downturn, but they've been seeing that the amount of Federal background checks done in order to purchase firearms broke record levels with more than 14 million occurring last year alone. That's a 55 percent increase in firearms purchases in just 4 years, but it has not even led remotely close to the doom and gloom havoc being peddled by anti-gun advocates.

Criminologist Gary Kleck analyzed National Crime Victimization Surveys and concluded that robbery and assault victims who used a gun to resist were less likely to be attacked or to suffer an injury than those who used any other methods of self-protection or those who did not resist at all. Unfortunately, in my home State of Illinois, Governor Quinn took it upon himself in May to determine what's best for Illinois. Rather than listening to the voice of the Illinois constituency, Quinn made desperate 11th-hour phone calls to sway Illinois Democrats to his side and block vital legislation to allow concealed carry in Illinois. He knows better than 49 other States, and he knows better than top law enforcement organizations like the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, the Illinois Sheriffs Association, the Chicago Police Lieutenants Association, and the Chicago Police Sergeants Association.

Quinn doesn't get it, but 49 other States do and so do I, which is why I am a proud cosponsor of H.R. 822, the National Right-to-Carry Reciprocity Act of 2011, which was introduced by my colleague, Representative CLIFF STEARNS of Florida. This bill allows any person with a State-issued concealed carry to carry in any other State. Therefore, for the 49 States that issue concealed carry permits, their State laws would apply.

In Illinois, I refuse to deny visitors the right to carry weapons when they are authorized to do so. We must follow the example set by every other State in this Nation and allow law-abiding citizens to own and bear arms. We must restore, defend and preserve this constitutional right at all government levels.

REDUCING THE FEDERAL DEFICIT

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

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, over the past several weeks, we've been debating ways to reduce the Federal deficit.

Republicans have said that everything is on the table and that nothing is sacred, but that just isn't true. The Republicans refuse to cut tax giveaways to the wealthiest special interests in this country. And when it comes to discussing the merits of continuing our efforts in Afghanistan, the Republicans clamor to defend it despite our fiscal mess.

I want to remind my Republican friends, the situation we are in now is not new. Throughout history, from Rome to the Ottoman Empire to the Soviet Union, the overextension of military and protracted struggles in foreign countries have crippled empires.

Some historians have credited Ronald Reagan for the Soviet Union's collapse, but what really bankrupted the Soviet Union was its wars. Just like us, they paid a crushing price both financially and morally in Afghanistan. Overextending geopolitically comes at a cost over time, and any nation that thinks otherwise is setting itself up to repeat the mistakes of the past.

As of today, the United States has spent more than 2½ times the percentage of GDP on Afghanistan than the Soviet Union spent of its GDP during its 9-year war in Afghanistan. Public polls are clear: Americans know the cost of the war in Afghanistan is unsustainable and want us to withdraw as soon as possible.

And when it comes to cutting back on support for the neediest Americans, we can't seem to face the urgent reality that the money that we spend abroad needs to be spent here at home. The financial facts tell the story. Taxpayers in my district in Seattle have spent \$1.1 billion for the Afghanistan war to date. Think about that: one city, \$1.1 billion. For the same amount of money, we could provide health care for 700,000 children from low-income families, or put 125,000 kids in Head Start, or health care for 150,000 more veterans.

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Imagine how different it would be if States like Wisconsin, which faces a \$3.6 billion budget deficit, did not have to bear the cost of the war in Afghanistan.

So the question before us is simple: What is our priority? Fighting a war with no end or investing in the American people? The answer lies in what kind of country we are, what legacy we leave behind to our children and our grandchildren, and transcending political decisions toward a common commitment to make America strong again.

America will cease to be a world power if we fail to support the domestic foundations of our Nation. Yet the House does not even blink as it approved a \$650 billion defense budget last Friday. While the Republicans were cutting any spending that helps people, they didn't so much as flinch as they threw hundreds of billions of dollars into the bottomless pit of the defense budget.

We need to stop seeing the world through the lens of constant threat and foster a sense of the common good and shared responsibility. That, not our military footprint, is what will advance our interests in the world and make us confident again.

In a national poll conducted last year, 47 percent of Americans rated

China's economy as the strongest economy in the world. Our crumbling roads reflect our crumbling self-confidence. Our national prosperity is vital to our national security, and that is why I believe getting out of Afghanistan must be the center of reducing our deficit. Anything short of that would ignore the fiscal reality and the will of the American people to end the Afghanistan war.

We have a choice before us: Continue the war and continue downhill, or stop the war and start up the hill to regain what we've lost over the last few years.

NEW TAXES KILL JOBS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to join with my colleague from Illinois, Congressman ADAM KINZINGER, in congratulating the people of Wisconsin on passing a concealed weapons bill. I think they'll find, as we have found in South Carolina, that having a concealed carry permit—we call it Law Abiding Citizen's Self-Defense Act—that the consequence of this a number of years ago now has been a reduction in crime. In fact, many of the people who—as I was a floor leader in the State Senate to propose the concealed carry law, so many of the people who opposed it, and they opposed it thinking that they were doing correctly, have subsequently told me that they really are thrilled that now it has passed, that it, indeed, has promoted a reduction in crime in our State. And I know the same will be true in Wisconsin and possibly one day in Illinois.

Madam Speaker, time is running out for the American people. With just weeks to go before our country defaults on its debts, liberals in Congress continue to roadblock any progress on real spending cuts. The American people want to see spending reforms. The administration can cut other Federal spending before it allows a default on the U.S. debt. Americans understand that the Federal Government is burdening future generations with debt by borrowing over 40 cents of every dollar it spends. Senior citizens are at risk with the value of the dollar in question.

Americans want to see meaningful spending reform. Liberals want to play political games. Republicans have been trying to lead on spending reform. From the moment this new Congress has been in session, House Republicans have passed numerous bills that cut spending, curb government growth, and encourage job growth for American families. The latest news on the debt limit talks shows yet again how out of touch this current administration is with the American people. Cut the spending. Do not impose new taxes which will kill jobs which need to be developed by small businesses.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September the 11th in the global war on terrorism.

HEALTH CARE IN PUERTO RICO: HISTORIC PROGRESS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to discuss the issue of Federal support for health care in Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories. This is a story of unprecedented progress, but it is also a chronicle of continuing challenges.

While the treatment of the territories under Federal health care programs has substantially improved in recent years, serious disparities still remain. The consequence of these inequalities is not difficult to discern.

Last month, a study found that patients at hospitals in the territories fared significantly worse than patients at hospitals in the States. The study cited funding disparities under Medicaid and Medicare along with the territories' lack of voting representation in the Federal Government as likely causes for these discrepancies. The study concluded that "eliminating the substantial quality gap in the U.S. territories should be a national priority."

Consider Medicaid, which helps our most vulnerable citizens. Medicaid has always operated differently in the territories. The Federal Government pays at least 50 percent of the program's cost in the wealthiest States and upwards of 80 percent in the poorest States. By contrast, Federal law imposes an annual cap on funding in the territories. Historically, Puerto Rico's cut was so low that the Federal Government paid less than 20 percent of Medicaid costs on the island in any given year. Inadequate Federal funding has made it difficult for Puerto Rico to provide quality health care to its low-income population.

If the purpose of this policy was to save the Federal Government money, it was shortsighted. Between 2005 and 2009, over 300,000 Puerto Rican residents moved to the States. Many were men and women of limited means who, upon migrating, immediately became eligible for full benefits under Medicaid and other Federal programs.

Last Congress, my fellow Delegates and I fought hard to ensure that our constituents were treated in an equitable manner in the Affordable Health Care Act. Under the law, funding for Puerto Rico's Medicaid program will triple over the next decade. Though it is far less than Puerto Rico would receive if treated like a State, this increased funding does represent a significant step towards parity.

But the Affordable Care Act did not eliminate serious disparities facing my constituents. For example, Puerto Rico is still subject to unequal treatment

under Medicare. Although island residents pay the same payroll taxes as their fellow citizens in the States, ill-conceived Federal formulas provide lower Medicaid reimbursements to Puerto Rico hospitals.

Despite the pressing need to correct all these disparities, I know that to legislate effectively you must choose your battles wisely, especially in a fiscal climate as challenging as the one our country faces today. Therefore, I have introduced three health bills that would correct unprincipled inequalities and do so in a fiscally responsible way.

The first bill amends the HITECH Act, which provides payments to doctors and hospitals that become users of electronic health records. The act inadvertently excluded Puerto Rico hospitals from the Medicare payments, and my budget-neutral bill would include them. My second bill, which has bipartisan support, would modify a unique Federal law that makes it more difficult for Puerto Rico seniors to enroll in Medicare part B and would reduce the penalties for late enrollment. And my third bill would make it possible for territory Medicaid programs to cover breast and cervical cancer treatments by placing Federal contributions for those services outside the annual cap.

So I have filed these three cost-conscious bills to address some of these disparities we are facing, and I hope to have the support of my colleagues when the time comes to consider them.

Now a word about the current state of affairs in Puerto Rico; after all, I represent Puerto Rico in this Congress. And if we're going to be talking about a crisis in Puerto Rico, I'll tell you about a crisis in Puerto Rico. It is the high incidence of violent crime that is tied to the drug trafficking that is happening in the Caribbean. And I, for one, am doing something productive. I am seeking additional resources because it is in the interest of both the United States as a country, as a whole, and Puerto Rico to increase the presence of Federal law enforcement officers in Puerto Rico.

While I want civil rights to be protected all over America, what I am doing is supporting the ongoing investigation of the Department of Justice. But I am not denigrating the integrity of those who put their lives at risk to defend the safety of our citizenry.

□ 1030

MOURNING THE LOSS OF STAFF SERGEANT MICHAEL GARCIA AND SERGEANT CHRISTOPHER SODERLUND

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

Mr. FLEMING. Madam Speaker, I rise today to mourn the loss of two Louisiana soldiers from Fort Polk who recently died in Logar province, Afghanistan, during Operation Enduring

Freedom. Staff Sergeant Michael Garcia of Bossier City and Sergeant Christopher Soderlund of Pineville, Louisiana, made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in service to this Nation.

It is at this point that important decisions involving the defense of our Nation become most personal. Instead of thinking in abstract terms like casualties, weapons, equipment, we are confronted with the reality that these are not just soldiers; they are in fact our friends, our neighbors, our sons, fathers, brothers.

Staff Sergeant Garcia and Sergeant Soderlund represented the very best America has to offer. Their contribution serves as an enduring reminder to all Americans that the freedoms and liberties we hold so dear are afforded to us only by those who wear the uniform and the loved ones who support them.

Let us pause today to remember the sacrifice these brave soldiers made on behalf of this great Nation.

BULB ACT

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

Mr. CONNOLLY of Virginia. Madam Speaker, we are 2 short weeks away from defaulting on American debt, which would devastate our economy and plunge this country, if not the global economy, into a steep recession. We are engaged in three overseas wars as part of the broader struggle to defeat terrorism. Century-old autocracies are crumbling in the Middle East. Extreme drought is destroying farmers' livelihoods across the Southeast, Texas, and Oklahoma, while floods of biblical proportions inundate the upper Midwest. Unprecedented tornadoes have killed hundreds of people in Missouri, Alabama, and Virginia, while the melting of glaciers and polar ice continues to accelerate. Meanwhile, our economy stagnates for lack of any new congressional action to expedite growth.

In response to these existential threats at home and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for democracy abroad, the Republican leadership has brought to the floor a bill to repeal a non-existent ban on incandescent light bulbs passed by a Republican Congress and signed by a Republican President, President Bush. That's right, light bulbs. Connoisseurs of Internet hearsay are aware that Tea Party conspiracy theorists think President Obama is trying to outlaw the incandescent light bulb even though President Bush signed that law into enactment. Cooler heads, such as representatives of every major light bulb manufacturer in America, from Philips to Johnson Controls, actually support the light bulb efficiency standards because they provide a competitive advantage for American manufacturers relative to their Chinese competitors, who produce shoddy, light-inefficient bulbs. Who