

LIFTING OF MORATORIUM ON POSTAL CLOSURES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SEWELL. I rise today in support of America's postal workers, small businesses, senior citizens, and rural communities across this Nation. I stand before this Chamber gravely concerned about the future of the United States Postal Service and the impact of its fiscal crisis on communities across America.

The Postal Service is an iconic American institution woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. For more than 200 years, the men and women of the United States Postal Service have fulfilled their mission to deliver universal, trusted, timely, and effective service to the American people. Americans depend on the postal service, rain or shine, six days a week, from Montana to Alabama, from New York to California, from Florida to Alaska. Whether it's overnight, flat rate, first class, the United States Postal Service delivers.

Today, the Postal Service is teetering on the brink of insolvency and its future remains uncertain. Significant declines in first-class mail volume, evolving consumer trends, and increasing expenditures and operating costs mean that the Postal Service must reduce its footprint, reorganize, and take drastic measures to remain viable and competitive in the 21st century.

On May 15, the moratorium on postal closure will be lifted and thousands of post offices and mail processing facilities across this country will be targeted for closure. If Congress does not act, the lifting of this moratorium could mark the beginning of a slow and painful process of downsizing, layoffs, and reorganization for the U.S. Postal Service. We must take swift and decisive action to create a more efficient business model for the United States Postal Service. I believe that an investment in the future of the Postal Service is an investment in our economy, in small businesses, and in the American people. It requires our prompt attention and deserves our immediate action.

So much is at stake in this debate over postal reform. We know that reform is necessary, given the current market reality. But we cannot reform the postal service on the backs of the rural and underserved communities throughout this country. For so many of these communities, the post office is the meeting place—the place where you send your packages and receive your medicine.

The lifting of the moratorium on May 15 is an issue of utmost concern to the constituents that I represent in Alabama. In towns like Oak Hill, Magnolia, and Sawyerville, Alabama, the local post office is much more than a place for sending and receiving mail. Post offices are vital lifelines for these

rural, isolated communities. These lifelines must be preserved and protected. I am committed to ensuring that we as Americans have access to affordable, reliable, and efficient postal service.

Consider the ripple effect and the economic impact of the closure of a post office and how that may affect an entire community. Imagine small town America, where the local post office lies at the heart of the community and is an integral part of its history and identity. This is the case in many of the communities across my district. The fact is, the closure of postal offices will devastate small towns like Gainesville, Coy, and Myrtlewood, Alabama, and so many across this Nation.

Yes, we must all buckle up. We must all decide to show fiscal responsibility. And in these market conditions, we know that reductions are necessary. But surely we can do something to make sure that these reductions are not on the backs of the rural, underserved, and underprivileged communities. Many of the postal services that are being offered are irreplaceable in these communities. For seniors who can't leave their homes, mail carriers deliver lifesaving medication. And for small businesses, postal services like bulk and flat-rate mail enable them to grow and create jobs.

The United States Postal Service provides Americans with universal and invaluable service, and I urge my colleagues to come together and pass a bipartisan comprehensive plan for the future of the United States Postal Service that will not disproportionately affect underserved communities.

ATF LONG GUN PROVISION IN CJS BILL

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

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my strong objection to an unwise and dangerous policy provision that is included in the Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations bill on the floor today. It would undermine the ability of Federal law enforcement to investigate and curb gun trafficking along the Southwest border.

In August of last year, the ATF began a program to require licensed gun dealers in the four most dangerous border States to report when an individual buys multiple assault rifles within 5 business days—just as all dealers have reported multiple handgun sales for over 20 years. The current rule is narrowly tailored to generate useful intelligence on illegal gun trafficking by Mexican drug cartels. According to ATF data, 70 percent of firearms recovered and traced in drug cartel crimes in Mexico originated from the United States. We know that semiautomatic assault rifles sold by U.S. dealers near the border fuel Mexican cartel violence—violence that has killed more than 47,000 people in Mexico, including thousands of police and military personnel.

This rule is working. In just the past 9 months, ATF opened more than 120 criminal investigations based on multiple assault rifle sales reports. And this action is constitutional. The rule is indisputably constitutional. The authority to operate such a program has been upheld by Federal courts. So there's no question about the legal authority. But this bill that we will vote on today, at the behest of the NRA and other gun groups, would block funding for this vital law enforcement program.

Unfortunately, this is only the latest in a long list of irresponsible actions this Congress has taken on gun policy, such as the fact that due to Congressional action, loaded firearms are now permitted in National Parks. The D.C. voting rights bill that enjoyed joint bipartisan support was scuttled by requiring restrictions on the D.C. City Council regarding the type of gun safety laws that they could enact if they wanted their right to vote.

Restrictions blocking State and local law enforcement access to important crime gun trace data were made permanent. Just last year, the House passed legislation to override the concealed carry requirements of individual States, establishing a lowest common denominator Federal standard.

Despite all of these actions to weaken gun laws, judging by the outlandish statements from the NRA, you would think that the Second Amendment was under constant bombardment. Wayne LaPierre, vice president of the NRA, said last year that the claim that the Obama administration has done virtually nothing to restrict the rights of gun owners is "a big fat stinking lie." He went further to claim that the President's lack of action is "all part of a massive Obama conspiracy to deceive voters and hide his true intentions to destroy the Second Amendment in our country." Again, another LaPierre quote.

Actions are supposed to speak louder than words, but apparently for some people, crazy conspiracy fantasies speak loudest of all.

Instead of weakening gun laws further, we should be passing commonsense measures that are supported by the vast majority of Americans. In fact, according to a poll conducted by Republican pollster Frank Luntz, 82 percent of NRA members and 86 percent of non-NRA gun owners support prohibiting suspected terrorists from purchasing guns; 69 percent of NRA members and 85 percent of non-NRA gun owners support background checks for all gun sales at gun shows.

□ 1050

And yet the NRA opposes these commonsense restrictions and gets this Congress to do so as well.

There are bills introduced in Congress right now to address these two issues, the Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act and the Fix Gun Checks Act. Neither one has received so much as a subcommittee hearing in this Republican Congress.

Instead, we are debating a bill that includes a provision that would remove a modest, yet valuable, tool for Federal law enforcement to stop the illegal smuggling of firearms and the killing of thousands of innocent people. Where are our priorities?

I do want to thank Chairman WOLF and Ranking Member FATTAH for including \$12 million in the CJS bill to implement the NICS Amendments Improvement Act. It's a \$7 million increase over last year; that's progress. In fact, it's a program that assists States in the establishment and upgrade of information such as mental health records entered into databases that are used to determine eligibility for firearm purchases. If we had had that, perhaps our colleague, Gabby Giffords, would not have been shot. Increased funding is a step in the right direction, but the inclusion of the ATF provision is not. It will only serve to undermine Federal law enforcement's ability to stop illegal gun trafficking. Congress needs to stop weakening gun policy to serve the narrow interests of the gun lobby and start enacting laws to protect the safety of the American public.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 51 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer:

Loving and gracious God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

Bless the Members of this assembly as they set upon the work of these hours, of these days. Help them to make wise decisions in a good manner, and to carry their responsibilities steadily with high hopes for a better future for our great Nation.

Deepen their faith, widen their sympathies, heighten their aspirations, and give them the strength to do what ought to be done for this country.

May Your blessing, O God, be with them and with us all this day and every day to come, and may all we do be done for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. HIGGINS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Brian E. Pate, one of his secretaries.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. The Chair will entertain up to 15 requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

(Mr. HULTGREN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HULTGREN. Mr. Speaker, I wear this pin today in honor of May as National Foster Care Month. At the end of fiscal year 2010, over 100,000 foster youth were eligible and waiting for adoption. Sixty-five percent of former foster children experienced at least seven school changes while in care. In 2010, almost 30,000 youth "aged out" of the foster care system without a permanent family. In some States, up to 50 percent of former foster and probation youth become homeless within the first 18 months of emancipation. In some cities, nearly 60 percent of victims of domestic minor sex trafficking are youth from the foster care system.

All children deserve safe, loving, and permanent homes. We must work together to create good policy for foster youth, and I would encourage anyone thinking about becoming a parent to consider changing a life through adoption and foster care.

POSTAL REFORM

(Mr. HIGGINS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remind this House of the far-reaching impact that proposed postal facility closures would have. In my Buffalo community, closing the William Street mail processing facility would affect 700 jobs. Closures would also adversely impact our printing and mailing industry, in addition to non-profit agencies in local municipalities who rely on regular mail service.

Last week, the Senate took the first step in postal reform by passing legis-

lation that would prevent the large-scale closure of postal facilities by requiring the postal service to maintain overnight delivery for at least 3 years.

Mr. Speaker, though the Senate bill is not perfect, we must bring it to the floor immediately in order to achieve real reform. This bill is our best path forward.

MEDICAL DEVICE TAX

(Mr. PITTS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee approved bipartisan legislation to reauthorize and reform the Food and Drug Administration user-fee program. This bill will smooth the process of reviewing medical devices and drugs, increasing transparency and predictability. It's a big step in the right direction for helping American companies continue to lead the world in medical research. Unfortunately, the medical device industry faces a huge setback starting next year.

Last week, Senator TOOMEY and I visited Precision Medical Products in Denver, Pennsylvania. In a roundtable meeting, we heard from a dozen medical device companies about how the new ObamaCare medical device tax will destroy jobs and stall research. This new 2.3 percent tax is on all revenue—and not just profits—meaning even if a company is struggling to break even or even losing money, they have to pay this hefty tax bill. This new tax is over and above the new user fees that they have agreed to pay.

Already, some companies have cut back. Yesterday, we took a big step forward. But if this new tax becomes reality next year, we could still lose the edge on medical device equipment. It should be repealed.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES

(Mr. CARNAHAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CARNAHAN. Yesterday was President Harry S. Truman's birthday. One of his quotes is particularly appropriate today. He said:

The purpose of our society is to enable the individual to attain the highest achievement of which he is capable.

The highest achievements that have sprung from our education system have included harnessing the atom, claiming the high ground in space, and curing previously fatal diseases. But now, because of our failure to adequately fund education, tuition is skyrocketing. Graduates who wish to reach for achievement are anchored to Earth by thousands of dollars in debt. For us to also allow interest rates to double on these student loans is morally unacceptable and economically foolish.

To paraphrase President Truman: the extra bucks stop here.