

Israel's southern border, families have become unacceptably accustomed to running for shelter to avoid rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. But nothing could provide preparation or justification for the onslaught of missile fire raining down on Israeli towns and cities over the past few months, nor the escalated barrage of the last few days.

Since the beginning of 2012, Hamas has launched more than 900 rockets at the State of Israel; 340 of these were in the past few days alone. In the face of this brutality, Israel, like any nation, has the right and the duty to protect her citizens from unwarranted violence and destruction.

Two days ago, Israel launched Operation Pillar of Defense, a legal, proportionate, and surgical strike aimed exclusively at Hamas' missile stockpile and terrorist leadership.

We watch with deep concern for the people of Israel as these events continue to unfold, and we remain united in our support of Israel's sovereign right to self-defense.

I am proud that the Iron Dome missile defense system has provided a bulwark of support in this tragic and frightening time.

We mourn the loss of life and send our deepest condolences to the families of victims. We reject Hamas' call to violence, pray for the most minimal of casualties, and remain ever hopeful for a return to common peace.

FEED MY STARVING CHILDREN

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

Mr. PAULSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend a Minnesota service organization that has, for 25 years, fought against childhood malnutrition in every corner of the globe and in communities across our Nation.

Since its inception, Feed My Starving Children has tirelessly worked to provide lifesaving meals for millions of children, shipping an astounding 600 million meals to individuals in nearly 70 countries around the world and here in the United States. The true effect of the work they do for severely malnourished children is immeasurable.

Several times I have volunteered personally with my staff and packed meals which Save My Starving Children sends to malnourished children in places like Haiti and Sudan. But we're not alone, as nearly 670,000 volunteers have joined Feed My Starving Children in fulfilling their vital mission.

Feed My Starving Children's commitment to fighting childhood hunger for the past quarter century has been steadfast and has positively impacted the lives of millions in Minnesota and around the world. I would like to commend all of those involved in Feed My Starving Children for their hard work, and I look forward to another successful 25 years.

□ 1210

ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

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

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, Members of Congress, as Congress goes into the Thanksgiving holiday, we are going to be deliberating what we can do to help our Nation avoid the perilous financial condition we're headed towards. I have a suggestion that in a small way can make a contribution towards saving billions of dollars.

Everyone here knows the problem we have with childhood obesity in America. Childhood obesity is at an epidemic level. We all know young people who have consumed various types of food that has left them in a condition that is unhealthy. And yet did you know that we are actually giving tax deductions out to big companies that go ahead and advertise and market products that contribute to childhood obesity? So what I'm doing is introducing a bill right now that would protect children's health by denying any deduction for advertising and marketing that's directed at children to promote the consumption of food at fast-food restaurants or of any kind of food that's of poor nutritional quality.

In this way, if this bill becomes law, or if it is adopted in the negotiations to try to avoid the fiscal cliff, we can find a way to not only reduce childhood obesity by blocking these deductions for the advertising, but we can also enable our children's health to be put on a better path and our country's health to be put on a better path.

SUPPORTING ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues today from both sides of the aisle to stand with the people of Israel in support of their sovereign right to defend themselves against Hamas terror. Over the past year alone, Hamas has launched approximately 900 rockets and artillery shells from Gaza into Israeli civilian neighborhoods. My colleagues, think for just a minute: if rockets were coming from Mexico or from Canada, we would not stand for it for one minute.

This week, we saw Hamas fire rockets that struck as far north as Tel Aviv. And today, we have disturbing reports that at least one rocket hit near Jerusalem—the seat of Israel's government and a city holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. That Hamas would specifically target Israel's Parliament building, as reports indicate, shows the great disregard Hamas has for the very idea of democracy, which does not exist in Gaza.

By strengthening the United States relationship with Israel, this Congress

will send a powerful message to Hamas and all in the region who would cause Israel harm. The right of self-defense cannot be allowed to go unexercised by a government dedicated to the protection of its people. We will stand with Israel. And we also, Mr. Speaker, lament the loss of life of Palestinians. Every life is important, so it is not that we stand insensitive to the lives of Palestinians, but they need to stop the violence and the attacks. Israel has the right to defend itself, and we will stand with them.

REMEMBERING STEVE VERMILLION

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

Mr. RIVERA. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I take to the floor of the House of Representatives today to inform my colleagues and the entire Capitol Hill family of staff of the passing of my dear friend and chief of staff, Steve Vermillion. For nearly 25 years, I have known Steve as a friend, family man, and committed public servant. My service in Congress has been greatly enhanced by Steve's invaluable advice and knowledge regarding all aspects of the legislative process. As a 17-year veteran of Capitol Hill, Steve will be dearly missed by the Capitol family for his warmth and his sense of service to this institution and our Nation.

Steve began his service in the House of Representatives in 1986, serving as communications director for then-Congressman Bob Livingston. He subsequently served as a legislative assistant for Congressman James Sensenbrenner, as chief of staff to former Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, and most recently as my chief of staff. An avid and champion rower who also received a degree from the U.S. Naval War College, Steve was recognized for his work throughout his years in Congress with such distinctions as the Congressional Staff Leadership Award from the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute.

Steve demonstrated his commitment to service with great dignity these past two years as he simultaneously battled health problems while dutifully fulfilling his professional obligations with excellence and distinction. His family can take great pride in the manner in which Steve honored us all with his unwavering strength of character, his dedication to the work of the American people, and his civic virtue.

His wife, Jennifer; his daughter, Sarah; his son, Joe, and his entire family should know that Steve made great contributions to the United States Congress and to our Nation.

Steve was indeed a man of the House. Those who worked and served with him over the years are blessed to have had the opportunity to share in his life, a life that has left a lasting impact on so many. Today our country has indeed

lost a great American, a great patriot, a great friend, a great husband, and a great father.

So while we here in the United States Congress bid farewell to our friend and colleague, we do so always remembering the enduring spirit and sense of service that Steve imparted on every life that he touched. Steve Vermillion's life serves as an inspiration to all of us who knew and loved him. May God receive him mercifully into His glory and bless the family, the Nation, and everyone that he leaves behind.

Steve, we'll miss you, Big Man.

MOURNING THE PASSING OF STEVE VERMILLION

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

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RIVERA) in mourning the passing of Steve Vermillion. I gave Steve Vermillion one of his first jobs on Capitol Hill and taught him about the legislative process. He was a man of unquestioned ability, a man of deep integrity, and a man of great commitment to his principles and love of this country and the democracy that we have built and nurtured over the last 230-plus years.

His service to other Members of Congress, as well as in the private sector, was marked by making a difference. No one who worked with Steve Vermillion or who was touched by his life came away a poorer person from it. He enriched all of our lives. He made a great contribution, and I join with the gentleman from Florida in expressing our sympathies to his wife, Jennifer, and to his two children on his passage.

May his soul rest in peace.

ACCELERATING END TO AFGHANISTAN WAR

(Ms. LEE of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, as we gather here for the first time since the election, it's important that we continue to talk about and work to resolve the questions that cannot wait until the 113th Congress. President Obama will soon be meeting with his military advisers and considering various plans for Afghanistan.

My Republican colleague, Congressman WALTER JONES, and I will be sending a letter to the President renewing our call for an accelerated withdrawal from Afghanistan. I encourage all Members to join us on this letter. Keeping our troops in Afghanistan through 2014 will not bring about a meaningful difference on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, it is really time that we catch up with the American people, who are calling for an accelerated end to the war in Afghanistan. Let's bring

our troops home, end the war in Afghanistan, and invest in jobs and nation building here.

□ 1220

AMERICA'S TO-DO LIST

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALBERG). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, as is obvious in this room, the business for the week has now concluded. This is a week which commenced on Tuesday; and prior to that, the Congress, the House, had not been in session for 7 weeks despite the fact that this country has a to-do list a mile long in terms of the critical issues that affect our health care system.

Whether it's doctors' fees that are going to hit a cliff on January 1, a 37 percent cut for Medicare providers of all stripes, particularly in the physician community, we have the fiscal cliff, where tax rates are going to go up for almost every American wage earner if Congress fails to act. We have the sequestration, which is a measure which will be the equivalent of a chain saw going through the government, cutting .2 percent from every budget, whether it's defense or nondefense issues.

We have a farm bill which needs to be acted upon. We have, again, the 2008 farm bill which was a 5-year measure that has expired; and it's critical for rural America. We need to renew the farm bill. And to give one small example, which the dairy industry has reminded people of, that the price of a gallon of milk starting in January could potentially go as high as \$7 if we don't restore and reauthorize the system of price supports that we have in our dairy industry.

The Violence Against Women Act expires. Again, a critical measure so that law enforcement officials all across the country can continue the progress that we're making in terms of the issue of domestic violence and violence against children.

Again, the list goes on and on.

And, incredibly, despite the fact that we have been out of town for 7 weeks—this House convened on Tuesday and is recessing again today for another week's break. And Thanksgiving is obviously an important national holiday for our country and is certainly something that is important to my family, just like every other Member's family—but the fact of the matter is, if you look at the number of legislative days between right now and Christmas—where, again, Congress has never been in session beyond that date—there are literally only 17 potential days; and the Speaker's Office has only scheduled 12.

This is not the way to run a government. And I would just say—as someone who, again, was grateful about the

support I received from my congressional district in eastern Connecticut on election day a few days ago—the message that I heard loud and clear is that it's time for this body to knock it off, to start working together, and to try to start getting some of these critical measures dealt with so that the U.S. economy can have a horizon so that employers can make investment decisions, so that employers can make hiring decisions, so that issues of tax policy and budget can give, again, sectors all across the U.S. economy the confidence to move forward.

We have a very fragile recovery that we're going through right now. We are roughly averaging about 100,000 to 200,000 jobs a month, which is not enough to make a real dent in the unemployment rate in this country. And part of the reason, I believe—and I think, frankly, many economists and observers of the U.S. economy today believe—that we have not gotten a faster recovery is because of the uncertainty that surrounds the failure of Congress to act in terms of the fiscal cliff and sequestration.

Again, going back to the farm bill, as one example of a huge sector of America's economy, our agriculture, the Senate passed a farm bill, a bipartisan farm bill on June 19. This was a measure that was a 5-year authorization bill that sets food policy, food security policy, food safety policy. Republicans and Democrats in the Senate—which is, again, one of the most difficult legislative bodies in the world—actually came together and passed a farm bill. It will reduce the Federal deficit by \$23 billion. It reforms the whole system of commodities support so that we're not going to be sending cash payments to farmers but, instead, modify the system in favor of a risk insurance so that producers actually have a little more skin in the game, which is a healthy thing and is a much more market-oriented approach to having a safety net for agriculture.

In the area of dairy, which is unlike almost every other commodity, it is harvested every day—actually two or three times a day. In terms of the herds of cows, the dairy farmers are out there working hard every day with, again, a very challenging market environment. We have a solid reform in the farm bill in terms of setting up a risk-insurance plan. For the first time in American history, we had full support from the dairy industry and dairy providers. Lots of compromise and negotiation. And, again, a \$23 billion reduction to the deficit in terms of the last farm bill. That was done on June 19.

Since then, the House leadership has refused to bring a farm bill to the floor despite the fact that the House Agriculture Committee, which I sit on, actually passed a bipartisan measure. So it was teed up and ready for action here on the House floor, and yet we have gone 5 months since the Senate acted. We had 7 weeks of recess prior to this past Tuesday. We have American