

cold. That's why I joined with Congressman JIM LANGEVIN to introduce the Fair, Accurate, Secure and Timely Voting Act of 2012, the FAST Act. A Senate companion bill was introduced by Senators CHRIS COONS of Delaware, MARK WARNER of Virginia and SHELDON WHITEHOUSE of Rhode Island.

Representative LANGEVIN and I have significant experience serving at the State and local levels, and we strongly believe that the Federal Government often works best when it leverages those laboratories of democracy at the local and State levels to test innovative solutions and governing reforms and best practices that might have applicability at the Federal level.

Consistent with this principle, our bill avoids overly prescriptive requirements and, instead, offers States a menu of options and financial incentives to adopt voting reforms.

Our FAST Voting Act recognizes that modernizing the Nation's voting system will require collaborative and coordinated efforts at the State, Federal, and local levels. It creates a competitive grant program, similar to the President's Race to the Top schools initiative, and rewards those States that aggressively implement the most effective and promising reforms to expand the franchise.

The menu of reforms includes flexible voter registration opportunities, including same-day registration; early voting, with a minimum of at least 9 days before the election; no-excuse absentee voting; assistance to voters who do not speak English as a primary language; assistance to voters with disabilities, including the visually impaired; effective access to voting for members of the Armed Services; formal training of election officials, including State and county administrators and volunteers; auditing and reducing waiting times at polling stations; creating contingency plans for voting in the event of a natural or other kind of disaster.

To be clear, the FAST Act is the latest in a series of proposals to reform how our elections are administered. Given the renewed interest among the public, Members of Congress, and the President, we ought to at least move forward with hearings to debate the merits of these proposals.

This is the world's greatest and oldest democracy. How can any of us be satisfied with the scandalous operations that occurred in all too many voting places that impaired the ability of Americans, free Americans, to freely cast their vote?

We ought to clean this up. It's a solvable problem, and it ought to be solved on a bipartisan basis.

HONORING SERGEANT FIRST CLASS RILEY G. STEPHENS

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

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Speaker, America recently lost another hero in the war

on terror. On September 28, America lost Army Sergeant First Class Riley G. Stephens of Tolar, Texas.

Riley grew up in Tolar. He enlisted as an infantryman in the Army in 1993. He volunteered for the Special Forces Assessment and Selection Course. He also went on to graduate from the Special Forces Qualification Course in March of 2005.

At the time of his tragic death, he was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) as a Special Forces medical sergeant. He would go on five separate deployments in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

During his 19 years of service to our country, Sergeant Stephens earned many awards and decorations. He earned the Bronze Star Medal with Valor, two Bronze Star Medals, the Purple Heart, the Army Achievement Medal with Valor, four Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, the National Defense Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal with three campaign stars, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon Military, the Army Service Ribbon, two Overseas Service Ribbons, the NATO Medal, the Air Assault Badge, the Basic Parachutist Badge, the Expert Infantryman Badge, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Ranger Tab and the Special Forces Tab.

On October 7, Sergeant First Class Riley G. Stephens was laid to rest at the Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery, not far from his hometown in Tolar where, earlier that day, his life was celebrated and his service to our country was celebrated in a church full of friends and family and fellow patriots.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Sergeant Stephens. He will forever be remembered as an outstanding soldier, a husband and a father. We thank him and his family for their service and sacrifice for our country.

His sacrifice reflects the words of Jesus in John 15:13 which say: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all Americans to continue praying for our country during these difficult times, for our military men and women, and for our first responders who keep us safe by their sacrifice each day.

God bless our military men and women, and God bless America.

COMMEMORATING THE CANONIZATION OF SAINT MARIANNE OF MOLOKAI

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

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a resolution commemorating the remarkable life of

service of Mother Marianne Cope of Molokai, and her canonization as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church on October 21, 2012. She joins Saint Damien of Molokai among the 12 American saints.

I am joined in introducing this resolution by Congresswoman ANN MARIE BUERKLE, who represents Syracuse, New York, where Mother Marianne's Order of the Sisters of Saint Francis is based; by Congressman RICHARD HANNA, who represents Utica, New York, where Mother Marianne grew up; and by Congresswoman COLLEEN HANABUSA, who represents Hawaii's First Congressional District. I am proud to represent Hawaii's Second Congressional District, which includes the island of Molokai.

It may seem surprising that one-sixth of America's saints are connected to the tiny Kalaupapa Peninsula on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. The story of Kalaupapa is heartbreaking.

We have all heard of how isolated native populations are especially susceptible to new diseases. Once Westerners and other peoples came to Hawaii, diseases like smallpox and measles caused high mortality. It was no different with leprosy. Native Hawaiians made up the majority of those afflicted with this disease.

To stem the spread of leprosy, the Kingdom of Hawaii decided in 1866 to forcibly relocate persons found to have the disease to the Kalaupapa Peninsula. Those with the disease were outcasts in every sense of the word. Kalaupapa was chosen because it is surrounded by the ocean and some of the tallest sea cliffs in the world, effectively cutting off escape.

□ 1040

Mothers, fathers, and children who contracted the disease were taken from their families and brought to Kalaupapa, where living conditions were terrible and medical care almost nonexistent. Father Damien, who ultimately contracted and died from the disease, is recognized throughout the world for all he did to improve conditions for the outcasts of Kalaupapa. Mother Marianne carried on and expanded on his work. This resolution honors Mother Marianne for her legacy of compassionate care and recognizes her example of what it truly means to dedicate one's life in service to others. One does not need to be Catholic to be humbled and inspired by the life of someone who devoted herself so selflessly to those whom almost everyone else shunned and rejected.

Mother Marianne, born Barbara Koob, immigrated to this country from Germany as a young girl. She and her family settled in Utica, New York. At the age of 24, she entered the religious life as a Catholic nun and commenced a life dedicated to children, education, and the sick. Mother Marianne later focused her efforts on health care and was influential in establishing St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica. She was also

the founder and administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse, the city's first hospital.

In 1883, Mother Marianne received a letter that would change her life. It was from Father Leonor Fouesnel, a missionary in Hawaii, who was desperately searching for volunteers to take charge of the hospitals that served people with Hansen's disease. More than 50 religious congregations had already declined, but Mother Marianne was different. She eagerly accepted the mission. She wrote back to Father Leonor:

I am hungry for the work and I wish with all my heart to be one of the chosen ones. I am not afraid of any disease.

Mother Marianne left for Hawaii, along with six sisters from Syracuse, in 1883, where she began a 30-year mission caring for those diagnosed with Hansen's disease. Mother Marianne accepted a government plea to start a new home for women and girls with Hansen's disease at the Kalaupapa settlement. Mother Marianne arrived in Kalaupapa just months before Father Damien's death. She oversaw the expansion of health services and programs to provide education and tend to the spiritual needs of the patients.

Mother Marianne lived until the age of 80. On August 9, 1918, she died in Kalaupapa. She was deeply mourned and is still revered. I have visited her grave site, where I left ho-okupu, a traditional Hawaiian offering. I was deeply moved by the devotion of this woman from New York who left all that was familiar to live on an isolated peninsula 5,000 miles from home. Kalaupapa became her home and its people her family.

Mother Marianne recognized the rights and inherent dignity of all people. She dedicated her life to caring for those who needed it the most. People of all faiths can admire her spirit of aloha—encompassing love, compassion, mercy, and grace—and malama—to care for others.

ONE LESS PLACE SETTING AT THE HOLIDAYS

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

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, it's the time of year when families reunite and renew their very close connections—connections that are actually, in most instances, the most precious parts of our lives. This Thanksgiving I know all of us were grateful for the company of those we love the most. But more than 2,000 American families sat at tables where there was one less serving of the Thanksgiving meal just a week ago. Those families lost a loved one in the deadly war in Afghanistan—now more than 11 years long and a tragically reckless policy.

I'm personally grateful for the service of all of our Afghanistan veterans and for their sacrifice and for the sac-

rifice of our military families. But sometimes I don't know how we as a Congress and a Nation can look them right straight in the face after everything we've put them through. The benefits of this war don't come close to justifying the devastating human cost—not just fatalities, but disfiguring wounds, lost limbs, traumatic brain injury, and demons of post-traumatic stress. They all add up to tragedy at the utmost.

For too many of our veterans, the transition back to civilian life is a daily struggle. Many face not just health care challenges but joblessness, housing and credit troubles, and overall economic anxiety and stress. We've had enough of this. Why would we want to extend a war that has given so much misery and so much heartache and so few actual national security benefits?

The American people have rendered their verdict on the occupation of Afghanistan. Poll after poll shows they want it over. Who can blame them? In fact, the public opinion was so clear during the last Presidential election that both candidates for President in this year's campaign were saying that they would end the war. But the question, Mr. Speaker, is, When? The current 2014 timetable is not nearly aggressive enough—not when we're losing brave servicemembers every single week, not when our military presence is sustaining the very extremists we're trying to defeat, and not when American taxpayers are paying the bill to the tune of \$10 billion a month, at least.

And now it seems that our policymakers might be planning for a significant military presence in Afghanistan beyond 2014. According to a new New York Times article last weekend, one of the options on the table calls for 10,000 American troops and several thousand more NATO troops to remain on the ground after 2014. Sources say that General John Allen, our top commander in Afghanistan, prefers to keep as many as 60,000 troops for another year. As The Times editorial board points out, this is not the "steady pace" of troop withdrawal that the President has promised.

This is unacceptable. We ought to have a role in Afghanistan, but it cannot and must not be a military role. We need more humanitarian aid, more support for education, health care, democracy promotion, civil society, and so much more. But we will not make America safer and we will not make Afghanistan stronger by continuing this war. The only morally decent and strategically sensible approach is to bring our troops home now—certainly before 2014.

INVESTING IN R&D AND STEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) for 5 minutes.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Today, I would like to empha-

size the important role that Federal investments in research and development, or R&D; and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or STEM, education play in stimulating growth, creating new industries and jobs, and delivering long-term benefits to our citizens.

As a member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and now as ranking member, I have had the privilege of hearing countless witnesses from industry, academia, and government over the past several years testify that investments in R&D are essential to keeping America competitive in a challenging international marketplace. In fact, according to a paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research, changes in technology are the only source of permanent increases in productivity.

If we are to reverse the trend of the last 20 years, where our country's technology edge in the world has diminished, we must make the investments necessary today. The statistics speak for themselves. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of our economic growth since World War II can be attributed to development and adoption of new technologies. The path is simple: research and education lead to innovation. Innovation leads to economic development and good-paying jobs and the revenue to pay for more research.

□ 1050

As private firms underinvest in research and development because the returns are too far off in the future, there is a clear and necessary role of government to help our Nation keep pace with the rest of the world.

More than 50 years ago, when DARPA was first created, no one had any idea that the research that they would fund would be responsible for the creation of the Internet or the proliferation of GPS technology, but it did. Those inventions started with Federal dollars, as did countless other game-changing technologies.

It is clear that Federal investments in R&D bring significant returns for decades to come. In 1987, MIT Professor Robert Solow was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics for his work proving that improved technology and improved education in the workforce was clearly and chiefly responsible for long-term growth, much more than increases in labor or capital. The current best estimate for the return on academic research alone is 28 percent. Federal efforts are underway now to more vigorously and rigorously quantify the return on Federal investments in R&D.

Today we find ourselves at a crossroads. The United States remains a leader in science, technology, and innovation but no longer the unchallenged leader. While our own world-class innovation infrastructure is under stress, our competitors in other countries, even as they institute austerity measures in other parts of their budgets, are