

seizing the opportunity to make strategic investments in long-term basic research and build and leverage public-private partnerships to support the shorter term R&D that will help create jobs now and long into the future.

As we struggle with our own deficits, we too can make the strategic choice to continue to invest in our future—both in our human capital and physical infrastructure—or we can make the strategic choice to permanently cede our leadership, to fail our current generation of young people and to put our economy in a state of stagnation for years to come.

STEM education is another critical component to the Nation's economic competitiveness. Yet according to the Program for International Student Assessment, the U.S. currently ranks 17th in science and 25th in math out of 34 countries. Though our best STEM students have no trouble competing with their international peers, on average, our K-12 students continue to lag far behind their international peers in math and science aptitude. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 science assessment, 34 percent of the fourth-graders, 30 percent of the eighth-graders, and 21 percent of the 12th-graders performed at or above the proficient level in science. When eighth-graders were tested again in 2011, they achieved a modest 2-point gain in the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency.

When the results are broken down by demographic groups, we see a 6–7 point gender gap that begins somewhere between the 4th and 8th grade and persists through 12th grade. Even more troubling, there are huge and persistent gaps across racial/ethnic groups. Among African American students, in 2009 only 11 percent of fourth-graders, 8 percent of eighth-graders, and 4 percent of twelfth-graders performed at or above the proficient level in science. The number for Hispanic students—14, 12 and 8 percent, respectively—are only slightly better. The one small sign of improvement is a 4 point gain for Hispanic 8th graders from 2009 to 2011. But how as a nation and as parents and grandparents can we tolerate any of these numbers for any of our students?

We must also do better at the college level. Even among those minority students who have access to high-performing schools or who otherwise succeed against the odds and enter college intending to major in a STEM degree, fewer than 20 percent finish within five years, compared to a 33 percent 5-year completion rate for White students and 42 percent for Asian students.

We've been talking about "A Nation at Risk" since the report by that name came out nearly 30 years ago, but in that time we've made little to no improvement. Some suggest we may even have gone backwards. As long as our nation overall was still number one, it was easier for our leaders to let year after year pass without taking the hard steps to take on an enormous set of challenges in a large and diverse country where, rightly so, education is controlled at the local level.

However, the world is changing, the demand for STEM skills is steadily increasing,

and our nation's leadership is being challenged. At the same time, our demographics are shifting in profound ways, making the racial/ethnic gaps that much more consequential for our future. By the year 2050, minorities are predicted to represent 55 percent of the national college population.

I am heartened by many of the initiatives going on now at both the federal and state levels, including the Obama Administration's Race to the Top, Initiative and the state-drive common core standards in math and science. Nevertheless, we have a long way to go to ensure that the U.S. continues to produce the world's best scientists, mathematicians, and engineers and to make sure that every student is prepared for the highly technical, high-paying jobs of the future. According to 2008 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the professional information technology (IT) workforce was projected to add a little under a million new jobs between 2008 and 2018. This represents more than twice the rate of overall workforce growth over that same period. Many high-tech companies cite the availability of a skilled STEM workforce as the number one reason for determining where they locate their facilities. Producing students with the STEM skills needed to fill the jobs of the future is necessary to maintaining our nation's innovation capacity and creating new high-skill, high-paying jobs at home.

We need to take a step back and refrain from making short-sighted, ill-advised cuts to our R&D and education investments in pursuit of illusory budgetary benefits. While we debate turning the lights off on groundbreaking research projects, shuttering world-class research facilities, stopping emerging industries in their tracks, and losing many of our best and brightest scientists from the STEM pipeline for good, our competitors in China, India, and elsewhere are surging ahead in their investments in R&D, STEM education, and emerging industries.

I urge all of us, as we undertake our very difficult task of trying to set us on a more sustainable fiscal path, to do whatever it takes to prioritize steady growth of our investments in science, technology, and STEM education. It is when our economy is hurting the most that we should be redoubling our efforts to innovate our way into a brighter future of new jobs, new technologies, and untold societal benefits.

CORRUPTION IN AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, this year I pushed for and received a congressional investigation into the Dawood National Military Hospital in Afghanistan based on allegations that senior Afghan medical personnel sold U.S. military medical supplies and that Afghan soldiers and police were dying in the facility from untreated wounds and malnutrition because their families couldn't come up with the necessary bribes to pay the hospital staff for their care.

The Afghan surgeon general, General Ahmad Zia Yafthali, was complicit in the corruption. U.S. Army Lieutenant General William Caldwell was instrumental in covering it up by not only

delaying an investigation but by limiting the scope of it when it did occur. Neither General Caldwell nor General Yafthali have been disciplined for their conduct.

Last week I was in Afghanistan and I visited the hospital. I left Afghanistan confirming my belief that the greatest threat to the future of Afghanistan is not the Taliban but the pervasive corruption that permeates every level of Afghan governance and the lack of leadership by the United States in confronting it.

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 55 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

Reverend Dr. Leslie Callahan, St. Paul's Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, we offer thanks for the joys and challenges of self-government, which this House and the whole Congress symbolize.

In a world ravaged by violence, political and domestic, we enter gratefully the sanctuary of these Chambers for peaceful deliberation for this Nation's good. Even in the spaces of deep disagreement may these debates be seasoned with mutual understanding. May Your presence as liberty, love, and justice walk up and down and, yes, even between these aisles. Remind everyone of the sacredness of the trust of their constituents and the hope of all our citizens.

At day's end, may all affected by their decisions be confident of their good faith. At the end of the term, may the reelected redouble their efforts for the common good and those retiring find satisfaction in having done their duty. In the name of all that is holy and good.

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. REED) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. REED 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.

**WELCOMING REVEREND DR.
LESLIE CALLAHAN**

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. FUDGE) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome Dr. Leslie D. Callahan to serve as our guest chaplain today. I have known Dr. Callahan since she was a toddler and am proud to say that she is the dedicated senior pastor of St. Paul's Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, its first female leader in 119 years.

Dr. Callahan is a religion scholar who received her bachelor of arts in religion from Harvard University/Radcliff College, a master of divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York, and doctor of philosophy in religion from Princeton University.

A native of Gary, West Virginia, and resident of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dr. Callahan has been publicly preaching since the age of 19. She is noted for her dynamic preaching and teaching gifts and as a minister who plays a major role in shaping the future of the African American church. She is the mother of 2-month-old Annabelle, or Bella.

Reverend Callahan's character is captured in her favorite scripture from Psalm 27:4:

One thing I desired of the Lord, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to seek God in God's temple.

**ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
PRO TEMPORE**

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BASS of New Hampshire). The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

MLR AND FRAUD

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

Mr. PITTS. Yesterday, we had an Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee hearing on how we can combat waste, fraud, and abuse in our health care system. We heard from private sector representatives about some of the innovative ways that they prevent fraud before it happens. At the same time, Medicare loses billions of dollars annually because most fraud is only discovered after it has been perpetrated.

Now, under ObamaCare, we have a new medical loss ratio rule, or MLR,

that may actually create perverse incentives for private insurers to behave like Medicare. Some have suggested that the consumer protections provided by the MLR rule are too important to subject the rule to change in order to prevent fraud. Setting aside whether individuals or employers have received the benefit of the MLR rule, clearly the best way to save money is prevent it from being stolen in the first place, not chasing criminals after they have received and spent their illicit gains.

The flawed MLR rule is just another example of how ObamaCare's sloppy legislating and rulemaking has the potential to cost the American people dearly.

MORE MONEY FOR WAR?

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

Mr. KUCINICH. The same geniuses who involved the U.S. in a war against Libya, who knocked off the pro-U.S. Libyan Government, who created in Benghazi an extremist shooting gallery which has claimed four American lives including our Ambassador, who have not been held accountable or responsible for those events, who have opened the door for radical fundamentalists to run roughshod over Libya, these same experts are working out of the same playbook for Syria.

Assad was no angel, but he was not a significant threat to the U.S. Apparently, flush from success in Libya, the administration is preparing to ratchet up the war in Syria.

Why would Qatar, our partner in Libya, be supplying surface-to-air missiles to rebels in Syria without the support of this administration? NATO—meaning the U.S.—discusses putting missiles in Turkey, which would create a de facto no-fly zone over northwest Syria, expanding the war.

Is this why we need a tax increase? More money for more war? Really?

**CONGRATULATING RANDOLPH
HIGH SCHOOL CARDINALS**

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

Mr. REED. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Randolph High School Cardinals on their victory in the New York State Class D title game on November 23, 2012, at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse, New York. Led by Head Coach Pat Slater and the game's Most Valuable Player, Cody Oldro, the Cardinals won 28-7. It is with no small amount of pride that we recognize all of the players, cheerleaders, coaches, advisers, administrators, and, most importantly, the parents and the kids for their achievements and congratulate them on their third State championship since 2005.

The 2012 New York State Class D title game was also Coach Slater's

final game as head coach of the Cardinals, capping a 33-year career at the helm. His teams earned three State titles, eight Section Six championships, and a career record of 213 wins and 99 losses. Today, we honor Coach Slater for the positive impact he has had on the young people at Randolph for so many years.

CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE

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

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, our national policy for transportation and budgetary commitment is a disgrace and an embarrassment. Our roads and bridges are a mess. Transportation for America says that we have 69,000 structurally deficient bridges in this Nation. We have over 2,000 structurally deficient bridges in New York State, and we have 99 structurally deficient bridges in my home community of western New York. Every second of every day, seven cars carrying our families drive on a bridge that is structurally deficient.

In the city of Buffalo, we are preparing to make a decision about the future of the elevated Skyway bridge, a roadway classified by transportation officials as being structurally deficient, fracture-critical, and functionally obsolete.

Federal investments should help communities make smart decisions and become more self-sufficient. Investing in smart infrastructure is not simply about tearing down our crumbling bridges; it's about rebuilding our Nation.

**CONGRATULATING COLORADO
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
CHAIRMAN BOB SCHAFFER ON
HIS RETIREMENT**

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

Mr. GARDNER. Today, I rise today to honor Colorado State Board of Education Chairman Bob Schaffer on his recent retirement.

Chairman Schaffer proudly served the State of Colorado and our country in this Chamber, representing Colorado's Fourth Congressional District. Throughout his career in Congress and on the State Board of Education, he has dedicated himself to improving the education of Colorado and this Nation's youth. He's a passionate advocate of education policies that reach all students in our Nation.

In addition to his work on the State board, Bob serves as the principal at Liberty Commons in Fort Collins, Colorado. Liberty is a public charter school and is consistently ranked among the State's top-performing schools.

Chairman Schaffer has been an advocate for State and local control over education. He promotes the value that