

bank examination. By and large, most U.S. banks are having to shrink in size in response to the Fed's pressure, which translates into reduced lending.

We have been going through a period of time in which President Bush and his Secretary of the Treasury at the tail end of their administration started saying this and then President Obama and his Secretary of the Treasury then saying it. They have been saying loan, loan, loan, and then the local bank examiners having been saying no, no, no, and it has been holding us back. This country could be booming beyond belief right now, but we're holding it back in so many ways, and we will never come out and have a full and complete recovery unless that atmosphere changes.

I heard a talk this morning by Governor Mitch Daniels of Indiana, and he said that our employment rate is less than 64 percent now. He says that is the lowest it's been since the era of stay-at-home moms. He said over a third of adult children are now living at home with their parents, which is way above what it has been in the past. In fact, we have an unemployment rate that is far too high, but our underemployment rate is perhaps even much higher. All across this country you have college graduates who are working as waiters and waitresses in restaurants or in other low-paying jobs because they have gotten college degrees and can't find good jobs because we've sent so many good jobs to other countries in recent years and because our regulatory environment is holding this country back and keeping it from booming as it should be right now.

ACCELERATE OUR WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

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

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Speaker, on February 1 of this year, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said that American forces would step back from a combat role in Afghanistan as early as mid-2013. This is a year faster than had been announced only months previously. He also added that U.S. troops would move into an advise-and-assist role to Afghanistan security forces. I know that most everyone who has joined me on this floor this morning would want a faster transition. To be frank, we wish we could have avoided much of this 10-year nation building altogether. I rise today to express my strong support for the administration's decision to reduce our military footprint on an accelerated timeline.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers, our men and women in uniform, will do and do whatever it is we ask of them. Indeed, the sacrifices that our soldiers and their families have made have been extraordinary. Just this morning, with Congressman DONNELLY, I met a family who lost their dad, and his son is here who was serving with him in Afghani-

stan. There is nothing that we can do to adequately express to them our enormous appreciation for their sacrifice.

If we did not have men and women who, at the call of the Commander in Chief, would put on the uniform and report for duty and do what the Commander in Chief and this Congress authorized, we would not have the United States of America. But the obligation we have to the citizens from our districts that are willing to make that sacrifice is to give them a policy worthy of their willingness to make that sacrifice.

It is time that we do all we can to accelerate our withdrawal from Afghanistan. The reason is this: That's what our national security requires.

There was a very valid reason to go into Afghanistan. It was the home of Osama bin Laden. The Taliban gave him sanctuary. Al Qaeda had free hand. Our policy was right when it was started, but it transformed itself into a nation-building policy where our partner has become a corrupt Afghanistan Government that is unreliable, that is squandering taxpayer money, that is not cooperating with the American military.

The question is: Should the American taxpayer and the American soldier be required to do nation building in Afghanistan, particularly when the threat of terrorism is real, but it is not a nation-centered threat? It is dispersed around the globe. The new American policy of counterterrorism, as opposed to counterinsurgency—that is, going after terrorists where they are as opposed to nation building where some may be—is the right direction for this country to go.

Mr. Speaker, the policy announced by Mr. Panetta to accelerate that withdrawal is overdue and it is timely at this point. I strongly support it and urge my colleagues to do so as well.

HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I come back to the floor again this week to continue to talk about high-level nuclear waste and its location around the country.

This week really saddens me because, in the weeks past when I've identified the U.S. Senators from the appropriate States, usually I would have more in support of moving their high-level nuclear waste out of their State than who wants to vote to keep it in their State. As I go to Connecticut today and the States surrounding Connecticut, it is really amazing how many Senators have gone on record to say, No, it is okay; we will just keep this nuclear waste in our State for 15, 20, 25 more years.

With that, let's look at the options we have here.

The nuclear power plant that I'm addressing today is called Millstone. It is

in Connecticut. I always like to compare it to where the high-level nuclear waste should be, which is underneath a mountain, in a desert in Nevada, at Yucca Mountain, where, in 1987, we passed into law and said Yucca Mountain will be the location for our high-level nuclear waste. It is the law of the land.

How have we done? How much nuclear waste is at Yucca Mountain, this mountain in the desert? We don't have any. We've already spent \$15 billion. The waste would be stored 1,000 feet underground. The waste would be stored 1,000 feet above the water table. The waste would be 100 miles from the nearest body of water, which would be the Colorado River.

□ 1040

Well, let's compare it to Millstone in Connecticut. Right now, Millstone has 1,350 million tons of uranium spent nuclear fuel on site. The waste is stored in pools and in dry casts. The waste is 15 to 20 feet from the water table. It is on Niantic Bay, just off Long Island Sound. Here's a picture. Here's the nuclear power plant; here's the bay. It's right next to the water. And without moving forward on Yucca Mountain, this waste will continue to be stored there 15, 20, 25 more years.

So let's look at the Senators from the surrounding States that border this body of water. We have Senator BLUMENTHAL—new. He said in a campaign interview that he opposed Senator REID's fight to prevent Yucca Mountain, so we put him in the "yes" column. Senator LIEBERMAN voted "no" in 2002, so we put him in the "no" column. Senator LAUTENBERG from New Jersey voted "no" on the Senate Appropriations Committee amendment to restore funding, so we put him in the "no" column. Senator MENENDEZ from New Jersey has been a vocal critic, and so he's in the "no" column. KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND, Senator from New York, we have her as undecided. We're kind of waiting for her to take a position. Part of this debate is to at least get Senators on the record somehow to see where they will be on this position.

Senator SCHUMER—obviously fairly close to Connecticut and New York City—he had voted "no" in '02. Senator JACK REED—actually a pretty good friend of mine—from Rhode Island voted "no" in 2002. Senator WHITEHOUSE, a Democrat from Rhode Island, we have as really "undecided." Two "undecided," a whole bunch of "nays," and one "yes."

So how does that do for our totality of where Senators are at this time based upon the information we have? Well, we have 41 Senators who say we need to move high-level nuclear waste out of our State to a desert underneath a mountain. We have 14 that we really have no public record on. We'd like to see the Senate sometime take a vote and figure out where they might be. And we have 15 "nays."

Now, why is this important? The Nuclear Waste Policy Act in 1982 said: Let's find a single repository. The Blue Ribbon Commission, which testified before my committee just last week, said: We need a long-term geological repository. As I quoted in a story yesterday, Brent Scowcroft, the cochair, said: We're not excluding Yucca Mountain, but we have so much nuclear waste now that we're going to have to find a second location.

So you can continue your fight on Yucca Mountain, but the Blue Ribbon Commission said we need a long-term geological storage centralized. We're just saying we already have one. If we're going to need a second one, then we better start that process of looking at a second one, but we ought to start filling up the first one.

We spent \$15 billion. And why aren't we moving forward? Well, we have the majority leader of the Senate who says no. In fact, my colleague, Mr. CLYBURN, was quoted in a paper as saying: As long as HARRY REID is alive, Yucca is dead.

OPPOSING PIONEERS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to the so-called PIONEERS Act that, among other things, repeals the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, or GOMESA.

It's hard to believe that the lessons of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill are already being forgotten, less than 2 years after almost 5 million barrels of oil flowed out into the ocean and devastated the gulf region's environment and economy.

Through this horrible tragedy, we learned firsthand the dangers of drilling at extreme ocean depths and the difficulties in stopping a spill once it occurs. We also learned the dangers posed by the powerful Gulf of Mexico loop currents in the eastern gulf. These loop currents are capable of transporting spilled petroleum into the Florida Straits, through the Florida Keys, and onto shorelines up the Atlantic side of my home State, endangering hundreds of miles of coastline in Florida, and beyond up the east coast.

We were extremely lucky that more of Florida was not affected by the Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 and that the site of the spill was not within these normally-occurring loop currents. Allowing drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico would place leasing directly within the strong loop current and is the height of folly.

Even if we didn't have such a powerful precautionary tale as the Deepwater Horizon accident, drilling near Florida's coast simply doesn't add up. Florida's \$65 billion tourism industry relies on pristine beaches. Florida is also home to 85 percent of the United

States' coral reefs, which are profoundly sensitive to oil spills.

Coastal resources like mangroves and sea grasses would also be put in harm's way, as well as Florida's vibrant commercial and recreational fishing industries. That is why so many bipartisan members of Florida's congressional delegation have lined up in opposing drilling near our shores. In fact, a few weeks ago, Congressman JOHN MICA held a field hearing in Miami to discuss the dangers of offshore drilling by Cuba that is within 100 miles of Florida's shores. The Florida Lieutenant Governor—a Republican—Jennifer Carroll stated at the hearing that:

The Deepwater Horizon incident in 2010 has shown that a spill that poses even a potential of impacting Florida's water or land causes a huge negative impact on the economy.

I could not have said it better myself. This is why we simply should not allow drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

I would welcome a debate weighing the harms against the benefits of expanding offshore exploration off Florida's coastline if the benefits were comparable to the risks, but they're not—not even close. Expanding drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico would not lower gas prices or produce enough oil to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

In short, opening the eastern Gulf of Mexico is not the answer to our energy concerns. If we are serious about weaning our dependence on foreign oil, we need to continue the clean energy policies of the Obama administration and efforts in recent years by Congress. We have more domestic oil production today, right now, than we have ever had. For example, the 2007 bipartisan effort to increase the fuel efficiency of cars over the next decade will have a profound effect on the demand side of the supply-demand equation.

The Natural Resources Defense Council estimates that by 2020 the new auto fuel standards will save consumers \$65 billion in fuel costs by cutting consumption by 1.3 million barrels a day—more than could be produced in the eastern gulf in an entire year.

Finally, a little history lesson on the 2006 law that this bill will repeal. In 2006, Republican leadership in both Houses of Congress enacted GOMESA, which opened 8 million acres for new oil drilling leases off Florida's panhandle in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. In exchange, the 2006 law placed the rest of the eastern gulf under a statutory moratorium until 2022. That agreement should be honored, not tossed aside less than 6 years later.

Our word must be our bond, or negotiations and handshakes are rendered meaningless. In my 19-year legislative career, your word being your bond was always supposed to be paramount. In this case, apparently there are some Members of the Republican leadership that don't believe that and are willing to cast it aside.

Beyond the economic and environmental reasons for honoring the 2006

deal, protecting our military training areas is also important. The military uses the eastern Gulf of Mexico for training operations, and the Pentagon has said that drilling structures and associated development are incompatible with military activities, like missile flights, low-flying drone aircraft, and training. For this reason, the Pentagon has long opposed expanding offshore drilling in the eastern gulf.

The 2006 law incorporates an agreement between the Department of the Interior and the Defense Department to set aside waters east of the "military mission line" to preserve military readiness. On behalf of Florida's tourism industries, fishing industries, and on behalf of the needs of the Defense Department and in the name of military readiness, I urge my colleagues to remove this terrible provision from this legislation.

To add insult to injury, it is unconscionable that House leadership has refused to even allow a vote on a bipartisan amendment that I cosponsored with my Florida colleagues that would have stripped out the GOMESA repeal. If they had the courage of their conviction, they would allow a fair and open debate on this. But when you don't have much to back up your argument, you can't allow a fair fight.

COMMEMORATING THE LIFE OF DANNY THOMAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. RIBBLE). The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACK) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACK. Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to commemorate the life of a truly wonderful man, Mr. Danny Thomas, who represents so much that is wonderful about our country.

Born to a poor immigrant family, Thomas understood the meaning of hard work from a very young age. He started work at the age of 10 selling newspapers and worked until he moved to Detroit to go into show business. After years of struggling, Thomas achieved unrivaled success with shows like "Make Room for Daddy," the "Andy Griffith Show," and the "Dick Van Dyke Show." It was with this success that Thomas started St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where no child is turned away because of an inability to pay.

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Since it opened in 1962, St. Jude has saved thousands of lives, helped countless families, and forwarded vital research on childhood cancer and other diseases.

This month marks the 50th anniversary of St. Jude, and to commemorate this incredible work done at St. Jude, the U.S. Postal Service is honoring Danny Thomas and St. Jude with a commemorative stamp. I can think of no one and no charity more worthy for this honor than Thomas and St. Jude. His is a story of hard work, success, and giving.