

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.

□ 1050

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.

HONORING THE LIFE OF SPECIALIST ROBERT J. TAUTERIS, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. RIBBLE). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. DONNELLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DONNELLY of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to solemnly remember and honor the life and dedicated service of Specialist Robert Tauteris, Jr., a native son of Hamlet, Indiana, and a proud member of the 713th Engineer Company based in Valparaiso and assigned to 81st Troop Command.

Specialist Tauteris died, along with three of his fellow soldiers, on January 5, 2012, in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained when their vehicle was hit by a roadside improvised explosive device as they scouted for bombs and potential problems along a major supply route.

The State of Indiana mourns the loss of the four brave men who took on this dangerous mission to ensure the safety of their fellow soldiers. Specialist Tauteris died, along with his fellow National Guardsmen, Specialist Brian Leonhardt, Specialist Christopher Patterson, and Staff Sergeant Jonathan Metzger. Private Douglas Rachowicz was severely injured in the same incident.

Robert graduated from North Judson High School in 1986 and had worked in manufacturing at Ferro Corporation in Plymouth. Robert Tauteris served one tour in Afghanistan with the National Guard and volunteered for his second deployment when his son, Robert Tauteris III enlisted. Father and son left together for Afghanistan in the fall of 2011. Bobby III accompanied his dad's body home to Dover Air Force Base.

Robert's posthumous awards include the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Army Good Conduct Medal, and the Army Achievement Medal. He also earned the National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal with the Bronze Service Star, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with M Device, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, the NATO Medal, Combat Action Badge, Driver and Mechanic Badge, Combat and Special Skill Badge, Basic Marksmanship Qualification Badge, and the Overseas Service Bar. It is an extraordinary record, and he is an extraordinary hero.

Robert will be remembered by his friends, his family, and fellow soldiers as a dedicated, reliable, hardworking man who cared deeply for his family. He is survived by his sons, Robert III and Matthew; Robert III's wife, Kayla—and they are here with us today—his dad, Robert Tauteris; his sister, Tammy Tauteris Smith; brother, Tom; half-brother, Darrel Ray Minix; and stepmother, Nichelle; as well as extended family and friends who are left to treasure his memory.

It is my solemn duty and humble privilege to honor the life, the service,

and the memory of Specialist Robert Tauteris, Jr. He is a testament to the great honor possessed and sacrifices made by our men and women in the Armed Forces. We mourn his passing and offer solemn gratitude for his service and sacrifice.

On behalf of the United States of America, we want to thank your family for your service, for your sacrifice, and for everything you have done.

God bless you.

REFORMS TO THE MEDICARE SYSTEM

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

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on behalf of the senior citizens in Pennsylvania's Eighth Congressional District who rely on a Medicare system which makes predictable and stable payments to their physicians.

I came to Washington, with one of the largest freshman classes in recent history, to make the difficult decisions that for too long have been deferred and delayed. I'm proud to have joined a bipartisan group of my fellow Representatives last spring in passing a budget resolution which addressed the long-term challenges facing Medicare.

The budget resolution we supported provides fiscal stability to a program which will face severe cuts and drastic changes in the future without serious reform. However, while these basic reforms to the existing system are being debated, we are currently faced with a more pressing issue, the solution to which has already earned widespread support among lawmakers, doctors, and health care industry groups.

The practicality of the sustainable growth formula for Medicare payments has been a subject of much debate in this Chamber since its implementation in 1997. Over the course of the past two decades, Congress has deemed it acceptable to provide for short-term, temporary fixes to ensure that doctors receive adequate payment for the services they provide to Medicare patients. Short-term fixes provide no stability or predictability to these important service providers.

In speaking with a cardiologist in my home of Bucks County, he shared his concerns with me over the way Congress has chosen to handle the SGR. He told me that every time a short-term extension comes up for a vote, he is faced with the possibility of having to lay off employees and reducing his practice in the face of potential cuts.

The constant threat of cuts to the Medicare reimbursement rate prevents doctors and hospitals from developing new delivery and payment models intended to reduce rising health care costs and denies them the flexibility they need to achieve savings through improved care.

Each time Congress enacts a short-term fix, the scheduled cuts in the SGR

formula grow deeper and the cost of a full repeal increases. A full repeal in 2005 would have cost less than \$50 billion. Today's cost is upwards of \$300 billion. In the next 5 years, if nothing is done to correct this predictable crisis, the cost of short-term fixes and the total debt accumulated from the SGR will climb to over \$600 billion.

With the drawdown of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the homecoming of many of the brave young men and women who so proudly served our country in those theaters over the course of the past decade, we are presented with a unique opportunity to provide for a permanent fix to the Medicare physician payments, and to do so without adding to our already burdensome national debt. The use of savings from the Overseas Contingency Operations fund to permanently repeal the SGR formula will provide doctors and their patients with the certainty they so desperately need in these difficult economic times.

As with so many of the challenges facing our Nation today, we are presented with two clear options:

We can choose to ignore the problems posed by the SGR formula to doctors, seniors, and to our fiscal health by continuing the practice of short-term fixes and forced draconian cuts to hospitals and health care providers and apply the savings from the OCO funds elsewhere; or

We can choose to use these funds to permanently repeal the SGR and to set our Medicare system on a new path and provide for long-term stability for doctors that promote equality, efficiency, and improved health care services for our Nation's seniors.

I understand that we're presented with another opportunity to provide some breathing room for doctors and their patients as part of the middle class tax cut bill that looks to achieve bipartisan support here this week. Let us use the next 10 months to engage in some honest discussion about the real cost and impact of the SGR. Let's get this right before the end of the year. And I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do just that.

BRING THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN TO AN END

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

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, first let me just thank my colleagues, Congressman JONES, Congressman McDERMOTT, Congressman ELLISON and others, for speaking out this morning clearly, saying that it's past time to bring the war in Afghanistan to a swift and orderly end.

There's no military solution in Afghanistan. We need to bring our troops home now, and we need to make sure that we leave no permanent military bases. The American people are sick and tired of the past decade of war, and they want this war to end.