

grandmother, and devoted wife. She and John would have celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary this summer. Barbara's influence lives on through the lives she touched, especially those she protected. It's my honor to be one of the many people who will keep her legacy alive by defending our most vulnerable, the unborn, as she did for so many years.

God bless Barbara Willke, and may she rest in peace.

CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS COLORADO RIVER

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

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a member of the Safe Climate Caucus. Earlier this week, American Rivers published its annual list of the country's most-threatened rivers. Primarily because of over allocation, the Colorado River is at the top of that list. That is a challenging place to be.

Across our region, 34 million people rely on the Colorado River for drinking water. That includes cities like Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Phoenix. The Colorado River snakes through the Grand Canyon and is truly the lifeblood of Arizona, and that's why I continue to advocate for Federal solutions to threats from uranium mining and other sources of contamination.

But the real and most serious threat to the health of the Colorado River is climate change, and that should not be ignored. Scientists predict that climate change will reduce the Colorado River's flow by up to 30 percent by 2050, threatening all those communities and resources, including recreation and agriculture.

We need proactive solutions. We need strategies to manage and mitigate climate change and the impacts of climate change. The majority has to deal with this question. It cannot be ignored. The Safe Climate Caucus is challenging the majority to floor debate on climate change. We look forward to that opportunity; and for the sake of the Colorado River, that debate needs to happen.

EXPLOSION IN WEST, TEXAS

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

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it was around 8 p.m. last night, as the sun was setting, when in the historically Czech community of West, Texas, families were finishing up supper and winding down the day. Suddenly the tiny town of 2,600 was shaken by a massive explosion at the nearby fertilizer plant, equivalent to 2.3 on the Richter scale. The fiery blast was so strong that it was described by West Mayor Tommy Muska "like a nuclear bomb going off."

My daughter and her family were in church in Mexia, Texas, about 50 miles away, when they felt the shock. In fact, three firefighters from Mexia took off then and were headed straight for the town of West. Homes were set ablaze and flattened to the Earth. The senior citizens home has disappeared. Many citizens in the town were trapped in their homes. Others were stranded on the streets, covered with blood and no place to go.

When disaster struck, first responders, firefighters, EMS volunteers, and citizens traveled from all over Texas, headed to the town of West. For those of us in Texas, this is not a surprise. Texans always take care of Texans. In fact, so many firefighters came to West that officials said there were too many, and no more assistance was needed.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of people are injured. Up to 70 are feared dead. Many are unaccounted for as the police go door to door looking for survivors. So as the misty rain settles on the town of West, our prayers go out to the people of this wonderful community.

And that's just the way it is.

NATIONAL DAY OF SILENCE

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

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the National Day of Silence. Tomorrow is the 16th year we've commemorated the National Day of Silence, a time when students across the country remain silent for the whole day to draw attention to the discrimination toward their LGBT peers. The National Day of Silence is important for many reasons—to let our youth know they're not alone, that there are plenty of people ready to support them just the way they are.

As my constituent, Heidi Dimas, a senior at Pajaro Valley High School puts it:

The National Day of Silence is important to me because it is a day when you see all the support for the silent ones and that nobody is alone in anything.

I'm proud of my constituents who are calling for a stop to harassment of LGBT individuals. I am particularly proud of my constituents in Watsonville and from the Pajaro Valley High School for hosting the 16th Annual Queer Youth Leadership Awards.

Though many LGBT advocates and their allies are silent tomorrow, we in Congress must never be silent. It is our job to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Another of my constituents, Molly Schrank, from Alternative Family Education in Santa Cruz said it best:

The National Day of Silence is important to me because sometimes silence speaks louder than words.

□ 1340

DISABLED VETERANS RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT

(Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, no one should fight for their country, only to return home and have to fight their government. But that's exactly what's happening with over a million disabled veterans today who are waiting far too long to have their claims processed by the VA.

There are, right now, thousands of folks in my home State of New York and in the Hudson Valley who are waiting, on average, over 400 days to have their claims processed. That's a year and a half. That's wrong, and we can do better by our veterans.

I met one veteran recently named Edward Kackos. Ed served his country in Vietnam. He came home. He filed a disability claim just in February 2011. But that was 800 days ago, and Ed's still waiting for an answer. He said to me recently, "Sean, I just need an answer so I can decide whether I'm going to have to sell my house, because I don't want to have it foreclosed."

Think about how disgraceful that is. We need to give him an answer sooner, and there's a solution.

I recently introduced the Disabled Veterans Red Tape Reduction Act. This is a simple idea that would allow veterans to go to doctors outside the VA system to get their claims processed, and it would speed it up.

But this program is at risk right now, a program that 20 percent of all veterans use, because the last Congress failed to reauthorize it.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure for another 5 years.

LET'S HELP SMALL BUSINESSES

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I have introduced two bills to help small businesses. We all like to talk about how small businesses are the engine of our economy, and that's because that is true. That's why I have introduced the Help Entrepreneurs Create American Jobs Act, which is a bipartisan bill, to double the deduction for startup expenses to encourage entrepreneurs to start a business and create jobs.

I'll also introduce the Fairness and Transparency in Contracting Act to ensure that only small businesses, actual small businesses, receive Federal small business contracts.

Mr. Speaker, these bills are the least that we can do to give our economy a shot in the arm.

DAY OF SILENCE

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

Mr. CICILLINE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the National Day of Silence, which is coordinated nationally by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, and organizes students across our country to take a vow of silence for the day to highlight the bullying and harassment that many LGBT youth encounter in their public schools.

I am proud to join Congressman ENGEL from New York to introduce a resolution today in support of the goals of the National Day of Silence, and I will continue to work in this Chamber to raise awareness about this ongoing problem.

I ask that the House now join me in observing a moment of silence for LGBT youth who are victims of harassment and violence in cities and towns all across this country, and as a symbol of our commitment to guarantee that every child in America can study and learn in a safe environment.

HONORING THE LIFE OF DICK FALLOW

(Mrs. BUSTOS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. BUSTOS. I rise today to talk about the recent passing of Dick Fallow, a great friend to working men and women of the Quad-City region of Illinois and Iowa and a great ally to American workers.

Dick spent his life fighting to improve the lives of others. He was a tireless and a passionate advocate for working families and a true champion for civil rights.

As a young man, Dick served his country by driving an ambulance in World War II. Later, in the 1960s, he fought for civil rights legislation.

He is best known for being a lifelong local and national leader on behalf of the American worker. He showed up at every labor rally, picket line, and civil rights event. Rain, snow, heat, old age, and sickness, nothing could deter Dick Fallow from fighting on behalf of working people.

He was a rousing public speaker and inspired generations of Illinoisans and Iowans to get involved in public service. He also was a devoted and loving family man.

I know my husband, Gerry, and I join so many others in extending our deepest condolences to Dick Fallow's family. He will truly be missed.

REAL TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LANKFORD) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. Speaker, this is a conversation about something that's very pertinent to all Americans right now, and that is their taxes. Obviously, this is tax week, which was punctuated by an incredibly difficult day in Boston.

But this is also tax freedom day that's happening April 18. It's a recognition that if Americans worked their entire year they could get to this point. For many areas of the country, this would be the day they're finally paying into their own family, rather than paying into the Federal Government or the State and local Treasury.

Now, that differs from area to area, but this shows, again, the significance of what it really means to get to a point like this where we have to look again at our Tax Code.

Today is the day just to be able to pause and say: Where are we with our Tax Code, and where are we with our budget?

Let me just highlight a couple of things. Then I have several colleagues that I want to get a chance to yield the floor to to get a chance to continue this conversation.

There's a lot of conversation about our budget, rightfully so. We're over \$1 trillion overspending this year, the same as we did the year before, the year before, and the year before. Now, for the fifth year in a row something has happened that's never happened ever in American history. We've overspent the budget by \$1 trillion.

Let me set aside something else, though, for people to be able to look at, and that is, this year, in the Federal Treasury, we will receive the highest amount of tax revenue ever in the history of the United States Treasury. Make sure no one misses that. We'll receive more revenue this year than we ever have in the history of the United States Government. Yet, we're still overspending \$1 trillion.

We have serious budget issues, but they're not tax revenue as far as how much is coming in issues; it's overspending. But our issue with taxes is not the issue of the tax rate not necessarily having enough. It's the issue of how we do it.

It's such a convoluted mess to be able to go through our thousands and thousands of pages of Tax Code. We need to stop and be able to evaluate this: Is this really the right way to do it?

The purpose of tax action is to tax the smallest amount possible to run an efficient government. Is that really what we're doing in our Tax Code right now?

Is it a simple system that people can actually do? If so, why do people spend billions of dollars across America, and millions of hours, trying to fill out tax forms, and to be able to get it in on time in a way that's so complicated that when you turn it in, no one thinks that they actually turned it in correctly. No one.

So the challenge of this is, how can we get to real tax reform to be able to

solve many of the tax issues, to be able to benefit our Nation and what happens in the days ahead, and especially for our businesses that need so much help and would like to have the relief of the burden that they have to go through all this convoluted tax policy.

Let me introduce one of my dear friends. This is TOM REED from New York. He's a member of the Ways and Means Committee. They live and breathe and function with the Tax Code, and he is one of the leaders of trying to walk through the process of reforming this code.

Mr. REED. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Oklahoma for organizing this important topic and this conversation tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I believe in an America that is fair. I believe in an America where the rules are simple, so that hardworking taxpayers in America understand what those rules are, and they're not subject to the jeopardy of violating the rules because they're too complicated.

□ 1350

I believe in an America where it's not judging a person by whom they know but, rather, who they are. And, Mr. Speaker, why I start my conversation with those beliefs is because we need to apply those beliefs to getting rid of this broken, complicated Tax Code that we have in America. What we have is a Code that is not simple, that is not fair, that is way too complicated. That's why I believe in going through commonsense tax reform for the purposes of coming up with a simple, fair, and reasonable Tax Code so that people can fill out their own taxes.

As my colleague from Oklahoma rightfully points out, people are spending billions of dollars on tax preparers, third parties, and millions of hours—that can otherwise go to their businesses or to their families—to fill out a tax return that they can't understand because the rules are too complicated.

Also, we have to end what we came here to Washington, D.C., to do, my colleague from Oklahoma and myself of this freshman class in November, 2010, and that is having our country under the control of the special interests and creating those loopholes in the Tax Code that go to narrowly tailored people because of whom they know.

We want a Tax Code, I want a Tax Code, and I know my colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee want a Tax Code that promotes growth, that promotes economic opportunity, that promotes the opportunity for us to be competitive on the world stage. Because when America competes on a world stage in a competitive market, we win. We have the best workers. We have the best technology. We have freedom. We have the rule of law. We need to do commonsense tax reform for the purposes of putting us in a position where we can create the jobs today and for generations to come, because we will then create a fair, level playing