

Mr. O'ROURKE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Veterans Benefits Claims Faster Filing Act. This no-cost legislation will shorten the time that veterans must wait for their claims to be decided.

Nationally, the average wait time for a claim is nearly 300 days. In El Paso, Texas, the veterans I represent wait an average of 439 days. We must do better.

My legislation will require the VA to report and post processing times and award rates for claims filed in a variety of ways, from the fastest way, which is a fully developed claim filed online, to the slowest way, which is filing an underdeveloped claim on a non-standardized piece of paper.

Informing veterans that they will wait the least amount of time if they file fully developed claims online will create an incentive to do so. Fully developed claims are consistently turned around in 100 days or fewer. Imagine a veteran in your district saving months of waiting unnecessarily for a decision on their claim.

We owe a lot to our veterans, and we can uphold our end of the bargain to them by ensuring that they receive the benefits they have earned and depend on in a timely manner.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the Faster Filing Act.

SAVE THE CHILDREN OF THE NORTH FOREST INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, over the past couple of weeks, in my district, we've been working with a very small school district by the name of North Forest Independent School District, of about 7,000 young people, bright, energetic and prepared to reach and fulfill their future.

Unfortunately, the State of Texas chooses to close that school, not because they are not meeting the Leave No Child Behind, but because one high school did not meet the threshold by two students. Over the next couple of days, we expect to hear from the State to ask this district to terminate all employees.

We offered to the State a collaborative response of having them to work with public charters and work with the public school system, keeping it a public school system. We again ask the State of Texas, the Governor of the State of Texas, who has refused to give Federal funds for education back to the districts, you know why? Maybe it's because of sequester.

But more importantly, I want to save those students, I want to save those employees, and I believe we can do it by eliminating the sequester.

I ask unanimous consent to bring up H.R. 900, a one-sentence bill to eliminate the sequester. These children at the North Forest Independent School District deserve to be able to graduate

from a public school. It is shameful that they will be getting a notice of their beloved teachers, fire them all.

I will go home to the district and stand against it. I ask for relief from the U.S. Department of Education and all of those who believe in educating our children and being responsible to our teachers who teach them and love them.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. As the Chair previously advised, that request cannot be entertained absent appropriate clearance.

HONORING THE LIFE OF DEMETRIO RODRIGUEZ

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

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Today I'd like to take a moment to honor the life of Demetrio P. Rodriguez, a great American we lost earlier this week in my hometown of San Antonio. Demetrio passed away at the age of 87 after a long and rewarding life, a life that literally transformed public education in Texas and across the Nation.

Demetrio, like many of the folks who grew up on the west side of San Antonio, was a humble man. Born into a migrant farm-working family, he served in the Navy and later in the Air Force Reserve, and he worked for years at Kelly Air Force Base.

In 1968, with 15 other parents, he led the charge to change the way we do school finance, not only in Texas, but in the United States of America. He objected to the fact that property-poor districts were so far outspent and given much more money than property-rich districts in Texas. He led that charge.

In 1973, the Supreme Court said that education wasn't a fundamental right, but he didn't give up the fight. And in 1989, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the children of Texas should have an equal education, no matter their income.

He was a great man. He'll be sorely missed. He was a fighter and a champion of people.

THE SEQUESTER HAS REAL CONSEQUENCES

(Ms. SCHAKOWSKY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Some of my Republican colleagues were raging that air traffic was slowed by a so-called political manipulation of the sequester. I joined most of my House colleagues in voting to make a special exception for the FAA because we do want traffic to flow.

But I have a news flash: cutting billions of dollars from the budget in a sequester in a meat-ax way does have real consequences.

Furloughs are also occurring at the Departments of Defense and Agriculture, at the U.S. Customs and Bor-

der Protection. Head Start is cutting 70,000 slots for early childhood education. In my neighboring Indiana, there's a raffle being held to decide which children are going to be kicked out of the Head Start program.

Four million Meals on Wheels are going to be cut for seniors who are depending on them.

The Medicare Anti-Fraud Division is being cut. That makes no sense. And the sequester is projected to cost 750,000 American jobs this year.

So, Mr. Speaker, I too ask unanimous consent to bring H.R. 900 to the floor that would repeal the sequester.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. As the Chair previously advised, that request cannot be entertained absent appropriate clearance.

□ 1310

CORRECTING THE ENGROSSMENT OF H.R. 1765, REDUCING FLIGHT DELAYS ACT OF 2013

Mr. LATHAM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that in the engrossment of H.R. 1765, the Clerk strike "account" on page 2, line 14, and insert "accounts."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Iowa?

There was no objection.

REMEMBERING MAXINE SMITH

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

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Speaker, today, in Memphis, Tennessee, a great lady passed away—a lady who is as fierce, as brave, and as courageous a woman who's ever lived in this country: a lady by the name of Maxine Smith.

Maxine Smith was the executive secretary of the NAACP from 1962 up to around 2000. She served on the Memphis City School Board from 1971 to 1995 and was on the National Board of the NAACP. She helped take Memphis beyond Jim Crow and beyond segregation into a great city in America and America's mainstream.

Because the scourge of discrimination and desegregation stained this country, she was not allowed to enroll at Memphis State University. So she went to Spelman and then to Middlebury and got a master's degree. She went to work to help others and spent her life fighting against discrimination in all ways and all manners.

She served on the State Board of Education in Tennessee and made sure people got a good education, whether they were White or Black; and she overcame all of the hate and discrimination that she faced. She was a beautiful woman who lived Dr. King's dream—seeing people and judging them by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

She was a person to be emulated, honored, and remembered. She had a

great life—a life extremely well lived. I will miss her and so will this Nation.

REPEAL THE SEQUESTER

(Ms. SHEA-PORTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Today, the House proved that if it really wants to, it can move quickly. Today, we made it easier for air travelers, and I'm very happy that we did that. But the sequester is still there, and it is still impacting schools. I have a little Head Start that's going to be closed in my district. Others are being impacted. We're laying off Federal employees. This is impacting the military and health research across the country.

And so I call on the House majority to continue the work they started today. Don't just choose one group. Repeal this sequester. They have it in their power to put it on the floor to repeal the sequester. The American public is asking for this. It is our obligation to do this not just for air travelers but everybody around the country.

APPOINTING BUDGET CONFEREES

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

Mr. CONNOLLY. Today, we passed a fix for the FAA and for air traffic controllers because of a problem created by sequestration. But we only have 10 fingers. There are many more holes in the dike than 10. We've already plugged the hole on the Pentagon. We've already plugged the hole on food inspectors at USDA. Today, we plug another one.

Sooner or later, we have to recognize the dike itself is being undermined by something called sequestration. The time has come for Congress to put aside partisan wrangling. It's time for the majority to show leadership and appoint conferees to a budget so we can actually work this out in a sensible way, not a meat-ax, reckless way, and get things done for the American people. Sequestration is not rocket science, but it will remain beyond us if we continue the partisan fighting we've had in this House.

REMEMBERING HOWARD PHILLIPS

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

Mr. STOCKMAN. When I first started out in politics, a dear friend of mine, Howard Phillips, was a conservative leader and a great father and patriot. On April 20, Howard Phillips passed away.

He grew up in Boston, where he became an avid baseball fan. He knew all the teams, all the players, and remained a passionate fan throughout his life. He fought hard to get into the Bos-

ton Latin School. From there, he invaded the liberal bastion that is Harvard, where he upheld conservative principles and even served as the chairman of the student council.

Howard made national news during the Nixon administration, when he fought to abolish the Office of Economic Opportunity. A leader, a champion, and a great father, he founded in 1974 the TCC, or The Conservative Caucus. It rapidly became one of the major nationwide conservative organizations. He made headlines for opposing the Panama Canal treaty and supporting Ronald Reagan's efforts to rebuild our defense and to cut taxes and spending.

The conservative movement will not be the same without Howard. In fact, the conservative movement would not be what it is today without his leadership. In 1960, he helped found Young Americans for Freedom, which became the model for conservative political action groups. Howard, Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, Jerry Falwell, and other key leaders became the founders of what we know as the modern conservative movement.

Over the years, Howard stood firm to conservative principles when it was often easier to compromise with the establishment and others. When Howard saw the GOP tilting too far to the left, he found the U.S. Taxpayers' Party—now the Constitution Party—which nominated him as their Presidential candidate in 1992, 1996, and 2000. It was a distinct pleasure for Howard to see the new generation of conservative leaders. As a precursor to the Tea Party, Howard was always there.

Howard's work lives on through his family and through his children, through The Conservative Caucus, and through the work of his large family, including his son, Brad, who found the Persecution Project, which is very active in saving embattled Christians in Sudan; and his son Douglas' Vision Forum, which is a major home-schooling ministry; and through the many Americans inspired by his leadership and vision.

Howard is survived by his wife, Peggy, six children, and 18 grandchildren.

On April 29 a funeral will be held at McLean Bible Church.

God bless you, Howie. We love you.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will recognize Members for Special Order speeches without prejudice to the possible resumption of legislative business.

WE NEED TO KNOW WHERE WE COME FROM TO KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 min-

utes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honor for me to yield to a friend, a man that I am delighted was elected to join us last year, my friend, Mr. YOHO from Florida, for such time as he may consume.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT

Mr. YOHO. I thank the gentleman from Texas for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard many gun control supporters say that the Second Amendment is outdated. They point out the phrase "a well-regulated militia" as their proof that armed and alert citizens belong in the 18th century and not the 21st century. We saw last week in Boston that they couldn't be more wrong.

When the Constitution and the Second Amendment were written, the story of the Boston struggles during the Revolutionary War was still fresh in America's memory. British troops looked at every American as a threat and treated them like virtual prisoners in the communities that they built. That's why our Founders made sure that it would be law, and a birthright for every law-abiding American, that everyone would have the freedom to protect themselves.

These days, many of America's enemies don't wear the uniforms of a nation. They try to avoid confrontation with our military and our police force; and they lurk in our streets, they hide out in our universities, and they wait for our defenses to go down. They don't save their hatred for our heroes in uniforms. They unleash it on anyone who is free.

The line between crime and terror is a thin one. Any victim of a violent crime has experienced terrorism in its most intimate and intense form. When we talk about guns and we look at the true meaning of the Second Amendment, it's clear that the passage of a couple of centuries hasn't changed its intent much.

The Second Amendment is a uniquely American value, as relevant today as when it was written. No other nation before ours has trusted the people to arm and protect themselves. When tragedies happened in Tucson, in Aurora, and in Newtown, guns were to blame. When the tragedy happened in Boston last week, we rightly blamed the person and not the instrument.

□ 1320

Allowing law-abiding citizens to exercise their freedom of self-defense can help keep us safe, and I will fight to protect this precious constitutional right.

Mr. GOHMERT. I thank my friend from Florida.

At this time, I'm proud to yield to a friend from Wisconsin (Mr. DUFFY). I'm proud Wisconsin and Texas are in the same country because Wisconsin has certainly produced some great Americans.