

and that is not good for the psyche of this particular country.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time in order to turn the management time of this Special Order over to Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania so that he may speak and also introduce a couple of more speakers whom we have still to talk about this vital issue of Secure Rural Schools and how this House has finally come up with a solution—a long-term, lasting solution—to this particular problem.

SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) is recognized for 12 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Chairman BISHOP and Chairman HASTINGS.

As an individual from Pennsylvania, from the eastern portion of the United States, I do get it. This is a problem that obviously—as you've heard from my colleagues from the western part of the country—is devastating there. It's devastating in communities in Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District. We have the Allegheny National Forest there. I have four counties—schools, municipalities—which struggle because of a failed policy in terms of forest management. They struggle economically.

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When we do not have healthy forests, we do not have healthy communities. So I stand here very appreciative to Chairman HASTINGS' work and certainly supportive of H.R. 1526.

As chairman of the Agriculture Committee's Forestry Subcommittee, I continually point out that the Forest Service is housed within the USDA—rather than the Interior—and was done so for very specific purposes.

This decision was made long ago because our national forests were intended for multiple use. The most important function of that mission is to properly manage these forests and grasslands in order to retain the ecological health of those resources for sustained economic and recreational use.

You can't adequately manage a forest without harvesting timber. Just look to our private and State forests to see how to manage a forest cost effectively and environmentally responsibly. National forestlands, when managed correctly, will be more ecologically healthy and economically beneficial to the local communities.

Representing a forested district and as an outdoorsman, I've been very alarmed at how precipitously our annual harvests have dropped off in the past 20 years. Between 1960 and 1989, the Forest Service was harvesting roughly 10 billion to 12 billion board

feet per year. Since the early nineties, the annual harvest across Forest Service lands fell below 2 billion board feet and hit its bottom in 2002 at 1.7 billion feet. This is about one-fifth of what they've been harvesting in an average year.

We have seen firsthand the economic impacts of reducing our harvesting levels in national forests. Under longtime Federal law, 25 percent of the timber receipts generated on national forests are required to be returned to the county of origin. The purpose of this is that since there is no tax base there for the local government, timber receipts were to provide a consistent source of revenue to the counties to be used for schools, police, and local expenses.

In 2000, this lack of timber dollars plummeted so low that Congress created the now expired Secure Rural Schools program to make up for the loss of the county revenues in the national forestlands. This program simply would not have been needed if the Federal Government was keeping its promise to these rural areas by managing and harvesting the appropriate amount of timber.

In the Allegheny National Forest located in my district, we have slightly inched up in meeting the recommended level of harvest, but we are still nowhere near where we need to be. This is especially true across almost every other national forest around the country where they typically are generating only a few percent of the recommended level.

Too little harvesting will have a significant impact on overall forest health. Decreased timber harvesting means more dead trees and more highly flammable biomaterials that do little more than serve as fuel for wildfires. According to the Forest Service, the instances of wildfires each year have actually decreased in recent years. However, fires that we've been seeing recently are much more intense than they have been in past years. Why? The reason is because of increased flammability in the forests as a result of materials that have been accumulated and not removed through management activities.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, 65 million to 82 million acres of forestland are at high risk of wildfires. Last year, wildfires burned 9.3 million acres while the U.S. Forest Service only harvested approximately 200,000 acres. This means that 44 times as many acres burned as were responsibly managed and harvested.

As an original cosponsor of H.R. 1526, I want to applaud Chairman HASTINGS for his leadership and introduction of the bill. This legislation will provide responsible timber production on forestlands and does so in areas specifically identified by the agency.

Access and retaining the multiple-use mission of the Forest Service is paramount to ensuring that our rural forest communities continue to flourish and be viable.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to recognize my good friend, a Western Caucus colleague, Mr. PEARCE.

Mr. PEARCE. I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for yielding and for his work on behalf of H.R. 1526.

New Mexico is a home to multiple national forests. We see firsthand the effect of our national Forest Service policy. Last year, in the middle of the year, a fire broke out. It was about 4 acres for 2 or 3 days. The Forest Service's policy was basically "let it burn."

They let it burn for 3 or 4 days, had enough people to swat it out with whisk brooms, when suddenly the winds got up, as they do in New Mexico always, and blew that fire into 10,000 acres. It almost immediately started burning down homes, 255 homes. It's at that point we began to speak publicly about the Forest Service policies that would create infernos in our western forests.

Formerly, we had a policy in the Forest Service of the 10 a.m. rule. It was, if you get a fire, you put it out by 10 a.m. tomorrow. If you're not successful by 10 a.m. tomorrow, then it's 10 a.m. the next day. You dedicate all the resources you can to putting out the fire.

Those policies have been amended by current Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell into saying, We're going to let them burn. We're watching right now wondering if the sequoias will survive this Forest Service policy.

Many of the forests in New Mexico and the West are not surviving. Hundreds of millions of acres are at risk every year. It's not a matter of if they will burn, but when.

As we talked publicly about Forest Service management policies during that fire, then we started getting calls from individuals around the country who had retired out of the Forest Service saying, Yes, keep talking. We, as retired professionals, disagree with the current philosophies in the Forest Service.

We invited one of those 30-year employees—Bill Derr—into our district to run a congressional study and to come up with recommendations. He basically had two, after months of study. He said we should be mechanically thinning our forests—that is, logging in our forests—and, secondly, returning to the 10 a.m. policy.

What are the downstream effects of bad Forest Service management?

First of all, we're losing the habitat for millions of species; we're burning millions of species in the fire. These are endangered species sometimes, but otherwise we're just killing lots of animals.

Also, we're destroying a watershed. In New Mexico, in the Whitewater-Baldy fire, the forest around one of the lakes there that provides drinking water for Alamogordo was at risk. The Forest Service said they should clean it, and instead lawsuits were filed to stop that. The fire burned right up to the edge of the lake, and the lake now has 50 feet of fill in it. All the fish are

dead, starved for oxygen, exactly like the gentlelady from Wyoming said. The streams are now filling with silt.

Forest Service personnel tell us we will be having to empty that lake for the next 15 years. That's 15 years of dead fish; 15 years downstream facing flooding; 15 years without the drinking water that sustains a community of about 30,000. These are what we face.

Also, the West is starved for jobs because of Forest Service policy. The original Organic Act, the act that created the U.S. Forest Service, said that they should be logging to create local commerce and jobs and they should be protecting the watershed. The U.S. Forest Service is negligent on both of the underlying reasons for their existence. We in the West are suffering lost education opportunities, destroyed habitat, and destroyed forests. Those forests will not grow back for 100 years according to the Forest Service personnel.

It's time for us to pass H.R. 1526. I support it.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I would like to recognize the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, every year, rural America, especially the western States and areas like mine in northern California, are in the news. It's not for something good, but for something like we see going on with so many of the wildfires around the country. There's no reason for this. That's why I support this bill here today that would actually make our forests perform for us, instead of being a detriment to us and our health in California and the western States.

We can have either the type of air quality problems that are happening—like in the central valley of California, for example, one of my colleagues was talking about, although we've had challenges there in recent years, they've actually improved things. The air quality right now is much worse because of these fires than anything going on by people or after the improvements that have gone on with other air quality issues. In my own part of the State back in 2008, the whole summer and into the fall, brown, dirty—including the areas close to the fire—kids couldn't go outside because the quality was 10 times above health levels for them to be safe.

We see our small communities that are devastated by an economy that has shifted away due to forest management and Forest Service policies that don't work for them. This legislation would allow our forests to perform for us and help these economies, help the health of the forest, the health of the people, and the health of the local economies to be strong once again, and, as was mentioned earlier, our rural schools.

So let's do commonsense legislation instead of watching our forests burn. I urge you to support this.

POTENTIAL U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinarily busy week in Washington as we have all returned from a district work period. There are many issues to discuss, including how we're going to fund the Federal budget, get the fiscal house in order, potentially have the right type of tax reform, and deal with a whole host of other issues, but I felt like it would be very inadequate if the evening went by but did not delve into a little bit deeper of a discussion as to the nature of the Syrian conflict and the potential for United States military involvement.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote my constituents last week as they expressed tremendous concern about the potential for U.S. entanglement in the situation in Syria. In fact, it's overwhelming the number of people who have shared deep, heartfelt concerns. It is overwhelming. I'm hearing that from my colleagues, as well.

This is not some sort of populous reaction to the elites of this institution in government. It is an intuition of the American people who are suggesting to us in leadership that we have poured ourselves out as a country, sacrificed tremendously, extraordinarily, to give other people a chance for stability, for human rights, for the right forms of development, for political outcomes that uphold just governing structures.

Where have we gotten for our investment? Basically since World War II, the United States has been cast into the role of the superpower being the proprietor of international stability and we've accepted that arrangement, but there are tremendous pressures upon us as we continue to move forward in the 21st century as we've empowered other people and other economies through appropriate development to take responsibilities for themselves.

The United States has not always done this perfectly, but we've fought multiple wars and we've engaged in many areas of the world in order to try to give other people a chance and to stop aggressive ideologies that are inconsistent with basic and fundamental human rights. I've responded to the people of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to share that with you this evening:

Life in Syria today is, as the philosopher Thomas Hobbes once wrote, "nasty, brutish, and short." An ongoing civil war ravishes the country. The oppressive regime of President Bashar al-Assad wages battle against a nebulous, undefined mix of rebels, who have regularly employed the same brutal violence that the government has. The result is that there are more than 100,000 persons dead, including many innocent civilians—mothers, fathers, and children.

In response to the suspected use of chemical weapons by Assad, President Obama is now advocating U.S. military intervention, although, of course, the situation is now fluid. In the past, he has stated that the use of chemical weapons is a "red line" that Assad could not cross without a serious re-thinking of American involvement in the conflict, which to this point has included a significant amount of humanitarian aid—and properly so—targeted to those caught in the middle of this violence. The President, to his credit, has rightly asked for a vote of Congress prior to taking military action, and some in Congress are signaling their support.

In recent days, however, I have clearly stated my opposition to this idea. I oppose this action of unilateral military strikes. The United States should not bomb Syria in the name of stopping violence in Syria. While quick, unilateral military strikes might satisfy the President's "red line" rhetoric, the collateral damage and further risk of destabilization is very high.

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Now, as Congress has returned to Washington this week, there are hard questions that are in the process of being asked: What will be the consequences of this bombing? Who's on the other side of this? And how much do we really know of this rebel movement that we will be implicitly aiding if we attack Assad's government? What happens following the military strike? Why not expend the energy of this debate over military involvement on solidifying international outrage and holding particularly Russia, a longtime ally of Syria who's entangled in this situation, holding them accountable?

The international community must work together creatively to stop the savagery of Assad, but it cannot hide behind the United States military might. No longer can it be assumed that the United States is responsible for fixing all aspects of global conflicts, and no longer should the United States accept that framework. For the sake of global stability, a new construct must instead take its place, one in which the responsible Nations of the world are serious about their own defense and stabilization of conflicts within their regions.

In light of the increasing brutality in Syria, the United States should continue to advance its support for the innocent victims of this civil war. Meanwhile, we should also aggressively use this opportunity to facilitate new international partnerships that seek lasting solutions to complicated situations of mass violence.

Until such a united front is achieved, unilateral military action may only introduce further chaos to an already disastrous problem and, as I have said, implicitly put us on the side of a rebel movement who has also shown willingness to murder innocent civilians. And it is not clear whether or not the more