

Many State school chiefs and district superintendents have recently made a commitment to this effort. My legislation will make available much-needed Federal support.

□ 1015

The focus in the classroom should be on the student. This bill will help States improve their assessments and make better use of the results, so they can draw valuable conclusions about students and give educators the data they need, so they can do what they do best: teach.

Ultimately, we must address the culture of testing that has created stress for students, parents, and teachers. This bill is a strong first step. It keeps control in the hands of the States and school districts, and it provides the funding to streamline assessment systems and make sure that the remaining assessments are high quality and useful.

My bill offers this support through an existing funding stream, and it will help put the focus back on our students. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

OPPOSITION TO UNESCO FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against a push by the administration and its allies here in Congress to ignore U.S. law—this time, to ignore the legal prohibition on using U.S. taxpayer dollars to fund UNESCO.

Frankly, it is an indictment against the administration and some of our colleagues that we have to go through this song and dance every year or whenever a funding measure is set to come to the floor; yet here we are again, as some in Congress want to help President Obama circumvent and undermine U.S. law and restore at least partial funding for UNESCO, so that that body can continue to push its anti-U.S./anti-Israel agenda.

Time and again, the President has taken unilateral action meant to get around congressional opposition and has openly stated that he will continue to do so.

Since 1990, U.S. law has prohibited any funding to the U.N. or to any U.N. agency that gives the PLO membership status and recognizes the nonexistent State of Palestine.

UNESCO was well aware of our laws when its members voted to include this so-called Palestine among its ranks, triggering the U.S. funding prohibition. President Obama knew this when we cut off UNESCO's funding in response because it is the law; however, since then, he has sought ways to undermine and circumvent this law to not only restore funding to UNESCO, but to also pay dues in arrears which now would amount to over \$300 million in U.S. taxpayer dollars.

This is the very same body that allows the likes of Cuba—the antithesis of freedom and the respect for human rights and the rule of law—on its executive board. When UNESCO admitted a nonexistent Palestine, it undermined the peace process and only emboldened Abu Mazen even further to move forward with his unilateral push for statehood at the U.N.

There cannot be a legitimate Palestinian state unless it comes about as the result of direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This unilateral scheme by Abu Mazen is a way for him to use that U.N. body to gain de facto statehood without having to first come to an agreement with Israel.

If President Obama and his enablers in Congress have their way and U.S. funding for UNESCO is restored, it will signal that the U.S. supports this unilateral push for statehood, and we will have sold out our closest friend and ally: the democratic Jewish State of Israel.

We must make it clear to the administration in no uncertain terms that Congress will not allow it to continue to circumvent and undermine congressional authority or the law and that we will not allow it once again to fund UNESCO.

Giving the administration the authority it seeks to fund UNESCO would not only set a dangerous precedent by showing those with an anti-Israel agenda at the U.N. that the U.S. does not have the courage of its convictions or the fortitude to enforce our own laws, but it would also give the green light to the rest of the bodies at the U.N. to follow UNESCO's lead and also admit Palestine.

Abu Mazen has already signaled that he will seek further recognition at the U.N., and unless we make it absolutely certain to the entire U.N. system that admitting Palestine has very real and tangible negative consequences, the bodies at the U.N. will fall in line with this dangerous scheme, and that would cause irreparable harm to the peace process.

Instead of President Obama's looking for ways to spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars at an anti-U.S./anti-Israel body at the U.N., which is in violation of U.S. law, the President should perhaps instead focus on institutions at the U.N. that do work and that are effective.

This month, for example, the World Food Programme, WFP, was forced to suspend its assistance to millions of refugees who fled the crisis in Syria and went to Jordan, to Lebanon, to Iraq, to Turkey; as a result, millions could go hungry as they are set to face the harsh winter.

Our money would be better spent helping an institution we know works because it relies on voluntary contributions only, and we should be doing more to ensure that the WFP, the World Food Programme, can continue its good work to assist these millions of refugees around the world.

THIS CONGRESS MUST VOTE TO AUTHORIZE THE WARS

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my great frustration and anger that this Congress—the 113th Congress—continues to ignore its constitutional responsibilities to debate and vote on whether to authorize the U.S. war against Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria.

On July 25, this House voted 370–40 that, if the United States engages in sustained combat operations in Iraq, then the House would need to authorize such actions. Let me read exactly what this House approved by such an overwhelming, bipartisan majority:

The President shall not deploy or maintain United States Armed Forces in a sustained combat role in Iraq without specific statutory authorization for such use enacted after the date of the adoption of this concurrent resolution.

That vote, supported by 180 Republicans and 190 Democrats, was taken nearly 4.5 months ago.

What has happened since then? On August 8, just 2 weeks after the House vote, the U.S. began bombing Islamic State forces in Iraq. We are now bombing Iraq to protect infrastructure, as part of coordinated military operations with Kurdish and Iraqi military forces, and to take back or to hold cities, towns, and other territory. We are flying dozens of bombing sorties nearly every day in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, we have also escalated the number of U.S. troops in Iraq, ostensibly as trainers and advisers. On November 7, the President announced yet another escalation in the number of U.S. troops deployed to Iraq, sending roughly an additional 1,500 troops to the region for a “comprehensive training effort” for Iraq's army.

When they arrive, this will put the number of American troops in Iraq at around 3,000. The U.S. Central Command is also working on setting up new “expeditionary advise-and-assist operation centers” far outside the cities of Baghdad and Erbil.

What else has happened since July? We expanded the war to Syria. On September 17, this House voted to include in the short-term continuing resolution authority to arm and train certain Syrian rebel forces, ostensibly to provide ground troops inside Syria to fight Islamic State forces.

Five days later, the U.S. began bombing inside Syria. We have flown scores of bombing missions inside Syrian territory against the Islamic State and—and this should come as no surprise—other radical groups like the Khorasan Group.

This week, we are in military negotiations with Turkey to establish a safe zone—a no-fly zone—along the northern border of Syria that will cover territory inside of Syria and inside Turkey.

The President has asked for an additional \$5.6 billion from Congress to augment the Pentagon's overseas contingency operations account, the OCO. About \$3.4 billion of that would go to the operations against the Islamic State, and another \$1.6 billion would directly support the Iraqi training and equipping mission. I have no doubt that all or most of those funds will be included in the omnibus appropriations bill next week.

Mr. Speaker, if this doesn't add up to our forces being engaged in sustained military combat operations, then what in the world does? Many Members keep talking about prohibiting U.S. troops from having boots on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, we already have nearly 3,000 pairs of boots on the ground in Iraq, and I don't know how many people we have supporting and carrying out bombing missions because the Pentagon and the White House haven't told us.

Enough is enough. This House needs to draft, debate, and vote on whether to authorize this vast array of military operations known as Operation Inherent Resolve before we adjourn this year.

This war began under this Congress, the 113th Congress. It has escalated under the 113th Congress. It has expanded from Iraq to Syria and now to Turkey under the 113th Congress. It is the responsibility of the 113th Congress to authorize it or not. We need to take care of our business—real, serious, life-and-death business—before we walk out the door next week. We need to do our jobs.

No more excuses, no more whining about how the White House should send Congress a request. It is the institutional and constitutional duty of the Congress of the United States to decide matters of war and peace. It is time for the leadership of this House to step up to the plate and bring an authorization to the floor to be debated and voted on before we adjourn.

If not, then shame on this House and shame on the leadership for failing to carry out our most sacred duty to our uniformed men and women, their families, and the American people.

IN HONOR OF THE BRAVERY OF PRIVATE JOHN SIPE

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

Mr. PERRY. Mr. Speaker, I call attention to the bravery exhibited during the Civil War by Private John Sipe during the Battle of Fort Stedman.

In addition, I recognize and commend the tireless efforts by his great-grandson, Mr. Reuben Troutman, a constituent of Pennsylvania's Fourth District, who has advocated for over a decade for the consideration of his great-grandfather to receive the Medal of Honor.

On March 25, 1865, Private Sipe's selfless actions in the face of grave danger

exhibited unparalleled bravery while fighting at the Battle of Fort Stedman with the 205th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers.

After Confederate forces succeeded in capturing Fort Stedman, the 205th Regiment made a gallant charge to counter the rebel attack. Although still considered to be in training status at that time, these brave Pennsylvanians managed to force the opposition back into Fort Stedman, halting the Confederate onslaught.

During the intense hand-to-hand combat that occurred in retaking the fort, Private Sipe displayed extreme heroism when, without concern for his own safety, he fearlessly charged the rebel lines and captured the Confederate flag.

The commander of the IX Army Corps, Major General John G. Parke, recommended to Army headquarters that Private Sipe be awarded the Medal of Honor for his valor and selflessness in capturing the enemy flag.

Mr. Speaker, I must explain that capturing this flag at the time was not like this game that you might have heard about of capturing the flag. At the time of the Civil War, just imagine the fire and the sound of cannonade, muskets, the screams of compatriots on either side of the line in trying to manage the battle.

It was the flag, it was the guidon, it was the standard, that showed the soldiers what action their unit was taking, and without it, it would render them impotent because there was no communication. There were no radios during the Civil War, so capturing the flag meant everything; not only was it symbolic, but it had a huge purpose in determining what that unit could, would, or would not do.

Although recommended to receive the award by the commanding general, according to the National Archives and Records Administration, Private Sipe, however, never received the Medal of Honor.

In a process that has spanned more than a decade, Private Sipe's only living relative—his great-grandson Reuben Troutman of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania—has worked with our office and the office of my predecessors to ensure that Private Sipe was given fair consideration for the Medal of Honor for which he was recommended.

Unfortunately, the Department of Defense determined this year that a lack of existing evidence precludes the award of the Medal of Honor for Private Sipe's bravery and service. Private Sipe's heroism warrants recognition, nonetheless.

Additionally, Reuben Troutman has dedicated an extensive amount of time over many years in researching his great-grandfather's contribution at the Battle of Fort Stedman, and he has worked diligently and tirelessly to bring to light historical facts of Private Sipe's military record.

I commend Reuben for his attention to detail, persistence, tenacity, and

zeal in seeking to honor his family heritage and for a valiant attempt at obtaining recognition for his great-grandfather's honorable and courageous service during the Civil War.

As a proud servicemember myself and as a combat veteran and on behalf of the millions of other uniformed personnel who have served after him, I thank not only Private Sipe, but also Mr. Troutman, for their selfless service and dedication to our Nation.

□ 1030

HUMAN DIGNITY FOR ALL

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

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, in this season of reflection for many across the Nation, I will take a moment, first of all, to speak to my constituent Zeph to remind him that I have always supported the human dignity of all persons, and I will never fail to do so. I thank him for his warm embrace of those values and our commitment that we will continue to work together, which brings me to my concern of an ailing American who has continuously been held in Cuba.

I ask today on the floor of the House for the leadership of this government to continue to work diligently in the efforts to return Alan Gross to his family. I hope that we will join together, Republicans and Democrats, to work for his release and his return. I would note, Mr. Speaker, that I do not speak of the conditions of such, the reasons for such; just an American who is in failing health whom we need to work to bring home.

I think that is the kind of spirit of mercy that I would like to continue to speak of as we try to work our way through the understanding of the President's action on the executive order regarding immigration. It follows the directive of the Speaker of the House, who said:

A comprehensive approach to immigration reform is long overdue; and I am confident that the President, myself, and others can find the common ground to take care of this issue once and for all.

Spoken by Speaker BOEHNER in 2012.

Now, as we approach the new year, 2015, 3 years later, there has not been one vote on the floor of the House to bring mercy or relief to those who have been languishing in the shadows—not opening the borders, Mr. Speaker, but to really provide a framework for those who are here in the United States, almost as if there was a temporary pardon.

This is not, as the Judiciary Committee pounded over and over again yesterday, a change in the law. This is a work within the confines of the law under article II executive powers of the President and the language to take care. It is actually a recognition to frame, if you will, the interpretation that is given to laws of the land—