

red Republican States: Utah; Georgia; South Dakota; Idaho; Iowa; and, most recently, Nebraska, where the legislature overrode the Governor's veto to raise their gas tax.

It is time for Congress to do its job and to be in partnership with those States who expect us to maintain the Federal responsibility. Let's hear from the broad array of people and then allow the Ways and Means Committee to follow regular order.

There is more support for raising the gas tax. The public is already paying the price. The bill I have, which would provide 210 billion additional dollars over the next decade, would cost the average motorist just about \$90 a year. At a time of declining gas prices, that is not that great, but motorists are now paying \$350 a year on average in damage to their cars. The country paid \$125 billion in the cost of congestion.

Let's stop beating around the bush. Let's pass the first 6-year transportation reauthorization, the first since 1998. The first step is for the Ways and Means Committee to do its job, bring these people in, work together on a bipartisan basis, raise the gas tax, index the gas tax, then abolish the gas tax, replace it with something that is sustainable.

In the meantime, let's rebuild and renew America and put hundreds of thousands of people to work at family-wage jobs while we strengthen communities from coast to coast.

HOLDING THE VA ACCOUNTABLE

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

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about our veterans.

Memorial Day was just this past weekend, and we honored those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation.

This weekend also, veterans from around our great country journeyed here to our Nation's Capital to visit the monuments that were publicly erected in their honor. I am so proud that a group of over 60 veterans living in south Florida—including David Millan, Don Lowe, and Augustine Fernandez—were able to make the trip on the first-ever Honor Flight from Miami International Airport, located in my congressional district.

They, like all veterans, are true American patriots, courageous and brave, putting others before themselves, willing to stand up and fight for our Nation's ideals and for the spread of freedom, peace, and prosperity abroad. That is who they are. It is in their DNA.

My family and I, we know the sacrifice and the courage and the resolve that is required to dedicate one's life to the service of our country. My husband, Dexter, proudly served in Vietnam as a U.S. Army Ranger, earning a Purple Heart. My stepson, Douglas, and

his wife, Lindsay, both served tours of duty as Active Duty Marine Corps aviators in Iraq, with Lindsay also having served in Afghanistan. They are still serving our Nation as Marine reservists.

I could not be prouder of them and their fellow veterans and have the highest respect for the families and caregivers who support our vets after they return home from their missions. I recognize that we can never repay our veterans in full for their contributions, but we must certainly try. I would like to think that all Americans feel the same way.

A key part of our Nation's commitment to our veterans has always been providing them with quality health care, especially with respect to injuries suffered in the line of duty; but, more than a year after the most recent VA health system scandal rocked this administration and forced the replacement of a Cabinet Secretary, the VA's commitment on health care continues to fall tragically short.

A year later, the number of patients facing long wait times is still the same, and somehow, the number of patients waiting more than 90 days has actually doubled. A year later, the VA health system continues to fail our veterans. We know that these veterans have the right stuff, the selflessness, the courage, and the pride that they demonstrate in defense of the American way of life; but what must they think of our government now?

Unconscionably long wait times, bureaucratic mismanagement, top-down rationed care are all well below the bare minimum standards any American should expect; yet this is exactly what the VA, under this administration, continues to offer our veterans.

At least this Congress has pushed for reform, for access, for choice. In the last year, we have passed laws that set out to improve access for veterans seeking medical care and mental health services. Congress also provided the VA with \$16 billion to shorten wait times and improve healthcare quality.

I have joined many of my colleagues to demand that the VA publicly release the findings of 140 internal healthcare investigations conducted since 2006 to enforce accountability at the VA. I have also joined a bipartisan contingent of my House colleagues to offer to help the VA staff focus on providing health care by allowing congressional staff to serve as the primary point of contact for veterans asking about their claims and their long appointment times.

Over and over again, Congress' efforts have been met by a stubborn bureaucracy that looks to skirt legislative intent on expanding veterans access and choice and reforming the way that the VA health system does its business.

I am committed to holding the VA under this administration responsible for the continued failings of our VA health system, and I will continue to

fight alongside my colleagues in Congress for the reforms that will provide our veterans with the quality health care they deserve.

We know that our veterans should not have to wait another year. The time is long past; the time is now. The next time that south Florida residents come to D.C. on Honor Flights to visit their war memorials, they will truly know that our Nation honors their service by providing quality health care at all of our VA facilities.

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK

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

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to precede them.

I want to thank the gentlewoman from Florida. Of course, I am always glad to hear her speak on the floor. I wanted her to know that.

Mr. Speaker, we are now less than a month from the deadline for Congress to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank.

In 2012, this House came together under the leadership of the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Cantor, who worked with my office, and we put a bill on the floor that reauthorized the Bank and increased its lending authority with a bipartisan vote of 330-93. This should not be and is not a partisan issue.

Helping small- and medium-sized American businesses access new overseas markets and compete on a level playing field is something that Democrats and Republicans have long agreed that Congress ought to do.

That is why it is deeply concerning to read comments from Majority Leader MCCARTHY that Congress should "wind down" the Bank and allow its charter to expire. That, in my view, is a minority opinion on the floor of this House, and that would be a profound mistake.

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The Export-Import Bank is a critical tool that helps our businesses compete successfully in global markets. We are going to talk about trade, apparently, next week, but what we need to make sure is that we can export goods that are made in America, that we will make in America, and that we will sell abroad. The Export-Import Bank facilitates that effort. It is a critical tool that helps businesses compete successfully in global markets.

Last year alone, it supported \$27.5 billion in export activity. About 90 percent of its transactions support thousands of small businesses that otherwise would have difficulty accessing markets.

The Ex-Im Bank has supported 1.3 million private sector jobs since our economic recovery began, including 164,000 jobs just last year, and it does all this without costing the taxpayers

a single cent. In fact, it brought \$675 million in profits to the Treasury last year and more than \$2 billion over the past two decades. We cannot afford, Mr. Speaker, to let the bank expire.

Even more than just preventing a lapse, we ought to be providing exporters and potential exporters with certainty by enacting a multiyear reauthorization.

With the Export-Import Bank's future uncertain, businesses that could be reaching new customers abroad have been holding back making investments in growth that would create more jobs here at home. We are going to hear a lot about jobs here at home next week as we debate the fast-track authority. This deals with jobs here in America. With the Export-Import Bank's future uncertain, we are seeing uncertainty in the marketplace.

A multiyear extension and an increase in the bank's lending authority would give a green light to these businesses that it is time to invest and expand.

We all talk about investing. We all talk about expanding jobs. I want to quote: "There are thousands of jobs on the line that would disappear pretty quickly if the Ex-Im Bank were to disappear." Let me repeat that for my colleagues. "There are thousands of jobs on the line that would disappear pretty quickly if the Ex-Im Bank were to disappear." Those are not my words. That is a quote. They are the words of Speaker JOHN BOEHNER on April 30 of this year, just a few weeks ago.

He is not the only Republican who wants to save the bank. Representative STEPHEN FINCHER, Republican of Tennessee, has said that "a majority of RSC members support the bank's reauthorization." RSC members are amongst the most conservative members of their party in this House. In fact, there are 59 cosponsors on Mr. FINCHER's bill. They are Republicans.

All of my party, the last time we reauthorized it and this time, will vote to create jobs in America by voting for the Export-Import Bank. Now, we have 188 members. You don't have to be much of a mathematician to know if you have 188 and 60, that is 248. All you need is 218 to pass the bill.

The Speaker has said he wants to let the House work its will. He said that in 2011 when he became Speaker. And he said the House works best when the House can work its will. If we bring the Export-Import Bank bill to the floor, it will pass. Together with 180 Democrats, or 188—180 who have sponsored the 7-year reauthorization bill introduced by Ms. WATERS, Ms. MOORE, Mr. HECK, and myself—it is clear that a majority of the House supports a long-term reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank.

Mr. Speaker, we should act. We should act now before we find ourselves at the eleventh hour, before the June 30 deadline. Now, we have just seen shutting down the security apparatus to protect America for a couple of days. Let's not put at risk the economic security of our country.

Governors of both parties from across the country have written in support of taking action. Business leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, and organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers have all asked Congress to reauthorize the bank. There are now just 13 legislative days until the deadline by which we must do so.

Mr. Speaker, I ask our Speaker, I ask our majority leader, let the House work its will and vote on a multiyear reauthorization that will restore certainty for thousands of small businesses. Help them compete in new markets. Support the growth of good jobs here in our country, and contribute to deficit reduction. There will be a lot of debate next week about jobs. The Speaker believes that we will lose jobs if we don't pass the Export-Import Bank reauthorization.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Leader, bring the Export-Import Bank reauthorization bill to the floor. It will pass. It will be good for America. It will be good for Americans. It will be good for our economy. Pass this bill.

REFOCUSING ON THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, this week marks 1 year since the Veterans Affairs Secretary, Eric Shinseki, resigned amid a scandal that shook this country to its core. When President Obama reluctantly accepted Secretary Shinseki's resignation, he had a lot to say about his commitment to fix the VA and where the buck stops. He said: "We're going to do right by our veterans across the board, as long as it takes." And then: "This is my administration. I always take responsibility for whatever happens."

Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot has happened over the past year, and here are some of the highlights:

Last June, reports emerged that patient scheduling manipulation had been particularly egregious inside the central Alabama VA. During a meeting to discuss these findings, the director of the central Alabama VA led me to believe that appropriate action had been taken to remove the employees that were responsible for this. That wasn't true.

So I began to dig a little bit deeper into the problems, working with very courageous whistleblowers and the press to uncover major instances of misconduct, negligence, and mismanagement inside the central Alabama VA. What we were able to expose was more than 1,000 patient x rays, some showing problems, went missing for months and years. A pulmonologist was called, not once but twice, for falsifying more than 1,200 patient records but somehow given a satisfactory review. An employee took a recovering veteran to a crack house, bought him drugs and prostitutes, all to extort his

veteran's benefits. When caught, that employee, as extraordinary as this is, was never fired. Not until a year and a half later, when it was reported in the press and exposed publicly, did the VA take action.

What else happened last year? Congress passed a historic VA reform law providing unprecedented authority for holding employees accountable. The director of the central Alabama VA who lied to me became the first manager fired under the new reform law. Other managers were also removed, and the southeast regional director quietly retired when an investigation into central Alabama VA was expanded at my request to include him.

So again, a lot has happened over the past year. But, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot that hasn't happened over the past year.

Improvement to access for patient care, the one thing that we really need for our veterans, hasn't happened. It really hasn't happened nationally, and certainly it hasn't happened in central Alabama. In fact, VA medical centers in Montgomery and Tuskegee were recently identified number one and number two, respectively, the worst hospitals in the Nation for extended delays in patient appointment completions. The first and the second worst hospitals in the country are in the central Alabama VA.

A workload report at the end of April showed that more than 6,500 consults over 90 days were still pending, including more than half awaiting approval for non-VA care. So not enough improvement has happened where it matters most for our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't mention some of the progress the central Alabama VA has made. What was a major staff shortage is beginning to be filled, and that includes the mental health side. I appreciate very much the new acting director of the region, Tom Smith, keeping me updated on the latest. I am grateful for him stepping into this important role in a difficult situation, trying to rebuild, trying to rebuild some of the trust that has been lost.

As I have told him, the progress isn't enough. One reason I believe it isn't enough is that Washington has demonstrated something of a short attention span when it comes to these problems. We got their attention last year and a lot of nice promises have been made in terms of the national VA's commitment to improve in central Alabama, but once our problems leave the front page, there hasn't been sufficient follow-up. Mr. Speaker, maybe that is because we are depending on a broken bureaucracy to fix itself. Maybe it is because we have been asking VA leaders to intervene rather than requiring them to intervene. Maybe it is time that we change that.

You know, when a public school continues to fail to meet basic standards, what happens? The State Department of Education comes in to take over and