

There was no objection.

RESILIENT FEDERAL FORESTS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) for 30 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to talk about something that is positive that this body has done recently, something that is good for America and something that is good for our environment and good for our citizens. What I am talking about is the passage of the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is good for trees. When we have healthy trees and when we have a healthy forest, then we also have better air quality; we have better water quality; we have better wildlife habitat; we have less fire danger; we protect private property and public property, and it is a win-win-win situation for our treasured natural resource of our Federal forest. It is a winning situation for America, as we are good stewards and we conserve this valuable resource that we have.

Now, what this bill does is it allows us to actively manage our forests. We have qualified personnel in our Forest Service, people who are trained as foresters, people who have the expertise and the experience to manage these forests in a sustainable way; yet our forest managers' hands have been tied in previous years.

They have been working hard with local constituents, local stakeholders in these collaborative efforts to come up with forest plans, forest management plans, so that they can manage the forests in a way that is good for the local economy, in a way that is good for the wildlife in the forest, in a way that is good for the health of the forest; yet these forest management plans have been held up through frivolous lawsuits from outside groups, sometimes as far as a thousand miles away that file a suit against these plans.

They hold them up in court, and at the end of the day, the forest is not managed properly. Because of this, we have seen an increasing amount of forest fires over the past several decades.

Because of these increased forest fires, we are destroying our valuable natural resource. Not only are we destroying our resource, we are destroying our budget for the Forest Service. Currently, the single greatest cost to the Forest Service is fire suppression, and the next cost is litigation, and where the cost should be, in the management and health of the forest, comes in third.

What the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015 would do, it would take the focus off of fire suppression and put that focus on fire prevention. These are forestry practices that I have seen carried out in my home State of Arkansas.

In my district, the Fourth District, I have approximately 2.5 million acres of

Federal forest inside my district, on the Ouachita National Forest, on the Ozark National Forest, and also in four different U.S. Fish and Wildlife service areas.

Fortunately, in Arkansas, we have been able to manage these forests in a way that is good for the forest. A lot of this was done in an effort to protect an endangered species, the red-cockaded woodpecker. What our Forest Service employees have done is they have gone into the forests, they have assessed it, and they determined what would create the best habitat for this endangered species. They found that a habitat with an open understory, one which has large nesting trees for the woodpecker, is great habitat for the woodpecker.

They implemented a plan to go in and thin the forest—not clear-cut it, but thin it—and then develop a fire regime to keep the underbrush out. You might think that thinning the forest and burning the forest would cause a decrease in biodiversity, but our foresters saw something quite the opposite. Our forests in Arkansas were much like the ones across the country, many forests out West. They had been cut as much as a century ago and allowed just to grow back with the only management being putting the fires out when they start.

What happens in a situation like this is forests are dynamic; they continue to grow until they fill up all the growing space, and then they start competing with one another. When they compete with one another, they get weak; they are subject to insect and disease attack.

You get more fuel that falls on to the forest floor, creating a fuel load; you get dead and weakened timber, and you get a lightning strike, and it burns the whole forest down.

When you manage the forest, when you thin it and you use controlled burns, you open up the canopy; you open up the forest floor, and you see a flush of fauna, and you see biodiversity increase tremendously.

At the same time as the biodiversity and plant life increases, you get a flush in wildlife. On these plots in Arkansas, not only did we see an increase in numbers in red-cockaded woodpecker, we saw an increase in the bobwhite quail, in wild turkeys, in deer, in several other songbird species.

This management scheme is good for the forest; it is good for the wildlife; it creates cleaner air; it creates cleaner water. Again, it is a win-win situation. By applying these management practices—and they will be different as you go across the country in different regions.

As we let the local professionals and the local stakeholders manage the forests the way it was intended to be managed, we will create a healthy forest, which is good for all the local communities where these forests are located.

Another thing that we have done in this bill is we strengthened the secure rural schools provisions. We stipulate

that 25 percent of funding has to go into local counties to provide emergency services to fund schools. This is critical for these local communities where forest activities around the national forests have greatly decreased over the past several decades.

We used to cut nearly 12 billion board feet of timber off of the forests. Now, we are down to less than 3 billion board feet per year. Many of these local economies depended on those forests. As we quit cutting timber and the infrastructure to process the timber left, these communities suffered all across our country where these natural forests are located.

This bill will allow funding to go to these communities, so that they continue to provide emergency services, so they can continue to provide funds for education and help to grow the communities.

Another provision in this bill is it allows the salvaging of timber after a catastrophic event. Now, a clear cut actually mimics a wildfire in the forest; so when you have a wildfire that is a stand-replacing fire, it causes the damage when the fire occurs.

In forestry terms, the land is essentially being clear-cut when the fire happens, but you will still have dead standing trees. These trees need to be salvaged. They have value, value that can be extracted and used to reforest the land, value that not only creates value in reforestation, it also cleans up the land, so you can reforest it and prevent future fire dangers.

What has happened in the past is the salvage cuts have been held up in court again, and you get standing dead timber that, the next time a fire comes through, it makes it dangerous for our firefighters to go in and fight the fire.

What this bill does is it still requires an environmental assessment of the area, but it speeds the process in that, and it prevents injunctions from allowing these salvage cuts so that this timber can be salvaged, and the revenue is used to go back into the Forest Service to reforest these lands and, again, provide the management practices to have healthy forests.

What happens now is we see, after a catastrophic event, we get only 3 percent of regeneration or reforestation of the land. This bill requires that, after the catastrophic event, we have to have 75 percent reforestation after a period of 5 years.

The 5-year timeframe gives foresters time to come in and assess the efforts that they put forth and to correct any problems that they have had in restoring these forests.

This bill, again, is very critical and very much needed. It has the support of, I believe, 117 different organizations, from wildlife groups, from environmental groups, many tribes across the country, many county governments. People recognize the benefits of this bill and the benefits that can come to our country if we enact this legislation.

Unfortunately, the bill is held up in the Senate right now, and as the fire season increases out West and we see more and more of our natural treasure and our Federal forests going up in flames, it should become more imperative for the Senate to take up this bill and pass it and for the President to sign it into law.

As I have stated in committee hearings when we were pushing this bill through, the forests don't really pay attention to what we legislate here in Washington, D.C.

□ 2000

They are dynamic, living organisms. They continue to grow. They continue to fill up the growing space. They are more reactive to what happens in nature.

We need to be proactive in managing these forests—managing them to be healthy, managing them to be more resistant to wildfire and insects and diseases. I call on the Senate and the President to take up this legislation, to pass it, and to move America forward with healthy forests.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NEWHOUSE).

RECOGNIZING MAKENNA SCHWAB

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Mr. Speaker, I have got something I think is very important and something I think you are going to enjoy.

Sometimes we learn about some very remarkable people, individuals who, when we hear about them, make us pause, stop, and think about how much they inspire and really make a difference.

Today, I want to recognize one such person, a young lady of 12 years old by the name of Makenna Schwab. She lives in the community of East Wenatchee, Washington, which happens to be in my legislative district in the State of Washington.

Makenna was born with something called Larsen syndrome, which is a rare connective tissue disorder that causes bone dislocations. This affects her airway, spine, and joints. This remarkable young lady has already undergone 14 surgeries in her short life.

Four years ago, Makenna and her mother, Melissa, wanted to give something back to Seattle Children's Hospital, which over the course of her life has been their home away from home. She said she wanted to give something back because Seattle Children's has made it so that she can walk and live independently. So she decided to sell lemonade and cookies, a perfectly natural thing for a 12-year-old to decide. This young lady raised more than \$6,700 that year for Children's Hospital.

The family knew they could do more. They wanted to do more. So the next year, she and her family collected over 650 new toys for the kids at the hospital. But even that wasn't enough. The following year, she wanted to do even more. So she sold 530 dozen donuts, raising more than \$7,500 to go towards Seattle Children's Hospital.

This year, Mr. Speaker, she set her sights even higher. According to Seattle Children's Hospital's Kathryn Bluher, Makenna's goal was to give the kids at the hospital something that was very important, near and dear to her heart. She wanted to give them red Radio Flyer wagons.

I know you are smiling, Mr. Speaker, but that was an important thing because, in between her appointments throughout her young life, traveling between her room to the operating room to the playroom, the red Radio Flyer wagon was her ride. And she rode in style. She said that those wagons are a really good memory. They were less scary than a wheelchair.

The support that she got to reach her goal in this year's fundraising I think was nothing short of amazing. Makenna collected enough to purchase 33 wagons for the hospital. Friends, family, the mayor of the city, Wenatchee High School, a group of local dentists, even assisted living homes helped in the effort. The whole community pitched in. Actually, the hospital had to tell her that that was enough wagons.

She moved on to other things that were on the wish list. By the end of the drive, she had those 33 wagons, but she also had 36 DVD players, 12 headphones, five baby swings, 280 gift cards, 300 new toys, and many other things.

Makenna and her family have started a tradition that will live on, that has and will continue to make kids' stay at the Seattle Children's Hospital just a little less scary. As Makenna said, "I want to give kids hope."

Well, in May, and very deservedly so, Makenna received a national Make a Difference Day award for her volunteer project on behalf of the hospital.

As I told you before, sometimes you hear of remarkable people, and I am very proud to be able to share McKenna's story with you. I am proud to say that she is a fine citizen of my congressional district and my State of Washington.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman has 14 minutes remaining.

INCREASING VA ACCOUNTABILITY AND EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR VETERANS

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about some other positive things that this body has done here, as we approach the August break. This has to do with the VA.

Since the wait list manipulation scandal was brought to the public's attention last year, Americans have become all too familiar with incompetence and misconduct at the Federal agency charged with helping our veterans.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has held dozens of hearings; the head of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs resigned under congressional pressure; and Congress has enacted major reform legislation.

The Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act created a 3-year program to allow veterans to seek care from private providers if they live too far from a VA facility or cannot otherwise get an appointment within 14 days. It also gave the VA Secretary the authority to fire senior executives for poor performance and required a top-to-bottom study of the entire Department to be completed within 1 year of enactment.

However, even with this oversight, the Obama administration has failed to correct the problems. We continue to hear about unacceptable patient wait times, unanswered benefit inquiries, patient safety concerns, medical malpractice, flagrant mismanagement, infighting, corruption, and years of construction delays that total millions of dollars.

When government failure is exposed and legislation aimed at restoring accountability is enacted, it makes sense that action would be swift and immediate: people would be fired; wrongs would begin to be made right. Unfortunately, that has not been the case at the Department of Veterans Affairs. While there are as many as 1,000 employees that could potentially face disciplinary actions, the VA has only fired three people for involvement in the scandal.

Our veterans have earned our respect, and they shouldn't have to wait in line for months or years just to see a doctor. New documents show that one out of every three waiting for care at the VA has already died, and recent reports reveal there are now 50 percent more veterans on wait lists for a month or longer than last summer.

When our brave servicemembers come home, we have to keep our word to them by modernizing our VA system to deliver the best care in the world. In the 114th Congress, House Republicans have passed numerous pieces of legislation designed to help veterans and increase accountability at the VA.

In February, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act was signed into law and provides veterans with access to the mental healthcare resources they need.

Last week, the House passed the Veterans Information Modernization Act, which would give Congress and the public access to key data regarding the delivery of health care, medical services, and nursing home care by the VA healthcare system.

Many veterans have contacted us expressing their frustration at having to carry official Department of Defense discharge papers to prove their military service, and last week, legislation was signed into law to create an official identification card for veterans.

Just this week, we have passed the VA Accountability Act, which would provide the VA Secretary with increased flexibility in removing employees who fail our veterans; the Hire More Heroes Act, which would make it

easier to hire veterans by exempting those who already have health insurance from being counted as full-time employees under ObamaCare; the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which would provide an annual cost-of-living adjustment for veterans receiving disability compensation; and the Ruth Moore Act, which would update regulations for veterans seeking financial compensation for mental health conditions linked to sexual assault while they were serving in the military.

The House also had to pass legislation that included provisions to allow the VA to transfer funds within its budget to cover an unexpected \$2.5 billion shortfall in hospital and medical care accounts. Without this fix, the agency said it would start shutting down hospital operations in August.

It is critically important that we take care of those who have sacrificed so much in service to our country. This week, Congress has continued its efforts to meet our responsibility to America's veterans. However, we cannot transform the VA alone. It is the President's responsibility to ensure changes are made within the agency and employees are held accountable for their actions.

America's veterans deserve a meaningful, decisive plan to right the many wrongs that have been committed. It is past time for the Obama administration to change the culture at the VA and end this agencywide pattern of misconduct and neglect.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

REPUBLICANS ARE DELIVERING RESULTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 30 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment my two colleagues who have just spoken on the floor. I compliment Mr. NEWHOUSE from the State of Washington for highlighting a very important event in his district involving a significant constituent of his.

I particularly would also like to recognize Mr. WESTERMAN from Arkansas for getting H.R. 2647 passed, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015. It is really a coup for a freshman to get such a significant bill passed so early in his or her career. It is a major bill, a significant bill, and I want to compliment him on bringing his expertise in forestry to the House of Representatives. We need people with all kinds of backgrounds here who can help get things that the American people need for us to do on their behalf, and certainly that bill is going to do a lot for American people all across this country.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that no one hears about the plane that landed safely. What that very apt adage sug-

gests is that we are often unaware of good work being done every day, and it isn't until something goes wrong that people take notice. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to just highlight for a few minutes this evening the great work that this Congress has been doing in the past 4½ years, and particularly during the 114th Congress, which began in January.

Under the leadership of House Republicans, we have been doing very good work in tackling the difficult issues facing this Nation. We are advancing solutions that build a healthy economy, empowering every American to pursue his or her future, to reach his or her full potential and achieve a better life. Here, Mr. Speaker, are just a few specifics of what we have been accomplishing.

First, the House is more open. That may sound a little strange to people, but it is important that the American people understand that, under the majority leadership of Republicans, we have considered over 200 more amendments than the average over the last 25 years in the House of Representatives.

The House is more collaborative. House committees have passed 10.2 percent of bills out of committee compared to a 40-year average of only 6 percent of bills being passed.

The House is, overall, more productive. The House passed 193 bills in the first quarter, well above the 40-year average of 127. Of those, 32 have also passed the Senate—more than the 25-year average of 29.

□ 2015

The House is more effective. Over the last 30 years, only one other Republican-controlled House had more bills enacted in law to this point, and this Congress is above the 40-year average of 29 bills enacted with 32.

The American people want us to come to Washington, use our time well, and work on their behalf to get the things done that they see need to be done. We are working on our main focus, which are jobs and the economy.

Mr. Speaker, tomorrow's good-paying jobs will come from the freedom to innovate from the bottom up, with organic growth, not from top-down bureaucracies in Washington, D.C., looking out for themselves and attempting, always, to control the American people.

Mr. Speaker, we have passed many bills, as I have said before. One is the Small Business Regulatory Flexibility Improvements Act, H.R. 527, which was approved by the House by a vote of 260-163 in February of this year. That is a bipartisan vote, Mr. Speaker.

We passed the Unfunded Mandates Information and Transparency Act, H.R. 50, by a bipartisan vote of 250-173.

We passed the Death Tax Repeal Act, H.R. 1105, by a vote of 240-179; this is often called the death tax; it is sometimes called the estate tax, but it hits, Mr. Speaker, not just wealthy people, but average people with huge, unfair taxes.

This bill would provide certainty for families and allow small businesses to focus on growing new jobs and is the smart thing to do for our economy.

Mr. Speaker, much of the economic turmoil that has gripped this Nation is the result of the Federal Government spending beyond its means. In North Carolina, I hear often from constituents who are worried about our ballooning national debt, which threatens economic stability and jeopardizes the American dream for our families.

Irresponsible spending isn't fair to our kids, who must repay the debt, and it is not good for the economy.

Unknown to many Americans, the House Republican majority has cut Federal spending 2 years in a row for the first time since the Korean war. We banned earmarks and achieved the most significant spending reductions in modern history. We have protected tax cuts for 99 percent of individuals and families.

We passed a balanced budget conference agreement which balances the budget within 10 years, without raising taxes, and achieves more than \$5 trillion in savings. It is the first joint 10-year balanced budget resolution since 2001.

We have passed the Student Success Act, which replaces No Child Left Behind, by reducing the Federal footprint in education, restoring local control, and empowering parents and education leaders to hold schools accountable for effectively teaching students. It stops the Federal Government from coercing states into adopting Common Core.

We expanded and strengthened 529 college savings plans by a vote of 401-20, a very strong bipartisan vote.

We have passed an energy policy, the Keystone XL Pipeline Approval Act, the Natural Gas Pipeline Permitting Reform Act. We have passed the LNG Permitting Certainty and Transparency Act. We have passed Improving Coal Combustion Residuals Regulation Act of 2015.

Mr. Speaker, we are working on the economy, on bringing down the cost of energy, on providing for national security.

We have passed the National Defense Authorization Act, H.R. 1735, and are in conference now with the Senate on this bill.

We have passed the National Cybersecurity Protection Advancement Act, again, by a very large bipartisan vote, 355-63.

We have passed the Protecting Cyber Networks Act by a large bipartisan vote of 307-116.

We have passed a bill signed into law by the President in June, the USA Freedom Act, which ends the bulk collection of data at the National Security Agency, prevents government overreach, strengthens protections for Americans' civil liberties, and increases the transparency of certain national security authorities.

As my colleague from Arkansas talked about previous to my coming on