

that she was “deeply sorry” and that the spill was a “tragic and unfortunate accident.” That is not all: there was no accountability, no reparation, nothing.

How can the American people trust a government agency charged with protecting our environment when the same Agency is responsible for causing even more damage? Actions speak louder than words. This is more of the same from the EPA. They are another arm of the Federal Government looking to bully private citizens, but this is nothing new from the EPA.

Almost a decade ago, a gentleman from my district faced a costly, almost devastating battle with the EPA. Mr. Paul McKnight owned an old cotton warehouse in Senoia, Georgia. After a former deadbeat tenant of Mr. McKnight, who had already been responsible for the EPA spending \$1.6 million in a brownfield cleanup, could not afford to remove 2,000 barrels of toxic waste from this warehouse that Mr. McKnight knew did not exist, the EPA was called in to inspect the building by some anonymous caller who said that they could smell a leak. Once the EPA got there, their inspector said they couldn’t smell a leak. There was no leak, but they did find 2,000 barrels containing toxic material.

Without Mr. McKnight’s knowledge, the EPA declared this warehouse an “imminent fire hazard” and cleaned up the chemicals at a cost of \$800,000, even though the previous tenant had a bid of 170. Later, at a public forum, an EPA representative stated that the EPA had the funds to clean up the warehouse, only to bill Mr. McKnight later for that overpriced cleanup. Not only did they bill him for the overpriced cleanup, but they sought over \$1 million in cleanup fees and placed a lien on his real estate holdings, including his farm and his home.

I helped Mr. McKnight to get the case reconsidered. After 8 years in court, he was able to get it reduced down to \$600,000.

The EPA shouldn’t use legal loopholes and cower behind exemptions at the cost of taxpayers and, not only that, to charge somebody that had no knowledge of the barrels even being there, rather than the man who put the barrels there. This gentleman served 1 year and 4 months in Federal prison for this. It was his second offense, and yet Mr. McKnight was fined over \$1 million.

That is why I have introduced three bills over the last 2 months targeting the EPA. My bills: H.R. 3531, No Exemptions for EPA Act; H.R. 3655, EPA Pays Act; and H.R. 3699, Judgment Fund Taxpayer Accountability Act are all aimed at holding the EPA to the same standards and requirements as private citizens.

My bills remove these legal loopholes for the EPA and force them to repay the Federal Government for any damages the EPA causes. If I were to accidentally cause the same disaster, do you think that I would get off by just

saying “I’m sorry and I promise not to do it again”? That is why we have introduced these three bills.

So I ask my colleagues to, please, join me in holding the EPA accountable in any future accidents by supporting H.R. 3531, 3655, and 3699.

DEBT CEILING

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

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Speaker, in 1983, President Ronald Reagan wrote to then-Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, urging him to raise the debt ceiling. In his letter, he said: “The risks, the costs, the disruptions, and the incalculable damage lead me to but one conclusion: The Senate must pass this legislation before the Congress adjourns.”

Twenty-three years later, we now find ourselves 1 week away from defaulting on our debt for the first time in our Nation’s history. Instead of making sure we preserve the full faith and credit of the United States, as President Reagan had done 18 times during his tenure, some want to hold our economy hostage to extract ideological wins.

This is not the time for partisan bickering and political gamesmanship, not when it means delaying Social Security benefits for seniors and those with disabilities, withholding paychecks from our brave Active Duty servicemembers, and postponing interest payments on government-issued bonds.

We have a responsibility to live up to our obligations no matter what. That is not politics; it is basic governing.

The longer we wait to meet our obligations and raise the debt ceiling, the closer we get to another credit rating downgrade, a spike in interest rates, and a severe slowdown in economic growth. This is not an overstatement.

Let’s look back at what happened in 2013 during the last debt ceiling standoff. Just the possibility of default caused rates on Treasuries to rise by almost half a percentage point. That cost taxpayers as much as \$70 million.

This time around, if we actually default, market forecasters estimate that interest payments on Treasuries would increase Federal deficits by \$10 billion over the short term and by \$70 billion a year after that. That is money that wouldn’t be going to critical investments in research and development, education, and infrastructure.

On top of that, higher interest rates on Treasuries could lead to a 1 percent reduction in GDP. That would mean the loss of almost 700,000 jobs, and that is just a conservative estimate.

Make no mistake, every American would be impacted. Middle class families looking to buy a home would face higher mortgage rates. A half a percentage point increase in mortgage rates would increase the lifetime cost of an average home loan by almost

\$19,000. Small-business owners would face difficulties trying to secure new loans as lending tightens up. And students will have an even harder time trying to pay for college as student loan rates skyrocket.

We owe it to our constituents to move toward responsible governing and away from governing by crisis, which has become all too common around here.

The bipartisan budget package unveiled last night affirms the full faith and credit of the United States and represents real progress for hard-working American families who are tired of threats of default and partisan gridlock.

Now is not the time for politics. Now is the time for thoughtful consideration, bipartisan compromise, and, most importantly, finding a path forward for the American people.

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

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

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, this is the last week of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Before it ends, I would tell the American people about two amazing women from Sugar Land, Texas, two good friends of my family, two women who are here for a reason, two people who are touching others in need, two people who are making a difference.

□ 1030

Meet Irma and Sasha. Stunning, aren’t they? They are related. They look like sisters, but they are not. They are mother and daughter. The mom, Irma, is on the left. Her baby girl, Sasha, is on the right. Irma and Sasha are sisters in a cause. Both have fought breast cancer, and both have won.

Each year over 200,000 American women hear four crushing words: You have breast cancer. Irma feared those words because she knew they may be coming. Both of her sisters heard those four words. One died.

Irma beat her cancer, but lived in fear. With her family’s history of breast cancer, her daughter had a good chance of hearing those four terrible words. Five years after Irma beat breast cancer, Sasha banged on her door, crying without end. She was 31, and she had aggressive breast cancer.

Irma was by Sasha’s side every second of her fight against cancer. Mom watched her daughter lose each breast. Mom watched her daughter go through 16 rounds of harsh chemotherapy. Mom watched her daughter lose all of her hair, her eyebrows, her eyelashes. Mom watched her daughter lose that smile. Sasha thought that she was no longer beautiful. Her will to fight was decreasing.

Irma took charge. She told Sasha that “no matter how sick you feel, get

up, shower, and put some lipstick on. You are beautiful.”

Then it hit both of them. They were women of style and grace. Cancer took that away. The only wigs they could find looked good on circus clowns. There was not a beauty shop for women with breast cancer, a place where they are pampered, a place where they are beautiful. They were going to end that.

Dad had no choice. He gave Sasha his life savings, and in 2013 my wife and I walked into our friends’ dream store, Cure & Co., on its opening day. Cure & Co. gives women with cancer real wigs, real facials, and real beauty products. Sasha and Irma give their clients hope and love in the worst of times, the greatest gifts of all.

Look one last time at Irma and Sasha. They are gorgeous, stunning, and beautiful. They have had breast cancer. Both of them have beaten breast cancer, and both of them will never leave the fight until breast cancer is cured forever.

REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, last week I came to the floor and recommended that the Obama administration appoint a special envoy with a very broad portfolio: dispatched to work on a diplomatic solution to the tragedy that is destroying Syria and unfolding in the Middle East, now having broad impact in greater Europe.

I want to point out to those who are listening that the displacement crisis in the Middle East, centered in Syria, has consumed seven nations and propelled the largest refugee crisis Europe has faced since World War II. Already in Syria, over a quarter of a million people have been killed—civilians—and that is probably a low number.

With over 12 million people displaced, Europe is being besieged by hundreds of thousands, legions, of the dispossessed. Meanwhile, it almost seems surreal that no effective diplomatic negotiation is underway that holds the prospect of leading to peace.

I again ask the Obama administration to dispatch a special envoy with a broad portfolio to work full time on a diplomatic solution to the tragedy that is destroying Syria.

Then yesterday in The New York Times appeared an editorial by the legendary 39th President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, entitled “A Plan to End the Syrian Crisis.” I served President Carter during his years in the Presidency.

I well remember the incredible moment in 1979 when President Carter stood with Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, and they signed that treaty in March of 1979. Who would have ever thought that that moment in history would have been possible? Yet, until today, that treaty

holds between Egypt and Israel, and it has made a gigantic difference in the saving of lives in that extremely troubled region.

In his editorial to The New York Times, President Carter references that the Carter Center—which he founded and to which he has dedicated his life with his wife Rosalyn ever since his service as President—has been deeply involved in Syria since the early 1980s. Who would know more than he?

He recommends the only real chance of ending the conflict is to engage the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in preparing a comprehensive peace protocol with Syria. He knows what that requires. He recommends a cease-fire, formation of a unity government, constitutional reforms, and elections.

Mr. Speaker, I include for today’s RECORD the editorial entitled “A Plan to End the Syrian Crisis.”

I say to my colleagues and to those who are listening: As we watch this tragedy unfold, our Nation is the most powerful nation in the world. Surely, we should have the wisdom and the will to take this latest tragedy, which we had no small part in precipitating, and find a way to bring the parties to the table.

What is happening in Syria due to the lack of a diplomatic solution is now impacting Europe in ways that we have not seen since World War II. It is very destabilizing.

With what is happening inside Ukraine today due to Russia’s invasion, with over 1.7 million displaced persons internally, if Russia would happen to turn the tourniquet tighter in eastern Ukraine and cause additional displacement across Europe, imagine what the winter months would bring.

I can’t urge in strong enough terms that the Obama administration pay heed to President Carter’s very lucid editorial in yesterday’s New York Times. I commend all Members and citizens to read it.

[From the New York Times, Oct. 26, 2015]

A PLAN TO END THE SYRIAN CRISIS

(By Jimmy Carter)

I have known Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria, since he was a college student in London, and have spent many hours negotiating with him since he has been in office. This has often been at the request of the United States government during those many times when our ambassadors have been withdrawn from Damascus because of diplomatic disputes.

Bashar and his father, Hafez, had a policy of not speaking to anyone at the American Embassy during those periods of estrangement, but they would talk to me. I noticed that Bashar never referred to a subordinate for advice or information. His most persistent characteristic was stubbornness; it was almost psychologically impossible for him to change his mind—and certainly not when under pressure.

Before the revolution began in March 2011, Syria set a good example of harmonious relations among its many different ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Kurds,

Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians who were Christians, Jews, Sunnis, Alawites and Shiites. The Assad family had ruled the country since 1970, and was very proud of this relative harmony among these diverse groups.

When protesters in Syria demanded long overdue reforms in the political system, President Assad saw this as an illegal revolutionary effort to overthrow his “legitimate” regime and erroneously decided to stamp it out by using unnecessary force. Because of many complex reasons, he was supported by his military forces, most Christians, Jews, Shiite Muslims, Alawites and others who feared a takeover by radical Sunni Muslims. The prospect for his overthrow was remote.

The Carter Center had been deeply involved in Syria since the early 1980s, and we shared our insights with top officials in Washington, seeking to preserve an opportunity for a political solution to the rapidly growing conflict. Despite our persistent but confidential protests, the early American position was that the first step in resolving the dispute had to be the removal of Mr. Assad from office. Those who knew him saw this as a fruitless demand, but it has been maintained for more than four years. In effect, our prerequisite for peace efforts has been an impossibility.

Kofi Annan, the former United Nations secretary general, and Lakhdar Brahimi, a former Algerian foreign minister, tried to end the conflict as special representatives of the United Nations, but abandoned the effort as fruitless because of incompatibilities among America, Russia and other nations regarding the status of Mr. Assad during a peace process.

In May 2015, a group of global leaders known as the Elders visited Moscow, where we had detailed discussions with the American ambassador, former President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, former Prime Minister Yevgeny M. Primakov, Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov and representatives of international think tanks, including the Moscow branch of the Carnegie Center.

They pointed out the longstanding partnership between Russia and the Assad regime and the great threat of the Islamic State to Russia, where an estimated 14 percent of its population are Sunni Muslims. Later, I questioned President Putin about his support for Mr. Assad, and about his two sessions that year with representatives of factions from Syria. He replied that little progress had been made, and he thought that the only real chance of ending the conflict was for the United States and Russia to be joined by Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in preparing a comprehensive peace proposal. He believed that all factions in Syria, except the Islamic State, would accept almost any plan endorsed strongly by these five, with Iran and Russia supporting Mr. Assad and the other three backing the opposition. With his approval, I relayed this suggestion to Washington.

For the past three years, the Carter Center has been working with Syrians across political divides, armed opposition group leaders and diplomats from the United Nations and Europe to find a political path for ending the conflict. This effort has been based on data-driven research about the Syrian catastrophe that the center has conducted, which reveals the location of different factions and clearly shows that neither side in Syria can prevail militarily.

The recent decision by Russia to support the Assad regime with airstrikes and other military forces has intensified the fighting, raised the level of armaments and may increase the flow of refugees to neighboring countries and Europe. At the same time, it has helped to clarify the choice between a political process in which the Assad regime