

without equal in a world, a nation that does not fear or shy away from any challenge. It is our commitment to religious equality and the freedom to worship as we please that has made us a great nation. And this is no time to abandon that tradition.

Our bravery, the bravery of our military, and the bravery of our commitment to freedom and equality have shown for almost 250 years what American exceptionalism is truly all about.

It is not the time to lose sight of ourselves and say America is too weak, that America cannot handle 20,000 or 200,000 refugees fleeing for their lives. It is not the time for America to consider raising the white flag and say to those waving the black flag: "Yes, ISIS, you are right. We dislike and fear Muslims, and we do not care if you perish or not."

A lot of us love this country too much to see it abandon core principles and values because religious extremists commit acts of terror designed precisely to terrorize us.

On Thursday, the Immigration Subcommittee will hold a hearing on refugees from Syria and the Middle East, as well it should, but you can already imagine what we will hear. Republicans will most likely raise fears that Muslim terrorists disguised as refugees would somehow pass exhaustive criminal background checks because they have been lying in wait in those camps overseas for years on the slim chance they could do damage to America. They will raise suspicions, instill fear of Muslims, maybe even fear of a President they have been saying is a Muslim, and it will probably be a pretty sad display.

Let us as legislators, leaders, and patriots rise above petty politics, rise above sectarian fears, and rise above the underlying layer of xenophobia that often surfaces in this country at moments like this throughout our history. And let us maintain America's commitment to being a beacon of hope for those fleeing oppression, violence, and intolerance.

A haven for the religiously persecuted, whether they are Buddhists from Tibet, Christians from Iran, or pilgrims from Europe, is who we are. We are a nation that lives by the motto: "Out of many, one." We will not run in fear from that motto today or any day. This is America.

CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL BOONDOGGLE

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

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, as a Californian, I know full well that we are suffering from a record drought; but what we already know is that California officials pushing the State's high-speed rail proposal won't be deterred by skyrocketing costs, an absence of private investment, or the \$55

million—and growing—funding gap. What we didn't know was the extent of secrecy and mismanagement taxpayers would face at the hands of State officials pushing this project.

Just this month, we learned that in 2013 the agency's main contractor projected that the first phase's costs had risen 31 percent. This information was concealed by the High-Speed Rail Authority and only released 2 years later after pressure from Congress.

While the lack of transparency is unacceptable, especially given that taxpayers are ultimately on the hook for this project, the fundamental issue here is that the entire project is a ruse—in literal terms, a train wreck—in that State officials knew this for some time and that those same officials hid this from the public.

In 2008, voters were promised an 800-mile system that would link Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, cost about \$34 billion, and would have less than one-third of the costs paid by the State through its taxpayers. The system was promised to travel from San Francisco to Los Angeles in under 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Fast forward to 2011 when the price had shot up from \$34 billion to \$100 billion, the plan was reduced to only L.A. to San Francisco, and the State was quick to grab billions of—unknown at the time—Federal stimulus that came along later, funding that could have been used for critical needs like roads or water infrastructure that California needs so desperately, as well as now shifting cap-and-trade dollars recently created to try and prop up high-speed rail and its deficient budget dollars.

As a State senator at the time, the first bill I introduced was one that would require them to come up with the ultimate full plan of the cost of doing high-speed rail. Having not succeeded in getting that through a majority that still liked it as it was, my next legislation was to say, now that we know this is over \$100 billion, let's put this back on the ballot and in front of the voters, since the price has tripled and they were deceived at what it would cost at the time. That, too, met defeat, as those in the majority still wished to continue this boondoggle.

Today, the Governor claims the price has fallen to \$68 billion for what would be an illegal system, based on what the voters passed under Prop 1A. However, the estimate ignores the costs of tunneling through the Tehachapi Mountains, ignores cost spikes in the initial construction segment, and ignores the rising costs of lands acquisition due to people having to fight because they are having their homes, their farms, and their small businesses paved over by this project.

The promises made in 2008 ranged from low ticket prices to questionable job figures, including the fact that they were claiming there would be a million new jobs from high-speed rail. When we pinned them down in committee a little bit later, they said, well,

that would mean a million job-years. That number has since been pared down. All these have been proven false. In fact, these claims are so misleading that a State court has forbidden the legislature from writing ballot measure descriptions.

Earlier this week, I sent out a survey to residents in my weekly e-newsletter to constituents in California's First District, my own district, asking them to share their thoughts on high-speed rail as it is now. I listed a number of suggested actions we could take on high-speed rail, from leaving it as is to defunding it, and asked which best represents our constituents' position on the project now.

Of the nearly 1,600 answers we received, their views are pretty clear. Nearly half of them said they thought funding for high-speed rail should be redirected to invest in water storage and water infrastructure to help our State right now in this drought.

About 20 percent thought the State should subpoena the cost documents and require High-Speed Rail Authority officials to testify why the figures were concealed. Approximately 18 percent thought California's high-speed rail should undergo Federal investigation in response to these allegations, given that the project involves the use of Federal funds. A scant 7 percent thought we should keep going forward with high-speed rail and believed the current price tag is a worthwhile investment of public funds. Lastly, 4 percent supported investing in high-speed rail, provided the project stayed within the old constraints, the old prices—the ones they saw on the ballot. So, at best, you see 11 percent that might support high-speed rail and 4 percent that might under the old price, which is nowhere near what was projected.

People don't like this project, don't trust those advocating for it, and they deserve better than to see their own tax dollars used to lie to them. No new Federal dollars will come from here to help this project be propped up anymore.

It is time we start prioritizing funding for projects that actually address real problems facing California, such as the current drought. It is time to apply common sense to this situation. We have a State whose economy depends on a sound water supply, yet in the midst of a historic drought, we are still chasing this high-speed rail boondoggle.

Rather than throwing billions of dollars away, let's get to what people demand and will help our economy and the people of California.

CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE

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

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Speaker, when the average American wants to learn about a policy, where do they turn for

information? Often, the answer is the 24-hour news cycle, often filled by talking heads and sensationalism; or, to social media and message boards, where anyone can post anything—credible or completely misinformed.

The American public is no longer being informed by the likes of Walter Cronkite and Edward Murrow, and it is making our public debate increasingly partisan, polarized, and misinformed.

What few realize or like to admit is that there is a way Congress can help elevate the debate and educate our constituents with neutral, unbiased, nonpartisan information from the Congressional Research Service, or CRS.

For over 100 years, CRS has served as Congress' publicly funded think tank. Because they serve policymakers on both sides of the aisle, CRS researchers produce exemplary work that is accurate, nonpartisan, and easy to understand.

Despite the fact that CRS receives over \$100 million from taxpayers each year, its reports are not made available to the public. Instead, constituents must request individual reports through a congressional office. This has led to several undesirable consequences.

Well-connected lobbyists have the easiest access to these reports, unlike the average American. Second, while nonprofits make some reports available online, there is no guarantee that they will remain available and up-to-date. And most outrageously, a small industry has sprung up reselling these reports for exorbitant fees. In other words, businesses are making a profit by selling publicly funded work, work that ultimately belongs to the people.

Keeping these reports in the hands of Congress and beltway insiders is selfish and indefensible. I understand that allowing the public to access these reports will not answer all the questions constituents have about the work that happens on Capitol Hill, but it underscores the broader need for increased transparency in Congress and government.

Public trust in government has reached historic lows, causing too many Americans to simply give up on Washington and the mission of government. The best way to rebuild the public's trust and promote a more efficient and effective government is by furthering government accountability through increased transparency.

It is time to recognize that educators, students, media, and everyday citizens deserve access to CRS reports and that this access gives our constituents vital information about the issues, policies, and budgets we are debating here in Congress.

That is why Congressman LANCE and I introduced H. Res. 34, which directs the Clerk of the House of Representatives to maintain a centralized public database for nonconfidential CRS reports. This resolution gives the public tools to cut through the misinformation they face, gives them access to

something they are already paying for, and empowers the American people to hold Congress accountable for the decisions we make.

The steps toward a more open and transparent government may seem modest to some, but, in reality, they have a huge impact on how government serves the people. The mission of government matters, and if we are truly here to serve the people, then we owe it to them to operate in an open and transparent manner.

Let's give the public the information we are basing our decisions on. I urge my colleagues to stand up for transparency and accountability by supporting H. Res. 34. Information is power, and that is exactly what the American people deserve.

NATURAL GAS EXPANSION IN CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise in recognition of the efforts of the Susquehanna Economic Development Association's Council of Governments, otherwise known as SEDA-COG, in working to expand the availability of natural gas in areas across central Pennsylvania.

Mr. Speaker, natural gas is not only produced right here in the United States of America, but it is also economical and versatile, with uses that range from home heating to cooking and drying clothes.

While Pennsylvania sits on one of the largest natural gas reserves in the Nation, many areas of the State are unserved or underserved by natural gas providers. Converting to natural gas can lead to big savings for consumers who currently rely on other home heating fuels such as propane and oil.

To help address this issue, SEDA-COG's \$160,000 pilot project will provide natural gas to these areas in order to attract manufacturers and to give homeowners the option to connect. To do that, this organization has joined with gas suppliers such as UGI Utilities and Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania, starting with at least three projects in central Pennsylvania that will expand natural gas access to hundreds of potential users.

In addition, the project will focus on the sustainability of delivering natural gas through "virtual pipelines," where compressed gas would be delivered by a truck to be used by large commercial businesses located nearby.

If successful, SEDA-COG officials say that they could expand this model to fuel users connected by a small pipeline network, including residential areas such as housing developments.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the innovative spirit of SEDA-COG and its partners, and I look forward to learning more about how these projects could benefit other areas of Pennsylvania.

130TH ANNIVERSARY OF DUBOIS BUSINESS COLLEGE

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of the 130th anniversary of the DuBois Business College, which has several campuses located in Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District.

The college was founded in 1885 by a local businessman who recognized a need for skilled businessowners, operators, and employees. The school's original location was once known as the largest building in America devoted exclusively to commercial education.

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In the many years since, DuBois Business College has expanded not just to a new location in DuBois, but also to include branch campus locations in Oil City, Philipsburg, and Huntingdon.

Today the college has a student body of more than 400 and offers a variety of associate's degree and diploma programs, all of which can be completed in less than 2 years. This provides a quick transition for students into the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to welcome administrators and students from DuBois Business College to Capitol Hill today. I look forward to congratulating them in person, and I wish them well in their continued success.

RESTORATION TUESDAY

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

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, today is Restoration Tuesday. I rise today to support voting rights for all Americans.

I was proud to stand alongside Members who support the restoration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 recently and to launch the #restoretthevote legislative strategy. This national effort will help mobilize support for H.R. 2867, the Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015, a bill that I sponsored with Representatives JUDY CHU and LINDA SÁNCHEZ to restore critical Federal oversight to jurisdictions who have a recent history of voter suppression.

Since elections are held on Tuesdays, every Tuesday that Congress is in session, like today, we will declare it to be Restoration Tuesday. So today I am speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives on the need to restore the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Our call for restoring the VRA is urgent, Mr. Speaker. As our colleague JOHN LEWIS so eloquently says, there is no other work more important in this or any Congress than protecting the full access of all Americans to the democratic process.

If we do not act, the 2016 election will be the first Presidential election in 50 years without the protections offered to millions of voters by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We must act now.

I therefore urge all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, my Republican and my Democratic colleagues, to