

which would involve a sustained humanitarian response, government and civil society capacity building, and the creation of resilient political and security infrastructures and landscapes.

My proposed Victims of Terror Protection Fund is one of the strategies for addressing the growing African migrant and refugee crisis.

I commend President Obama's and President Buhari's commitment to Nigerian security and their collective efforts to tighten vigilance in vulnerable places.

I hope the United States continues to build a stronger alliance with President Buhari and Nigeria.

To succeed, at all our objectives to protect victims and combat violent extremism, in Nigeria, Syria and around the world, we must have continued U.S. support in protecting victims of terror, technical training, logistical and infrastructural capabilities and professionalizing its military force to battle Boko Haram.

POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New Jersey for talking about Ms. Gonzalez, who was from our area. She actually was from a city called El Monte, California, and that is where my first cousin, Norma Macias, is a councilwoman there at that city.

□ 1930

Right now, as we are speaking, they are holding a vigil for her, a memorial for her. She was a young lady on a semester abroad wanting to change the world by good design and using green products, et cetera. So thank you for mentioning her. I am sure the Gonzalez family will be very touched.

And, of course, thank you for mentioning the whole issue of the refugees because we are a beacon. We are a shining beacon of the world. These are people who are fleeing these types of terrorist attacks.

So I hope that we do have a good resolution to allow these refugees to go to all the countries until we figure out what is going on in the Middle East and they can return home. Home is where they really want to be. Thank you. I thank my great colleague from New Jersey.

Mr. Speaker, tonight I rise to address an issue that unfortunately reaches into households in each and every State, every city, and every neighborhood in this great Nation. It is the issue of poverty.

Poverty is a plague that weighs on a central tenet that our Nation was built on, and that is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I received a letter just this last month from our Democratic whip, STENY HOYER, discussing a recent report released by the U.S. Census Bu-

reau that found that 46.7 million Americans—15 percent of Americans—are living in poverty. How can we tell a family to pursue happiness when the rug is constantly being pulled out from under them?

Mr. Speaker, 15 percent, 46.7 million, is more than all the Californians and Arizonans put together. We cannot allow that to continue. We know that the effects of poverty hit every aspect of one's life.

It hits minorities disproportionately. Poverty affects minorities. 26 percent of African Americans live below the poverty line, and 23 percent of Latinos live below the poverty line.

We also see those types of percentages when we look at lower educational attainment and lower overall wages. As the number of first- and second-generation children rises, so does the amount of these children affected and born into poverty.

Nearly one in three children in the schools in my district are affected by poverty. It is hard to learn when you haven't had a meal. It is hard to learn when you don't have a roof over your head. It is hard where you are sharing a house with 15 or 16 people, most of them not related to you.

There are social programs such as SNAP and the Community Supplemental Food program. There are ways in which we can combat the effects of poverty. I don't believe that families who are benefiting from those programs are looking for a free handout.

There are Members of both Chambers who at one time or another received public assistance in times of need. One of them was a single mother of not one, but two, children while working and attending college. I think it goes without saying that these individuals are not lazy or looking for handouts.

Now, we shouldn't shame or judge other individuals in our society, but there is a negative stigma about being enrolled in welfare programs. We shame families who don't have the means to lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty. But then we don't want to give them that helping hand, that aid, that they need in order to do that.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the real shame—the real shame—is that we are a nation of unbridled wealth, bountiful wealth, and still over 46 million people are in poverty.

With the rising costs of housing and food, families in the United States are stretching each dollar more and more. Many find it difficult to save money at the end of the month, and saving for their son's or daughter's education is, quite frankly, an unattainable dream.

When I was growing up, I was told that, if I worked hard, if I did well in school, and if I saved my money, it was possible to be successful in America.

But, Mr. Speaker, every day these days it gets harder and harder to be successful in America. Those in poverty find themselves working hard, planning for the future, and doing ev-

erything that we tell them to do, and still they fall short, unable to attain the pursuit of happiness.

There should be absolutely no reason, if a person puts in hard work 40 hours a week, that they should be living in poverty. How can we expect families working minimum wage—and I will add that is not a liveable wage—to afford child care and save for their children's college education?

Honestly, it is nearly impossible. Yet, I see so many examples in my district of people who overcome all of the hurdles and the barriers that we are placing in front of them.

We can alleviate, we can remove, those barriers. We can have an impact on the poverty of our communities. Last month, during National Work and Family Month, Democratic leadership led a Working Families Day of Action to highlight important legislation to improve the living conditions for all families here in America.

I joined 113 of my colleagues in co-sponsoring a resolution which called for this House to address some of the issues important to some of the most disadvantaged demographics of people in our Nation. This resolution addressed commonsense measures, such as sensible working accommodations for pregnant women, equal protections for workers in the workplace, and increasing the minimum wage to a liveable wage.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the 46 million Americans living in poverty, we are talking about people from all walks of life. We are talking about the homeless. We are talking about children in our schools. We are talking about our senior citizens. We are talking about single parents, blue collar workers. We are talking about our immigrants.

All of these groups are stuck—stuck—in a vicious cycle of poverty and disadvantaged situations. These aren't radical ideas. These are sensible, American ideas where hard work is rewarded with equal compensation and protections. I believe that, as lawmakers—but, more importantly, as Americans—we owe it to the families of this Nation to enact legislation in which each and every person has a means to succeed.

Tonight I am going to go over some of the statistics that we have with respect to poverty in America. As I said before, Mr. Speaker, 46.7 million people are living in poverty.

The poverty rate was established in the 1960s, and it is based solely on an individual's cash earnings. It sets the poverty threshold at \$24,250 for a family of four. However, that rate does not take into consideration the cost of living in different regions of America. Try living in my region on \$24,250 for four people.

The Census Bureau recently established a new measure on which to gauge actual poverty rates. The Supplemental Poverty Measure establishes a new poverty rate by incorporating

expenditures on basic necessities, such as food, housing, and utilities.

California's poverty rate is 16.5 percent, slightly higher than the 14.9 percent rate for the United States. However, this statistic can be deceiving because of the high cost of living throughout the State.

So you could be above the \$24,250 a year for a family of four, and you are not in poverty according to the national rate. But the reality—the reality—is, when it costs \$1,800 for a one-bedroom apartment, you have eaten up about 90 percent of that \$25,000.

If we use the updated measurement system, California leads the Nation with 23.4 percent of residents living in poverty. Of course, once again, this hits the disadvantaged more than anyone else.

When using the Supplemental Poverty System, nearly 20 percent of seniors, one-quarter of our children, 31 percent of Latinos, and 20 percent of African Americans live in poverty. Let's put that in perspective.

The average rent in Orange County is \$1,648. Orange County that I represent is the seventh priciest metropolitan area in the United States. This brings the total cost to rent a modest—and when I am telling you a modest apartment in California, we are talking \$20,000 a year.

For a family of four living at or below the outdated poverty threshold, this leaves a whopping \$4,250 for the entire year. That leaves about \$354 per month to feed and clothe a family of four.

How, Mr. Speaker, can a family of four live on \$354 a month? How do you save for a college education? How do you save for a home? How do you buy a car? What can you do when you get sick?

I recently held a bipartisan briefing about home ownership as a vehicle for economic mobility for Latinos and African Americans. Latino families are struggling to rebuild the equity they lost in this last Great Recession because, between 2008 and 2010, in those 3 or 4 years of the recession, two-thirds of the wealth in the Latino families across the Nation was lost—was lost—just wiped out, done away with, because they lost their homes.

The home is always the first rung onto the wealth-creation ladder. Two-thirds because of foreclosure. And even though home values have rebounded in recent years, the fact of the matter is that those people who lost their homes are renting at probably twice the cost of what their mortgage payment was, probably something less than what they were living in, and not building any equity.

They are renters, and they are stuck. Even if you gained back on the market, it doesn't keep pace with the returns in the stock market. So the Hispanic household has a slower recovery than the rest of our Nation.

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 28 percent of Hispanic homeowners

say they owe more on their homes today than they can sell it for in 2011.

This topic of home ownership is more than a roof over your head. It is a source of pride. It is a source of pride. It is the American Dream, and it is a place that you can call your own. It is a part of owning America, and we want people to own a piece of America.

A recent Joint Economic Committee study report finds that White households typically have 150 times more wealth than Hispanic households. In 2013, the median net worth of Hispanic households was only \$14,000 compared to about \$142,000 for Anglo households, a difference of \$128,000.

□ 1945

And the wealth divide has increased since the Great Recession.

The median net worth of Hispanic households fell by over 40 percent between 2005 to 2013, compared to 26 percent for Anglo households.

Latinos are less likely to be financially prepared for retirement than any other households because of their disparity in employment, in earnings, and in wealth.

Only 12 percent of Latino households have access to the defined benefit pensions, for example, that guarantee a lifetime income, half the rate of Anglos and African American households.

Sixty-nine percent of working-age Latino households do not own assets in a retirement account—69 percent do not—compared to 37 percent of Anglos who do not.

Let's talk about my district, in one of the wealthiest counties of our Nation. I just told you that housing is seventh in the Nation with respect to what it cost you to live there.

Twenty percent of the people are living in poverty in my district, higher than the State and the national average.

Thirty percent of the kids, the children, in my district are living in poverty, higher than the State and higher than the national average.

Eighteen percent of women are living in poverty in my district, higher than the State and the national average.

Between 2011 and 2013, in those 3 years, 23,000 households within my district benefited from SNAP assistance—food stamps. Eighty-six percent of those households had children under the age of 18. Oh, and by the way, 78 percent of those households were Latino. Forty-three percent of those families that received SNAP benefits recorded having at least two or more workers in the workforce in the past 12 months.

What does this tell you? It tells you that families have not just one but two breadwinners in the family, and still they cannot afford to purchase basic food supplies.

Mr. Speaker, if hunger doesn't affect us directly, we often overlook the immense stress that comes with struggling to put food on the table. If you don't have a meal, you are not good in

school and you can't study because you are constantly hungry. How does a kid do his mathematics, his geometry, when he is wondering where is his next meal coming from?

The Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.

In 2014, 48 million adult Americans lived in food-insecure households, including 32.8 million adults, and 15.3 million children. And of those 48 million Americans, 19 percent of the households were with children, 35 percent of the households with children headed by single women, 26 percent African American households, 22 percent Latino households. How do we do that?

A recent report published by the Department of Agriculture found that error rates for awarding SNAP benefits are at an all-time low. Over 99 percent of SNAP benefits are issued to eligible households.

Mr. Speaker, you would think that a government program, any government program, with a 99 percent efficiency rating, with a proven record of lifting families out of poverty would be applauded and promoted by both sides of the aisle, but that is not always the case.

The most recent farm bill cut \$8 billion from SNAP, affecting 850,000 families in our Nation.

The assistance provided by SNAP is an economic booster, with every dollar in SNAP benefits resulting in \$1.80 in total economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, food is the most basic necessity for a person.

In ending, I would like to highlight a few of the excellent organizations in my district that make it their mission, their passion, to aid those in need.

The Lestonnac Free Clinic, founded by Sister Marie Therese in 1979, it is devoted to providing free—free—comprehensive medical care to the poorest of the poor in Orange County, California, as well as dental care to its established patients. This organization, this clinic, is a nonprofit, primarily volunteers—volunteer doctors, volunteer everything—working with pharmaceutical companies and local hospitals to meet the healthcare needs of low- and no-income families in our community. And the clinic has stayed true to its mission of providing free medical and dental care, and is only one of the few clinics in Orange County that does not charge—does not charge—for its services.

And collaborations were made with organizations, including Target store pharmacy, to provide low-cost medications. And over 100 volunteer doctors and medical staff have generously donated their time to help those in need.

The Lestonnac Free Clinic also contains a food bank and provides food to several hundred people each month. Over 20,000 patients have been treated in over 180,000 visits.

Or there is the Orange County Food Bank, which operates the Commodity

Supplemental Food Program, and it distributes 23,000 food boxes monthly countywide to low-income seniors 60 and older. It operates a community donated food bank with enrollment of over 350 local charities that make food available to those that are at the risk of hunger. This vulnerable population includes the disabled, seniors, families with children, veterans—I see veterans in those lines coming to pick up boxes of food—the unemployed and the homeless.

The foods department operates the SNAP program, and this program has increased enrollment to over 400,000 qualified individuals in Orange County, California, who are at the risk of hunger.

Mr. Speaker, we are a great country, and we have great Americans—those who have served in our military, those who have served in public service, those who teach our children, those who nurse us when we are sick, those who build our roads, invent new gadgets for us to communicate. We are a great country of innovation. We are a great country of beauty from sea to shining sea. And yet, in this great country of ours, in today's day, there are over 46 million Americans living in poverty, many of them going to sleep tonight hungry, hungry, hungry. As the Congress, as the conscience of America, as the people's House, we need to work together to eliminate poverty in America.

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

THE PEOPLE'S NIGHT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WALKER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. WALKER. Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing us to engage in what we call People's Night 2. The House has been working diligently for the citizens of our districts. We have passed solid legislation that is good for the economy, that protects life, that helps small businesses, veterans, bills that reduce taxes. I would guess that maybe not all of our citizens are even aware that the House has actually passed a balanced budget. In fact, there are over 300 pieces of legislation that have been passed through the House but have been stalled in the Senate.

Tonight, we want to highlight some of the legislation, but also, and with all due respect, we are calling on Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL to get moving on these bills. I am joined by several colleagues this evening to share why we believe it is time to move on behalf of the American people.

Our first Member, colleague and friend, from Pennsylvania, Mr. RYAN COSTELLO. Mr. COSTELLO is a freshman, along with myself, our shortstop on the baseball team, and a strong voice speaking out on those who sometimes

cannot speak for themselves, and that is our veterans. We promise that we would go to Congress and work hard for the men and women who depend on us to get the Veterans Administration correct.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO).

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend from North Carolina for yielding. Mr. WALKER has really been a leader in no time on so many issues. It is nice to be his hall mate and also his teammate on the baseball field, and I appreciate him putting together this Special Order to raise a number of issues that we have gotten through the House here and that we are respectfully calling upon the Senate to take up.

I am here to speak about the crying need for change and increased accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs that can be facilitated by the immediate passage of H.R. 1994, the VA Accountability Act of 2015. This is a bill that myself and many others have cosponsored under the leadership of Chairman JEFF MILLER, and it is a bill that I am requesting that the Senate take up and pass with bipartisan support here in the House in July.

It gives the Secretary of the VA the additional tools he needs to accelerate the badly-needed culture change at the Department of Veterans Affairs. It gives the Secretary of the VA what he needs to rebuild the trust between the VA and this Congress, taxpayers, and, most importantly, the veterans of this country.

H.R. 1994 includes many provisions to fix the broken personnel system at the Department. But, most importantly, this bill authorizes the Secretary to remove or demote any employee for poor performance or misconduct while also increasing protections for whistleblowers who have been, and continue to be, very important in the oversight role of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Many of you know the Philadelphia Regional Office has seen scandal after scandal. It has experienced a gross lapse in management, mishandling of claims, the administration of improper payments, and fabricated data. On top of that, the hostile work environment and whistleblower retaliation occurred on a nearly daily basis.

This bill brings accountability to the managers at the Philly VA responsible for these actions, as well as those across the country in the VA, who have acted improperly.

I believe a majority of VA's employees—as we all do here in Congress—this is an important point to make—most people that work at the VA are hard-working public servants who are dedicated to providing quality health care and timely benefits for veterans.

□ 2000

I am sure the majority of these employees are just as frustrated in that most of us see that the VA problem

employees continue to be moved to new positions as opposed to being removed from the payroll. We have seen time and again how poor performance can spread like a cancer through a workforce and how the presence of bad employees only leads to poor customer service and is an impediment to the quality of service our veterans have earned.

Our veterans deserve nothing less than the highest quality of care, and it is our job as Members of Congress to do everything in our power to ensure that their care is placed before the interests of entrenched bureaucrats and poor performance. If we want what is best for our veterans, then the status quo at the VA is not acceptable. It is not working. It is failing the mission of the Department, and it is failing the veterans the VA is supposed to serve.

Mr. Speaker, if we do not give the Secretary the tools that he or she needs to hold VA employees accountable, then we are just as culpable for any future VA failures. The antiquated civil service laws that have fostered the VA's cultural mess need to go. That is what the VA Accountability Act does. That is why we are calling on the Senate to take it up.

After the largest scandal in VA's history—and, in my home State, the continued problems at the Philadelphia VA—the VA has only successfully fired three employees for wait time manipulation even though over 100 hospitals have been identified as having gamed the appointment system. That is simply unacceptable. H.R. 1994 would give the Secretary the tools he needs to hold more employees accountable faster than can be done now under existing civil service rules.

As Mr. WALKER will continue to do this evening in pointing out a number of bills that have been ushered through the House—reform bills that improve the welfare of this country and that reform various bureaucracies—H.R. 1994 does just that. I urge the Senate to take action and push for accountability just as we have done here in the House on behalf of this country's veterans.

I thank the gentleman for organizing this Special Order tonight.

Mr. WALKER. I thank Representative COSTELLO. His hard work on the Veterans' Affairs Committee is duly noted.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, these bills are not making it to the President's desk. We are tired of the argument that the President will most likely veto these legislative bills or of the filibustering that we hear about sometimes in the Senate. We hear the word "reconciliation" a great deal. Reconciliation is a simple majority vote. Fifty-one votes in the Senate is what is needed to get it to the President's desk under reconciliation.

If we think back, this is how HARRY REID shoved ObamaCare into the culture and fabric of the American people—by reconciliation, by a simple majority. In fact, it has been Mr. REID