

steady voice on so many issues since he has been here in Congress, especially on behalf of the most vulnerable in our society: the poor and the working poor. His voice and his work has certainly been a major contributor in terms of our task force growing to over 100 members. Thank you again for being a member of the task force and for what you do each and every day.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor and my privilege to serve alongside you, Congresswoman, with all of the bigness of your heart and the care that you have for people, particularly those who are on their way up. You don't have anything against those who are already in place and doing well, but your heart is constantly on display toward those who are less fortunate. I am just privileged and honored to join you in that quest.

Today has been a great day. This morning, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the passage of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery in America. And to think back 150 years and look at the 100 years it took from that point to get to the point where we could pass a Voting Rights Act here in America, and then from that 50-year point up to today to be addressed by an African American President of the United States shows what kind of values we have in this country, what kind of opportunities we have in this country.

And so I am just filled with great tidings during this holiday season; however, I am not carried off by the winds of prosperity that may have come to some of us while to others the winds of prosperity have passed us by for various reasons, despite all of the progress that we have made as a people.

As it stands now, Congresswoman, it is not a Black or White thing; it is a people thing. We have more Caucasian Americans living in poverty than we have African Americans. So poverty is not a discriminator when it comes to national origin, when it comes to race, or when it comes to sex.

The fact is we have more women living in poverty and we have more children living in poverty. There is nothing to be joyful about that. We have more elderly people falling into poverty today.

My heart cries out for Caucasian Americans between the ages of 45 and 60 who, studies show, are meeting an early and untimely death at their own hands—suicide. Also, alcoholism and drug abuse are ravaging that particular demographic, as well as liver disease and other chronic ailments.

It all, I would posit, stems from the sense of hopelessness that pervades the people at this particular time. We see all of the prosperity. We see the prosperity of the few, the top 1 percent. You can look at the top 10 percent and see the concentration of wealth in this country. You see it, you watch the TV, and you aspire for all of the goods that are displayed to you on TV, but yet there is a sense of hopelessness about

you being able to achieve that, despite the fact that you are working two and three jobs and still qualify for food stamps and other social services.

We are realizing that, despite the hard work and the effort, the playing field is not level and the game is skewed in favor of the few on top at the expense of the masses on the bottom, and so something is wrong with that picture. That is an imbalance that we need to correct. So that is why I am so happy to work on the Out of Poverty Caucus.

Some say, "Why try? It can never be done"; but I am one of those who say that, if we don't try, it won't be done. If we try, it can make a difference.

I think that with the proper people in place to make the policy decisions that we make here in Congress, there is so much that we can do to relieve poverty in this country and to offer opportunity for people who only want to work hard and play by the rules. They long for the day to return when they can look at their children and their grandchildren and rest assured knowing that the opportunities for them will be at least, if not greater than, those that existed for themselves.

And so our job is to make things better on the ground for people. Our mission is to help those who need help. There are always going to be some people who need it, and there is nothing wrong with helping somebody who needs help. In fact, that is what living is all about: serving your fellow man. That is why I am here. I know that is why you are here, and I am just happy to serve with you.

I would add that it has been 51 years since 1964 when President Lyndon B. Johnson launched the War on Poverty, an ambitious set of initiatives to increase access to education, spur job growth, and improve nutrition and health to our poorest Americans. Fifty-one years later, it is estimated that up to 45 million Americans live in poverty. In the greatest Nation on Earth, there are 45 million starving children, impoverished seniors, and families that struggle every day to obtain the bare necessities to survive.

I know how it feels because, for 1 week, I tried to exist on the food stamp challenge with you, Congresswoman, and that was tough. I got off of it after, I think, about 5 days. To try to exist on what we give the average food stamp recipient is quite tough.

In Georgia, 25 percent of the people who are 50 or older and whose income level is less than \$22,000 a year struggle with hunger. In my district, that is an important issue, because in DeKalb County, 10 percent of the people live below the poverty line, and the majority of those are children. In Rockdale County, it is 13 percent.

Ms. LEE. I thank the gentleman for his message of hope tonight and for reminding us of the fact that poverty does take its toll on the mental health and well-being of the human spirit.

I want to thank all of the Members who participated. I hope we can move

in a bipartisan fashion to address some of the major, major issues that this body knows that it can address if it so chooses.

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

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer remarks on poverty and income inequality in America in light of our recent budget discussions. In the world's most rich and powerful nation, more than 46 million Americans live in poverty. In Texas, 18 percent of residents live in poverty and 25 percent of children under 18 live in poverty. In Dallas, TX, the number of low-income people rose 41 percent between 2000 and 2012.

These numbers are staggering in a nation, state, and city with such wealth. Congress can and must do more to create opportunity for people who live in poverty. Passing a strong federal budget with anti-poverty programs, creating educational opportunities for students who come from low-income families, ensuring children and families have adequate food, advocating for a higher minimum wage, and keeping our federal health programs strong are just a few examples of the ways Congress can help lift these individuals and families out of poverty.

We know that these programs work. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) kept almost 5 million Americans, including 2.2 million children, out of poverty last year. Medical kept almost 3 million people out of poverty last year and that number continues to increase as more states expand Medicaid. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC) helped to lift 10 million Americans, including 5 million children, out of poverty last year.

Anti-poverty programs not only help families rise above and stay out of poverty, they keep families contributing to the economy on a daily basis. Rather than keeping low-income Dallasites, Texans, and Americans on a tight-rope where they are one medical emergency, job loss, or large car expense away from dipping into poverty, we must bolster our resources. During the very year that we celebrated the 50th anniversary of several War on Poverty programs enacted by President Johnson, we must make it easier and not more difficult for working families in this country.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 381

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia (during the Special Order of Ms. LEE). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to remove myself from H.R. 381.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

FOREST MANAGEMENT AND WILDFIRES

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the House

Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry, I am pleased to open this Special Order to discuss forest management and wildfires.

Over the course of this year, many Western States, including Alaska, have gone through a catastrophic wildfire season, with more than 9 million acres burned to date. This is a continuation of an unsustainable trend where the average number of acres burned each year has doubled since the 1990s. To address this, government spending on wildfire suppression has also doubled; yet the total amount of spending on forestry activities has remained the same.

Because the cost of wildfire suppression efforts has continued to climb over the past 15 years, the U.S. Forest Service has repeatedly had to transfer money from its nonfire programs to firefighting efforts. In fact, this year alone, more than 50 percent of the Forest Service budget went toward wildfire suppression, taking funding away from programs and activities that promote forest health and reduction of underbrush, wood waste, and dead trees, which help these wildfires spread.

Fire transfers also undermine timber harvesting, which is critical for the health of the forests as well as our rural communities and counties.

In contrast to this 50 percent, only 20 years ago, the Forest Service was only spending as little as 13 percent, or one-sixth, of its budget on fire-related activities. However, this is not simply a question of allocating more money for fire suppression. The real solution to this problem is how we maintain our forests.

I am pleased to be joined tonight by bipartisan members of the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee of the Agriculture Committee.

I am pleased to yield to the ranking member of that committee, MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM.

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Mr. THOMPSON, I appreciate this Special Order on wildfires and forest management, and I really appreciate your leadership on the House Agriculture Committee as chairman of our Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry.

Most recently, the subcommittee held a hearing on the 2015 wildfire season and long-term fire trends, a much-needed hearing recognizing the concerns and urgent needs of many of our Members who watched their districts and States burn to unprecedented levels this year.

What is abundantly clear from the testimony we heard, especially that of Forest Service Chief Tidwell, was how crippling the current wildfire budget system is to the agency and how, frankly, it prevents the Forest Service from carrying out its congressionally mandated mission.

The current process for funding wildfire suppression is inefficient and wastes taxpayer dollars. Once the Forest Service exhausts their wildfire suppression budget, the agency is then

forced to transfer funds from nonfire programs, which are often needed to prevent fires, in order to support the immediate, emergency needs of fire suppression.

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In the last fiscal year, FY15, the Forest Service spent \$700 million more than what Congress initially appropriated.

Since 2004, the Forest Service has needed eight supplemental appropriations. This is now the norm, not the exception.

This year's wildfire season devastated much of the Western United States. The Forest Service spent \$1.7 billion fighting these fires. More than 9 million acres were burned, thousands of homes and other infrastructures were lost, and 13 firefighters lost their lives in the line of duty.

While I am thankful New Mexico avoided any big fires this year, I know firsthand how devastating fires can be. For 3 years in a row, New Mexico endured the biggest fires the State has ever seen. The Whitewater-Baldy Complex, Las Conchas, and the Gila fires devastated our land, our resources and our communities.

These fires are natural disasters that require emergency response and recovery and should, frankly, be funded the same way as hurricanes, floods and tornados. Now, it is clear to me that Congress needs to urgently fix this funding problem before more communities are destroyed and lives are lost.

In addition to the "fire borrowing" issue, Congress also has to address the rising 10-year suppression cost average for wildfires. Rising wildfire costs means that less funding is going to nonfire Forest Service employees and programs each year. Because of this, the Forest Service now has fewer resources for recreation, research and development, and road maintenance.

There are also fewer resources to carry out activities and projects that many say we need more of, such as NEPA analysis, timber contracts, timber salvage, controlled burns, and other Forest Service management activities.

Lack of resources often means that these projects get delayed or canceled. And we aren't just talking about Forest Service projects; they are projects in each of our districts that are developed by our own constituents and partners within each of these communities.

Now, I understand that the broken wildfire budget and rising costs are only part of the problem. Wildfires are burning bigger and more intense than ever before.

Climate change is causing more drought, higher temperatures, bringing new diseases and pests to new areas, and changing the vegetation on the ground. Our forests are not the same forests that they were 50 years ago, or even 20 years ago.

Climate change is undoubtedly changing our forest dynamics, and we must make our forests more resilient.

Fixing the broken wildfire budgeting process is the most effective thing Congress can do to begin to address the devastating wildfires that are plaguing this country.

I also agree that we need more management work done on the ground, so let's work together to ensure that the Forest Service has sufficient resources to do their work.

I understand that there have been talks on both the House and Senate side about including a budget fix in the upcoming omnibus, but that a deal remains elusive because some parties are unwilling to address the budget caps in order for wildfires to get treated as exactly what they are, as natural disasters. This would treat wildfire natural disasters just like every other natural disaster in this country.

We out west have helped fund hurricanes, tornados and flooding in the Midwest and in the eastern parts of the country. We should be doing the same for our natural disasters out west.

I urge Speaker RYAN, and Chairman PRICE of the Budget Committee, to recognize this simple, yet important distinction.

House leadership, Mr. THOMPSON, and others, I know, we can sit down and we can come to an agreement to fix the broken budget process and address some of the management needs. I stand ready at any moment to have these conversations and find a path forward.

I thank the chairman very much.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentlewoman, who is a great ranking member on the subcommittee, for all of her work and for her comments and words this evening.

Mr. Speaker, having served on the subcommittee with the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SCHRADER), he is a great advocate for forest products, for healthy forests, for economically healthy rural communities. We share that passion. I am just very thankful that he was able to, in a very busy schedule, make time this evening to be part of this Special Order.

I yield to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. SCHRADER).

Mr. SCHRADER. I thank the chairman. I want to applaud you and the ranking member for the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee for having this colloquy here tonight.

I think it is really important for folks to understand the severity of the issue that is before us here. As my western colleague pointed out a moment ago, these wildfires are alive and well, unfortunately, and absolutely devastating, devastating at a level that we had never seen or expected before.

These disasters, not just back east with Sandy and Katrina, but the wildfires that we see in New Mexico and in my home State of Oregon and neighboring State of Washington this summer, are absolutely catastrophic, and way above and beyond what we have seen in past decades.

The firefighting situation has become untenable. The height of ridiculousness

is to acknowledge the fact that fire-fighting costs have doubled over the last 15 years, on a regular basis, 8 out of 10 years, as was pointed out a moment ago, and not do anything about it.

The wildfires don't go away when we put our heads in the sand. They continue to devastate.

I would like to point out three, maybe four things I think are really important. We are talking about an omnibus bill here that everyone is arguing over. There are certain policy riders, I submit, that have nothing to do with the budget.

There is some discussion about a fire funding fix, though, to get after this budgetary disaster that we have, now every year. Why not budget up front for this so that the resources can be allocated immediately?

Secondly, not devastate the Forest Service budget, because if you take it out of the Forest Service budget, even temporarily, then the Forest Service can't do its land management work, which gets rid of the hazardous fuel, gets rid of the diseased trees, takes care of the pests to prevent the next wave of forest fires.

This is very simple, folks. This is very simple.

The funding fix also talks about working in a collaborative way to build the collaborative relationships that have eluded us so far for our forestry problems.

The fix talks about working collaboratively on the NEPA process with folks, make sure it is done correctly, but in a way that the Forest Service can manage and get it done quickly.

It talks about set-asides for small areas that could be categorically excluded where there is already collaborative work being done on the urban-rural interface and, actually, some areas to promote wildlife habitat.

I mean, this is the type of thing that actually gets at what both the environmental community and the forest community need to have.

One last big point I think that gets ignored a lot in this discussion is the economic loss that occurs as a result of these forest fires. We could have a lot more money for tax resources if we got after these fires early on.

Right now, I have timber communities in my State where over 50 percent of the land is Federal forest lands that go up in smoke, that they could otherwise be harvesting or reducing that fuel load by thinning, to promote jobs, economic development, and tax revenues.

I think a small investment in this budget to offset larger costs later on, and adequately fight these fires, to protect rural America, is critical.

Right now, rural America is not getting its fair share. There is a lot of talk about 9/11 and making sure our first responders get the health care that they need and deserve for stepping in in a disaster situation in New York City.

Where is the stepping in to help my firefighters out west? These men and

women go into toxic situations, life-threatening situations, and they get no respect just because we are out west.

As the ranking member pointed out, and the chairman pointed out, these are devastating disasters, just as bad as tornados, just as bad as hurricanes. Where is the fairness to my western colleagues in getting their issue taken care of?

This devastates the communities. These rural communities are poor already. With these fires rampaging across the landscape, they get poorer quicker.

There is no Intel or Microsoft setting up in the middle of nowhere in the rural parts of my State and my district. They depend on natural resources, the good use of natural resources, resources that can be used for carbon sequestration by not having these fires.

I find it amazing that, in a budgetary discussion, we are trying to save money, not just in the short term, but in the long term, that we are having trouble getting this fire funding fix that is bipartisan. Even the White House is behind it.

We have an opportunity to get this done for a small amount of money that will be paid back over the next few years in spades. I think it is a shame that we can't get this thing done just instantaneously.

I hope the discussion tonight opens the eyes of some folks about the discrimination that is going on against rural America, particularly out west.

And I really, really, want to thank the ranking member and the chairman, who I have worked with closely over the years, a true friend, a friend of rural and forested America, for bringing this to our attention. Thank you very much.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman for lending your passion and your knowledge to this important debate tonight. And I share your hope, that we raise the level of awareness.

We are talking a lot about western forests, but I have to tell you, having an eastern forest, I represent the Fifth District of Pennsylvania; when these large wildfires occur out west, there is a large sucking sound of resources, both personnel and money, being taken out of our eastern forests.

These are monies that are used to make our forests healthy. These are monies that are used to do timber marketing, marketing of timber and timber sales so that we can generate revenue to our countries, our school districts. So these monies really are taken away from active management, and active management is the key in helping cut down on the amount of wildfires in our forest.

This involves mechanical thinning, hazardous fuel reduction projects and, of course, a sustainable amount of timber harvesting per the forced Allowable Sale Quantity, or ASQ.

Now these various activities are essential in order to help ensure that the

forest doesn't become an overgrown tinderbox. Areas that aren't properly maintained not only become tinderbox, as a risk of wildfires, but also for invasive species outbreaks.

I don't know of anyone in Congress that has more expertise on this than our next speaker. He is a professional forester. He brings tremendous education and experience to Washington. We are real proud to have him as a part of our team working on this issue, really leading on this issue.

Our next speaker is actually the author of H.R. 2647, which has been passed by the House of Representatives, the Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2015, so I am honored to yield to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN).

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania, and also thank him for his leadership on this issue, a very important issue, and one that he has a good grasp of that I wish the rest of our Federal Government could get a good grasp of.

I also would like to thank the ranking member for her remarks, and the gentleman from Oregon, for his remarks.

We do have a national treasure in our forests. The U.S. Forest Service manages over 193 million acres of forests and grasslands from Maine to Alaska.

The Forest Service was formed by President Teddy Roosevelt and his friend, Gifford Pinchot, who was the first Chief of the Forest Service. These men were true conservationists and naturalists. They understood the science of the forest. They understood the value of the forest, and they understood its contribution to society, so they worked to conserve that for future generations.

Roosevelt and Pinchot hold a special place in my heart. I grew up by the forests that were established by Roosevelt, and I studied at the Yale School of Forestry that was founded by Pinchot.

Teddy Roosevelt once said about our natural resources, he said that our Nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets, which it must turn over to the next generation, increased and not impaired in value.

Mr. Speaker, we are not behaving well as a Nation. We are decreasing and impairing the value of our forests.

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Our forests are not just an asset; they are a treasure, a treasure that provides beauty, makes clean air, purifies our water, provides wildlife habitat, and a variety of recreational activities and opportunities. Our forests store carbon and provide many of the products that we live in, that we learn from, and that we use to survive every day.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a Republican failure, and it is not a Democratic failure. It is a congressional and an agency failure that we have the power to correct.

Wildfires continue to sweep across the country. They are burning hotter

and faster than in years past. More than 9 million acres of Federal land burned this year alone. Costs to fight fires and the number of fires burning grows every year.

As has been mentioned so many times before, the Forest Service's biggest expense is firefighting. The costs of it have ballooned over the years. It is not just the cost of fighting fires, as the gentleman from Oregon said, that is the cost. We are destroying a valuable asset: 9 million acres of Federal land and timber that goes up in smoke. These products could be used. They have value to them. We are not only spending the money to fight the fires; we are losing valuable assets every year.

This year, Mr. Speaker, Congress had to appropriate an extra \$700 million to land management agencies to cover the cost of fire borrowing. The Forest Service is becoming a firefighting agency, unable to meet its mission of "caring for the land and serving people."

Fire borrowing is not the only problem, and I submit that it is actually not even the problem. It is the symptom of a problem. It is the result of our current management choice that each year is becoming less and less management. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of choosing not to manage.

Forests are dynamic, living organisms. They don't pay attention to what we say here in Washington, DC, or what we write in laws. The only thing forests know is to grow and fill their growing space and to absorb the sunlight. They fill the growing space, and they quit growing. Then they become weakened. They are subject to insect and disease attack. They die. We get debris on the forest floor. Lightning strikes, and the forest burns. If we choose not to manage the forests, then nature continues to manage. We don't have that luxury of saying that we are just not going to manage the forest.

Our land management policies have changed for the worse simply and mainly because we have not been able to manage. Red tape and lawsuits are harming our landscapes. Forests are overgrown, and they are unhealthy.

Healthy forests will lead to smaller fires that can be contained. A healthy forest puts less carbon in the atmosphere, and, in fact, it sequesters more carbon through new tree growth and reforestation. Simply by the biological growth curve, younger organisms grow faster so they are pulling more carbon out of the atmosphere. They are storing it in their trunks, in their leaves, and in their roots.

The good news is the House has been behaving well. The House produced and passed a good piece of legislation in H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act. Now, this isn't the end-all to fix the problems with our forests, but it is a great first step.

H.R. 2647 simultaneously ends fire borrowing in a fiscally responsible manner, but it also gives the Forest Service the tools it needs to create

healthy forests. Healthy forests are a winning situation. Everybody wins with a healthy forest. Wildlife wins, and sports and outdoor recreation enthusiasts win. We all win with cleaner air, and we all win with cleaner water. Our rural communities win with an economic benefit. There is not a downside to having a healthy forest. It is good for America to have healthy forests.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for us to put the policy in place so that we can have healthy forests. It is time for the Senate to behave. It is time for the Senate to act on H.R. 2647 so we can end fire borrowing and manage our forests.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman. I thank you for your leadership and bringing your expertise to Washington. It is great to serve with you, and I appreciate all the leadership that you are showing, not just on this issue but so many different issues that are good not just for the folks of Arkansas, but for the entire Nation. So thank you so much for being part of this Special Order tonight.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy forest is so incredibly important because a healthy forest represents, also, wealthy communities. Our rural communities are so dependent on the active, proper management of our national forests.

These national forests didn't always exist. At one time, our predecessors—some going back 100 years or more—came to the table with the local communities, and they made a commitment that for the good of the Nation they would create national forests.

Now, let's be clear. National forests are not national parks. They are completely different. National forests are not managed by the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service. National forests are managed by the Department of Agriculture, because they were set aside and established so that our Nation would always have an abundant, ready supply of timber. Timber was one of the initial industries that we had. It was so important to the past of our country, but important to the future of our country as well.

As Mr. WESTERMAN really articulated well, when you have a healthy forest, you have carbon sinks and you have filters. A lot of our watersheds originate in our national forests, so it is good for clean water if they are properly managed. It is good for clean air, and it is good for the economy.

Mr. Speaker, from time to time, I spend some time as a lay pastor and I will fill the pulpit. When I am talking to the churches, I talk about how a healthy church is like a healthy forest. If I go into a church and I see that everyone sitting in the pews has my hairline, a little bit of salt on the side here with gray hair, that is not a healthy church. It is just kind of one generation. Well, forests are the same way. If you want a healthy church, you need multiple generations in the pews. If you want a healthy forest, you need

multiple generations of forest because it is good for the wildlife, it is good for the birds, and it is good for the mammals, because they need different types of forests at different points in their maturity in order to support that wildlife.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that leads to putting pressure on certain species is, when we stop harvesting trees, we stop active management, because we know that almost every species, at different times in their life, need that kind of open area. They need time in young forest growth right through to more mature forest growth. Without that, these species can't be supported.

So there are all kinds of reasons, let alone the economic health of our rural communities. That was a promise that was made by our predecessors when they took this land out of the private sector and put it into the public sector. It was done with a promise that they would always do active management in such a way to generate the revenue to be able to backfill for those property taxes that would have been lost.

We have really failed at that as a nation. Our rural communities in and around our national forests are so challenged. Don't get me wrong. I think we have great people that are working for the Forest Service. I spend a lot of time with them. They are dedicated professionals.

I think the Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell, is an outstanding individual, has strong character. I like the Chief because his first job in the Forest Service was when he was going to college and he worked summers as a firefighter. I am an old firefighter. He has done all the jobs. He knows what it is to manage an active forest.

We have a lot of pressures, though, that the bureaucracy has placed on him. We have a lot of external pressures with special interest groups who claim they are trying to save the forests. But the end result of their actions where they limit, they sue, and they prevent forest plans from being implemented and prevent timber management from occurring, they are actually killing the forests.

Forests are living entities. If they are not actively managed, they will get sick and they will die. When they do, they become emitters of carbon. When a forest is healthy, it actually absorbs carbon. It is a carbon sink, as I said before.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about some of the statistics that show that much of our national forest system is unhealthy. In fact, the Forest Service has identified up to one-quarter of nearly 200 million acres of national forest land as a wildfire risk. We have seen a dramatic reduction, Mr. Speaker, of the harvest from our national forests from nearly 13 billion board feet in the 1980s to roughly 3 million board feet in past years.

Let me put that into perspective and share some statistics on that. Let's go

back to 1995. In 1995, Mr. Speaker, one-sixth of the Forest Service budget was used for wildfire management and mitigation. It was reasonable. At that point, when we were using one-sixth of the Forest Service budget, we were harvesting in 1995 3.8 billion board feet.

Let's fast-forward to 2015. Now, the numbers I am going to share with you are from August of 2015. I readily admit I don't have the past couple months in this, but at this point, the Forest Service is spending 50 percent of its budget on fighting wildfires—50 percent.

Think about 50 percent of your household, 50 percent of your family's budget, your business, or a local school. To take 50 percent of your budget just for this type of crisis management doesn't work. It just doesn't work.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have only projected to harvest, at that point, 2.4 billion board feet. It is a big part of the lack of active management. We need to provide the Forest Service tools to be able to help them do their jobs. The high-water mark was back in 1987 when we had 12.7 billion board feet harvested. That is a variance from this year of 10.3 billion board feet.

We are constantly talking about the economic crisis that we are in here, and we are. We have got a debt that has been out of control. I am very proud to be a part of a Republican-led Congress that, for a number of years, on the discretionary side, we have actually reduced our spending, and we are starting to get our arms wrapped around mandatory spending. So we are doing our job.

But there is a need for more resources, and we recognize that. There is a need for more revenue. We are literally burning that revenue up in our national forests each and every year, dramatically. How much revenue? I would have to say that, if you take, every year, 10.3 billion board feet, if that is the amount that we could get our annual harvesting to, you have to ask yourself: How much more healthy would the forest be?

If the forest is healthy, Mr. Speaker, so many fewer wildfires would occur at just an incredible cost, including the loss of lives. We have lost a tremendous number of American heroes, our firefighters from both the U.S. Forest Service but also volunteer firefighters like myself. Perhaps some professional firefighters have lost their lives because of the incident. It is just the crisis that we have in wildfires.

If we would increase our harvesting, we would increase the health of the forest, and we could reduce wildfires and that risk. We would also increase revenue. I am not prepared to tell you what the average value of a board foot in timber harvest off our national forests is. I know that varies greatly.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to represent the Allegheny National Forest. I am proud to say that it is actually the most profitable national forest in the country. It is kind of puny compared to

my colleagues out west. We are about 513,000 acres, but we have got the world's best hardwood cherry. Our hardwoods are what increase the value. I know that is a wide variance on what the value of 1 board foot in 2015 of timber harvested in our national forests is. But whatever that number is, multiply it by \$10.3 billion, and that is a lot of revenue that is owned by the taxpayers of this country—given the fact it is their national forest—that we could be bringing in.

Then the prosperity, Mr. Speaker. If we could unleash and get timber in closer to that sustainable rate, what that would do for our school districts, our kids, our families, and the jobs that would be stimulated in the forest products industry. It would just have an amazing impact, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as we examine these issues, Mr. Speaker, it becomes easier to see how everything is corrected. Trees which should have been harvested years ago have been allowed to become fuel for forest fires, leading to the rise in the acreage burned that we have seen in recent years.

There are many prospective solutions to this problem, including the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the farm bill. I am very proud that all the Members were involved with the farm bill. It was a great bipartisan bill that we did. It includes provisions to include improved forest management. So we have taken action. We have enacted into law some tools for the Forest Service.

There is just more that we need to do, Mr. Speaker. Those tools include an expedited process in the planning for projects and the reauthorization programs, such as the stewardship contracting and the Good Neighbor Authority. These all improve forest health, timber sales, and restoration.

Now, the House passed the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015, which Mr. WESTERMAN very appropriately talked about, in July.

□ 1915

The goal of this legislation was to provide the Forest Service with direction and the tools to address the challenges of litigation. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, we have forest plans that are about active timber management, but we have these outside groups that sue the government because the government reimburses their costs, even when they settle out of court.

That is not why the Equal Access to Justice Act was originally written; not for some group that is not a direct stakeholder in terms of having property that is in the forest or adjoined to the forest. But it is litigation, it is funding, no doubt about it, it is the process, it is basic timber harvesting, and essential active management. I will come back to some of those in just a bit. I want to share some outcomes from the most recent hearing that we had with the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee.

I am proud to cosponsor this important piece of legislation. I believe that it should become law. It will have a major impact on reducing catastrophic wildfires across the Nation.

The district that I represent, Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District, is the home of the Allegheny National Forest, the only national forest in the Commonwealth. It encompasses more than 513,000 acres across four counties, and for generations, it has formed the economic bedrock of small communities in that region.

In some ways, the Allegheny is very different from our western forests—I have mentioned some of those—but it has many similar challenges, including a lack of timbering, reduced county budgets, and outbreaks of invasive species.

Reforming the way we deal with wildfires and forestry management will have a positive effect in forests and in rural communities, not just in the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania, but, quite frankly, across the Nation.

I look forward to hearing more from my colleagues, and taking opportunities in the future to host more of these Special Orders, in looking at ways so that we can confront the very real challenges in national forest regions.

I wanted to share some of the outcomes from our most recent hearing that we had on this issue back on October 8. We had some great speakers come in, witnesses, that provided testimony from all over the country. I will just share with you, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that would be helpful, things that we need to consider. I am going to start in the category of increasing the efficiency and the effectiveness of forest management that we have, starting with giving an opportunity for State primacy.

This was an idea that came out from a rancher in Washington State. The States tend to have less bureaucracy, they have less of a target on their back by these outside groups that are suing. So the State's success at increasing active timber management and a higher level of forest health. But State primacy is something that was an idea that came out that needs to, at least, have further consideration.

Expanding what we call categorical exemption from NEPA analysis. That doesn't mean that we are not looking at the environmental impacts. That couldn't be further from the truth. For where it makes sense, what we need to do is provide a categorical exemption from a full-blown NEPA analysis, but we need to do that more on a landscape perspective, so a landscape management. We are talking large scale, 100,000 acres or more, being able to more efficiently, being able to more effectively, manage the forest.

We have provided some categorical exemption opportunities within the farm bill to the Forest Service for regular maintenance activities, where they had to spend a tremendous

amount of resources just to clear a power line or to do trail maintenance, or replant after a forest fire, wildfire. Quite frankly, their sister agencies: the Bureau of Land Management and the Corps of Engineers, they didn't have to do that. So this is just kind of common sense.

We need to protect our active management funds. We can't be dipping into the funds that we use to manage the forest. That is what happened. That is what I referred to as that large sucking sound. It is not just resources. My forest supervisor, who does a great job, she was detailed. She went out west for a period of time. She wasn't on our forest doing her job because of the need for her expertise in the west during one of those wildfires this past year in the west. We need to protect our active management funds.

There are some things that came out: a recommendation for larger air tankers to be able to deal with the size and the scale of the wildfires that are out there. We need to, obviously, reduce this litigation. Out of 311 projects this past year, 16 wound up in the courts. That is a significant number. Quite frankly, it is not necessary. Unfortunately, it has become a fundraising scheme for the most part. It is not contributing towards forest health. It, actually, is deteriorating our forest health. We have an increase in invasive species. We are burning up our forest at a record level.

When you burn forest, you ruin that water filter, you impact water quality, you impact as a carbon sink. So we need to reduce the litigation and take steps to be able to do that.

We do need personnel, there is no doubt about it. We have 49 percent fewer foresters than just in 2010. It is our professional foresters, the silviculturists, who are out—of knowing how to mark the timber, of knowing when to harvest the timber when it is at peak value. That is an asset owned by the American people. We shouldn't be waiting until that tree blows over, burns down, or is eaten by some type of bug, invasive specie, until we harvest it. We should harvest it really at its peak value. That is demonstrating a fiduciary responsibility for the American people with this asset.

And then certainly we need more collaborative work. Again, H.R. 2647 would achieve that.

So that is more efficient, more effective forest management.

Let me look briefly at response. We do need to fund this appropriately. I am a supporter of a concept that would look at larger fires, more widespread. I don't know how we gauge that—by acreage or dollar value lost or dollars needed. Those really are natural disasters. They are as every bit a natural disaster as an earthquake, a hurricane, or a tornado. Those larger fires should be dealt with as natural disasters.

And then other fires on a smaller scale, underneath whatever that

threshold is set, then let's do that through regular order with the Forest Service budget with what we appropriate. There is a definite difference. That would be a recommendation. That was something that came out of a discussion.

And then safe harbor for mutual aid. One rancher from Washington talked about a Forest Service where there was a—I don't know if it was a State or a private individual with a bulldozer—a CAT came up to the Forest Service line. Two situations. One time they asked the Forest Service person, who was working under the direction of somebody in the bureaucracy. They welcomed him in, and they saved a tremendous spread of that fire. And then another time where the Forest Service personnel said: No, we have to fill out the permits first. Well, you have got the wildlife burning, but we have got to fill out the permits, and we have got to do the paperwork. I am not judging that Forest Service employee because they were probably doing whatever they were told to do, and there was more catastrophic loss there. So some type of safe harbor that allows better use of mutual aid.

I want to yield to a friend of mine because it kind of speaks to the efficiency and the effectiveness on the Equal Access to Justice Act. This is the law that we kind of talked about that really has encouraged radical environmental groups to file lawsuits and stop forest plans from occurring.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) to speak on the topic.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Look, we are here, and I am glad to hear what has come out of the Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee. I just wanted to talk about that because you mentioned the losses in transparency on that open book. It does that. It has been something that has passed through this House. We just passed it again last week. It really just shines the light on this access issue and the Federal government—what we end up paying sometimes for these groups to sue and what our departments are paying out.

What you are talking about is a healthy management of our forests, but it is also a healthy management of our resources. We are setting forth what we need to do as priorities in Congress. As someone from northeast Georgia, with a lot of forestry land—Chattahoochee National Forest—this is something we can work together on. We are glad to be a part of that.

The support that you have done and the leadership that you have given is incredible, and we want to continue to thank you for that and be a part of it. That is just part of our transparency issue we have with the Federal Government, and also these lawsuits that have been coming out, and we can do that together.

I appreciate the gentleman for yielding. I want to commend him for the work that he is doing and the work of our forestries around the country.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I appreciate the gentleman's perspective on that.

The Equal Access to Justice Act was a righteous piece of legislation when it was passed. But it was passed to be able to protect those who are kind of landowners, who were the big brother—the National Forest, or the Federal Government, was impinging on your private property rights.

We all know that most individuals don't have a whole lot of money to be able to defend themselves. Unfortunately, the Federal Government has the pockets of every taxpayer. It was never meant to be hijacked by the way it has been. I appreciate the leadership of the gentlewoman from Wyoming (Mrs. LUMMIS), who has been a great leader, championing kind of just returning to the original intent of the Equal Access to Justice Act. I look forward to working with the gentleman on that.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Open book access is just a great thing, and I appreciate it.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, I have one last category I want to cover here, and that is how we increase the markets, because you have to have a place to sell timber that is harvested. There are a number of things that we can do.

Just quickly, we need to expand our trade. That is why I am so pleased with the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The trade ambassador and his chief negotiators actually have eliminated basically all of the tariffs that really hindered our ability to export whether it was raw timber or boards or pellets. It was just very difficult in the past. This trade proposal, members of the subcommittee and members of the full Agriculture Committee worked very closely with the trade ambassador to make sure that that was one of our priorities that was achieved, and it looks like it has been achieved. I think that is going to increase markets. We need to do that with all of our trade agreements.

We need to expand the use of timber products within the green building standards, LEED standards. It is an original renewable, but it was excluded from those. It makes no sense whatsoever.

We need to develop the lamination technology that has taken timber, and being able to use that really for skyscraper type construction very successfully. The research is done by our U.S. Forest Services, as well as our land grant universities, such as my alma mater of Penn State. There is great research being done, actually supported through the farm bill in terms of forest services, forest products.

We need to encourage and develop the woody biomass of biofuels, taking that timber, that fiber, to use it for chemicals, to use it for fuel.

We need to prevent the loss of market infrastructure that results in no

beds or low beds for timber sales. In some parts of our country, our sawmills have been decimated. As small businesses, we need to help people with small businesses keep that foothold that we have and regain it.

Those are just a few of the things—all not my ideas. Those all came out of our hearing with the October 8 subcommittee that we had on wildfires.

I very much appreciate the bipartisan participation tonight by my colleagues on this very important issue. I think we have done some really good things with the farm bill to help our forest products industry. Again, this truly is about the health of the forest. It is about revenue for the country, but it is about the prosperity of rural America.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have this Special Order.

I yield back the balance of my time.

SONGWRITER EQUITY ACT

THE SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KELLY of Mississippi). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) for 30 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is good to be back on the floor of the House. I am thrilled tonight to be surrounded with my friends and colleagues, and to be part on championing a call that is close to my heart, and should be for every Member of Congress. Because we are dealing with songs and songwriters and the special place that they have in American life, and really in the world.

The amazing thing is how the songs that come from the hearts of many from Nashville, where I have friends tonight, Rob and Lance and Lee Thomas, and the rest, they are watching others across the country are songwriters, who are very interested in what goes on here. Because, amazingly enough, here in Washington, DC, as the tentacles spread out, you come to find out that, even in songwriting, Washington has its grip on it.

□ 1930

I just want to point out for those who may be watching—now, this is a quote. This doesn't come from me. It comes from Kevin Kadish. You may know Kevin. If you like to listen to a little bit of music, he happened to have a little, small hit with Meghan Trainor, "All About That Base," and Miley Cyrus' "Two More Lonely People." He made a comment. He said that no one is trying to put Pandora or Spotify out of business. We just want a fair market value for our blood, sweat, and tears.

This is something that, for me, is very special because, over the next 30 minutes, you are going to hear about a million and a half songwriters, publishers, and composers across the Nation and how the current music licensing regime is causing them to be paid well below market value.

Now, as a conservative, one thing I believe is that the government has a role—it has a limited constitutional role—especially when it comes to the ultimate of the small businesses: the entrepreneurs. Those are some of our songwriters and composers. The Federal Government should not have its thumb on the scale, and that is what we are seeing tonight. So you are going to hear about that as we go along. The government's heavy hand in this industry needs to go.

We have got another issue here of the Songwriter Equity Act. We have got some folks I want to have talk tonight; but I want to introduce this, and they are all cosponsors of this act. It is H.R. 1283.

When I start talking about this tonight, for those watching, there are three ways songwriters get paid. I am going to make it very simple. There are three ways they get paid: Two of which the government has its thumb on and—guess what?—one of which they don't. Does anybody want to take a guess? Raise your hand. Not my colleagues, you know this. Will anyone raise his hand really quickly? Which way is the fairest way? It is when they are able to negotiate on their own. That is the sync license.

So, with the Songwriter Equity Act, it removes the antiquated evidentiary standard; it adopts a fair rate standard for reproduction, or mechanical licenses. Why? To ensure that songwriters, composers, and publishers are appropriately compensated for the use of their intellectual property.

Before I get ready to turn it over to some of my friends who are here with me tonight and who are part of cosponsoring this, the issue before us is: We all can point back to that time. It is a song on the radio. This is the time of year, this holiday season. Or it may be a long drive in the summer. Or it may be sitting outside, but there is that song and that special someone. That song comes on, and you hear it, and the performer is performing it wonderfully. It may have been the performer, or it may have been something else. But a lot of times, there is someone who is sitting in a room or is sitting somewhere, and what comes out of their hand and onto a piece of paper has come out of their heart and their mind and their mouth. It has affected our hearts and our minds, and it has affected us even to this day.

You can think about those songs. That is what makes songwriters special. That is what makes this cause something that we need to fight for.

You have heard them on the radio. Our radio stations have played these songs. For a State trooper's kid, who grew up in northeast Georgia, to listen to the radio, that was my escape. Between that and books, I traveled the world and always longed to see it, and those songwriters took me there. This is why we are fighting today. It is because we believe that what these artists have is intellectual property. What

comes out of the their minds, what comes out and is expressed on paper and is then translated many times through artists' singing across the world, is worth protecting. It is intellectual property. It is as much intellectual property as is this property of my phone in my hand, and we have got to understand that.

Tonight, I have some friends with me. We will have a lot of time to talk about this. I want to start off up north a little bit. My friend from North Dakota, KEVIN CRAMER, is here. We have talked about this issue, and I am glad he has joined me here tonight.

One of the things that we talked about, Kevin, as you came on the floor, you said, You know, it is just about fairness. I think that is a great way to put it. It is just about fairness. So I am happy to yield to the gentleman to talk about this.

Mr. CRAMER. I thank the gentleman, my friend from Georgia, and others who have carried the ball on this issue for some time.

A special thanks to our friend from Tennessee, MARSHA BLACKBURN. I serve on the same committee with her, and I have learned a great deal about this and other things from Representative BLACKBURN.

Mr. Speaker, I was reminded of a quote by the songwriting and song performing phenom Taylor Swift, who said: I think songwriting is the ultimate form of being able to make anything that happens in your life productive.

Certainly, with whatever happens in your life, whether it is sad or glorious or joyful or heavy, you can write a song. It could be productive, but that doesn't mean it is profitable. If something is not profitable, the productivity of it will certainly wane over time, and we will be robbed of that very important piece of the music value chain: Where the product begins, which is in the heart and mind of the songwriter.

One of the things I love so much about this job—and I am happy to admit it to my friends in the Chamber tonight—is all of the things that you are forced to learn that you never thought were important before you learned about them. It is kind of amazing. Here we are, 435 colleagues, representing, roughly, 700,000 people. In my case, I represent the entire State of North Dakota. We think about things like agriculture and coal and oil. We think about things like highway bills, but we don't necessarily think a lot about songwriting. We think a lot about markets. We think a lot about fairness. We think a lot about regulation.

I was a regulator for nearly 10 years before becoming a Member of Congress. I regulated monopoly industries, and I was a rate regulator. When I was a rate regulator, setting the rates for electricity rates or natural gas, I had a lot of tools at my disposal, not the least of which was all of the evidence that the