

parties to the conflict. This was a major contribution toward restoring peace to that region.

Furthermore, on October 22 of this year, Belarus released all of its very few political prisoners.

In response, the European Union and the United States have temporarily lifted economic sanctions. Hopefully, that temporary suspension of economic sanctions will become permanent as Belarus continues to improve its standing.

Exchanging ambassadors, as my resolution calls for, is a major step forward in the right direction. I ask my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution, which I will submit to the Congress right now.

COMMONSENSE GUN REFORM

(Ms. LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because passing commonsense gun legislation should really not be a partisan issue. What our country needs is commonsense gun reform, but many in this Chamber won't even take the first step: taking guns out of the hands of terrorists.

Time and time again, Republicans have voted to block debate. Let me say that again: a debate. They won't even let us discuss Congressman PETER KING's Denying Firearms and Explosives to Dangerous Terrorists Act, otherwise known as H.R. 1076. That is simply outrageous. We should debate, yes, and we should vote up or down on this important bill.

This bill, which I am proud to co-sponsor, would close a dangerous loophole that allows individuals on the government's no-fly list to legally purchase guns. Let me emphasize this. These are people who are deemed too dangerous to fly on planes, but they can and do purchase guns. If they are too dangerous to fly on an airplane, why aren't they too dangerous to have a weapon that fires 800 rounds per minute?

My Democratic colleagues and I remain committed to blocking dangerous individuals from buying guns, and we remain committed to stopping the senseless violence that has already taken too many lives in this country. It is past time to listen to the American people and not to the NRA.

REFORMING AMERICA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, just a few minutes ago I returned from the White House, where President Barack Obama signed historic reforms for elementary and secondary education into law.

I was proud to serve on the conference committee that was respons-

sible for settling the differences between the House and the Senate versions of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which has replaced No Child Left Behind.

This is legislation which has been years in the making and which will finally put the control of education back into the hands of our States, our schools, and, of course, our parents and teachers across the Nation.

It also calls for the U.S. Department of Education to study how title I funds are distributed. I have long been concerned that children are put at a disadvantage based on the populations of their school districts rather than on a concentration of poverty. I am hopeful that this study will make the argument for a more equitable method of distributing these funds to areas that are deeply affected by poverty.

This is a bill that I believe will make a real difference for students across the Nation. I was proud to see it gain overwhelming bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate.

AMERICA'S GUN VIOLENCE EPIDEMIC

(Mr. JEFFRIES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. JEFFRIES. Mr. Speaker, we were elected to protect and serve the American people against all enemies, foreign and domestic. One of the best ways that we can uphold this sacred duty is to deal with the gun violence epidemic that we have in America, which claims the lives of more than 11,000 people each year.

One of the things that we should be doing is passing legislation to prevent individuals who are on the FBI's terrorist watch list, because they are suspected terrorists, from being able to purchase guns. To me, this seems to be a no-brainer.

If you are not able to fly because you are a suspected terrorist, you should not be able to purchase an AK-47, an AR-15, or another weapon of mass destruction which is not used to hunt deer, but is used to hunt human beings.

It is time for House Republicans to stop functioning as wholly owned subsidiaries of the NRA. It is time to cut the puppet strings from the gun lobby. It is time to do the business of the American people and pass sensible gun violence prevention legislation.

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT IS NOW LAW

(Mr. ALLEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I applaud the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

This legislation passed the House and the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law today by the President. Education is

not a partisan issue. At a time of political gridlock, I am proud to see both bodies and both parties come together to improve our education system.

The Every Student Succeeds Act repeals No Child Left Behind, gets rid of 49 wasteful and ineffective programs, and eliminates the Secretary of Education's coercion of States into adopting Common Core standards.

Most importantly, this legislation gets Washington out of our local classrooms and it restores control back to the school districts, teachers, and parents. These are the folks who know what our children need to succeed, not bureaucrats who are thousands of miles away.

As the son of two educators, I know that the future of Georgia's 12th District education system belongs in Georgia, not in Washington. As a member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, I am proud to see the Every Student Succeeds Act as the law of the land.

UPHOLDING THE SECOND AMENDMENT

(Mr. YOUNG of Alaska asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, given the challenges we face today with the economy and the labor force, I have watched since December 2 so much dishonesty on this floor concerning the actions on December 2 and the ability for terrorists to purchase weapons automatically.

FBI Director James Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee that every time someone buys a weapon it is run through the FBI and they are notified if someone is on the no-fly list.

I am a little concerned with the other side of the aisle as they keep talking about having to protect our public when, in turn, they are taking away the Constitution of our Nation.

If the FBI is sent this information, it is reviewed. If the terrorists are actually buying weapons and walking the streets, they should be arrested, but they are not.

You can get on the no-fly list. I personally have been on the no-fly list. It took me 6 months to get off of it. They didn't tell me who put me on it, why I was put on it, and what it was the result from. Six months.

Yes, I am an NRA board member. But to have people say that terrorists are running around buying guns is an outright lie. I will say that on the floor. It is not true. It is part of the Constitution. We should uphold the Constitution.

When coming into office, I swore to uphold the Constitution. What they are talking about doing is against the Constitution. I will fight until my dying breath to make sure that we have the ability to retain the Second Amendment.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Clerk of the House of Representatives:

OFFICE OF THE CLERK,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, December 10, 2015.
Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,
The Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to the permission granted in Clause 2(h) of Rule II of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Clerk received the following message from the Secretary of the Senate on December 10, 2015 at 9:15 a.m.:

That the Senate passed with an amendment H.R. 2820.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

KAREN L. HAAS.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 39 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1445

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LOUDERMILK) at 2 o'clock and 48 minutes p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

SECURING FAIRNESS IN REGULATORY TIMING ACT OF 2015

Mr. TIBERI. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3831) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to extend the annual comment period for payment rates under Medicare Advantage, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3831

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

This Act may be cited as the "Securing Fairness in Regulatory Timing Act of 2015".

SEC. 2. EXTENDING THE ANNUAL COMMENT PERIOD FOR PAYMENT RATES UNDER MEDICARE ADVANTAGE.

Section 1853(b)(2) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395w-23(b)(2)) is amended—

(1) by inserting "(or, in 2017 and each subsequent year, at least 60 days)" after "45 days"; and

(2) by inserting "(in 2017 and each subsequent year, of no less than 30 days)" after "opportunity".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TIBERI) and the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMPSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. TIBERI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise in support of H.R. 3831, the Securing Fairness in Regulatory Timing Act of 2015. This is a small but really important piece of legislation. I am pleased to have the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMPSON), my friend, here to discuss this important measure.

The House passed this measure earlier this year, in June, by unanimous consent. Now, we return to the bill to add the technical corrections asked for by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Senate so we can send this bill to the President's desk before the end of the year.

Today, the Medicare Advantage program, known by many as the MA program, serves more than 16 million seniors across the United States of America, including my mom and dad. Enrollment has increased more than three-fold in the past 10 years and is expected to nearly double in the next 10 years.

To ensure that seniors in MA plans across the country are able to continue to receive the high-quality care that they deserve, CMS is expected to pay about \$156 billion to more than 3,600 MA plans this year alone. That amounts to nearly 30 percent of overall Medicare spending.

Typically, every year CMS sends out what it calls a rate notice to plans and Medicare Advantage companies that details the various payment rates, as well as benefit changes that the agency intends to make for the following plan year that impacts people like my mom and dad. This notice follows the standard process of a draft notice. It gets published; then the public has a certain amount of time to submit comments and questions; and then the agency publishes a final notice based on that feedback that they receive.

However, MA and Part D aren't treated the same as the other major payment systems within Medicare itself. Right now, the current process takes about 45 days, but only 15 of those days are allotted for the commenting portion; 15 days for thousands of plans, millions of stakeholders to submit comments on proposed changes to a program that amounts to one-third of all Medicare spending.

I could almost understand this if the rate notice were a short and concise document, if it were easy to understand and simple to implement. But it is not. In fact, the rate notice has grown from around 16 pages in 2006 to

nearly 150 pages this year. That is over a 900 percent increase. All the while, the time for the public comment period has remained static, exactly the same.

This means less and less time for the plans and Congress to conduct the necessary review in order to provide CMS with the kind of feedback that would better help the agency assess the impact of their proposed changes to consumers. This is important because without accurate feedback, CMS could inadvertently move forward with a proposed change to the Medicare Advantage program that might negatively impact those seniors—again, like my mom and dad—who depend on these plans for access to their providers, to their doctors.

The legislation before us is simple, and it is straightforward. It extends the public notice period from 45 days to 60 days. Therefore, it would double the extension of the comment period from 15 days to 30 days. This is a common-sense, good-government fix we can make that will give plans more time to understand the changes that CMS proposes and other constructive feedback in order to make the Medicare Advantage program, overall, more responsive to senior citizens' needs.

I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to pass this legislation again and send it to the Senate so we can get it to the President's desk.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 3831, the Securing Fairness in Regulatory Timing Act of 2015. Every year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services publishes its Medicare Advantage call letter and rate notice, which outlines payment rates and changes for the nearly 2,000 plans that serve our most vulnerable population.

Nearly 10 years ago, the call letter and rate notice were less than 20 pages long. However, since then, enrollment in Medicare Advantage has nearly tripled, from 5.4 million to 16 million. Medicare Advantage policies have become more complex, and the call letter and rate notice has grown nearly ten-fold, sometimes up to over 200 pages long.

At the same time, the time between the publishing of these draft notices and the final notices, which is currently 45 days, has remained unchanged. During this 45-day period, in which there are only 15 days to comment on the proposed changes in the program, plans, stockholders, members, and staff, are expected to review 150 pages of regulatory changes and understand the impacts of those proposed policy changes on a program that provides essential medical care to over a third of Medicare beneficiaries.

We know from our experience, every February and March, that this does not lend itself to an efficient, effective, nor transparent process. Moreover, it