

They have lifted what they could on the travel ban. Americans are allowed to go. Today I am real excited to learn that both countries have agreed to begin commercial air service, scheduled air service. You have had to go on charter flights. I believe your city of Oakland, California, is one of those cities that is designated as a scheduled airline airport so people can fly directly from Oakland, California, to Havana to visit.

We have opened up a claims process, and we need to do more particularly in Cuba on human rights processes. On global health, Cuba and the United States got together jointly to help the Haitians with the critical needs that Haiti has in their delivery of medicine and care to that really poor country so devastated by the earthquake.

Mr. Speaker, what I am very excited about, frankly, is that Cuba has hosted probably one of the most important discussions going on in the world, and that is how to end the longest revolutionary war, the best financed revolutionary war in the history of the world, which is the FARC, supported by all the drugs in Colombia; and the Colombian Government and the FARC rebels have been sitting down in Cuba and working out a very complicated “how do we end a war,” “how do we get you back into civil society,” “how do we stop the violence.”

With that, and with the recognition of Cuba, it is the first time that an entire hemisphere, the higher hemisphere in this world, has been in diplomatic relations and peaceful relations with no country fighting another country within the hemisphere. What a great model for the rest of the world, and what a great model to show those countries in conflict, internal conflict, that if FARC and Colombian Government can sit down and work out a peaceful resolution, then any country can do that.

So I want to thank you and celebrate today. December 17 will be a day I will not only remember as my wife's birthday. We will remember it as the day that the Cubans and the Americans started breaking the cold war, the frozen foreign policy.

BARBARA LEE, you had a lot to do with it.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Congressman FARR. Let me thank you for laying out much of the history and the rationale for what seems so simple, to normalize relations between our country and Cuba.

And December 17 marks another milestone, and that is the release of our good friend, Alan Gross. He and Judy Gross, of course, are very excited about the forward agenda that we have here in Congress to lift the embargo and to lift the travel ban. Also, it is a day that we just want to say to Alan that a year later we are really pleased that he is home with his family. We salute Alan Gross, the people of Cuba, and our own government for making sure that this happened on December 17 of last year.

Mr. FARR. Yes. You were so instrumental. Think about it. A year ago, Alan Gross was on a plane coming back after spending 5 years—longer—in a Cuban prison. You and I had the chance to visit him there. As we knew, his state was frail, and if he hadn't gotten out, I really worried about him.

I saw him the other day here on the Hill, and he looked just fantastic. His spirit is back, and what a great spokesman for America and for foreign policy that countries can resolve differences.

Ms. LEE. Absolutely. Thank you, Congressman FARR.

I now yield to Congresswoman KAREN BASS, who has been a great leader for many, many years. In the day, I think Congresswoman BASS was really very clear on why we needed normal relations and should have normal relations between their country and the United States. It is in our own national interests to do that. She certainly knows that and has been before a lot of people very involved in ending the embargo.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Congresswoman LEE.

I want to applaud your leadership and the leadership of Congressman FARR. We will miss him, as this is his last session in Congress.

For years, you have worked to have normal relations between the United States and Cuba. Although I have only been here for 5 years, I know that you have put in many, many years working to see that our two nations cooperated. It is really amazing if you think that we are only 90 miles away and where else is there in the world where we have two countries that are so close but yet we have not really been able to communicate and have normal relations? So I am happy to celebrate this 1-year anniversary, and I look forward to our nations continuing to work together.

There are a few things that I would like to mention: the fact that even in spite of the embargo and the travel ban, over 100,000 Americans visited Cuba every year before the policy change. But Americans had to go through all sorts of changes in order to have the opportunity to visit the island. Now, with travel opening up—and I am glad that the flights will go from your city, Congresswoman LEE. They will also go from Los Angeles, direct from Los Angeles to Havana.

Oftentimes when we think of establishing and reestablishing relations in Cuba, we think about it from the vantage point of what the United States has to offer the island, and certainly we can talk long about that. But the Cubans actually have things to offer the United States. I can think of several examples.

Right now, there are over 50 U.S. students that are studying medicine for free in Cuba. The only obligation that those students have is that, when they come back to the United States after graduating, they have to commit to practice medicine in an underserved area.

The Cubans have been pioneering medication and a vaccine to prevent lung cancer. They have also been able to develop a medication that has helped reduce the need to amputate limbs secondary to diabetic neuropathy. They have developed this medication, and that is something that we could use from the Cubans.

So I am looking forward to our continuing to establish and deepen our ties with the island.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the gentlewoman from California, once again, for being here and for her leadership. We have legislation, H.R. 3238, to lift the embargo; H.R. 664; and H.R. 403, also to lift the embargo and travel ban.

I yield back the balance of my time.

THE PRICE OF CIVILIZATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SANFORD) for 30 minutes.

Mr. SANFORD. Mr. Speaker, I want to dovetail for one moment on the conversation that was just held by my colleagues from across the aisle. I think that they have been courageous. I think about SAM FARR and I think about BARBARA LEE, and what they have pushed for, ultimately, has less to do with Cuba—though they might argue otherwise—and more to do with American rights.

I would give, just as an example, that this whole notion of a travel moratorium as it now exists from the United States to Cuba is nonsensical—they have been bold enough to point that out—and many other things for quite some number of years. They have led the way on this issue.

I just want to applaud them because, if you stop and think about it, as an American, you can travel to any country on the globe—except for one. You can go to North Korea. You can go to Syria. You can go to Iran, and you could go to Iraq. It may not work out well for you, but you can go to any place on the globe except for a place roughly 60 miles off of Key West. That is a remarkable infringement on American liberty at the end of the day. So I thank them for what they have done not only on behalf of the Cuban people, but, ultimately, to advance this larger notion of individual liberty here in this country.

With that having been said, I also want to touch for one moment on the Progressive Hour that preceded my time. It was said during that hour that taxes “are the cost of living in a civilized society.” I think the question that all of us would have to ask is: How civilized a society do you want to live in then?

I have told my boys about this magazine that they will one day read, entitled, Reader's Digest, and when they poll the different readers, they came out with the finding that Americans would be roughly happy with one-quarter of their wages garnished and sent

off to the world of taxes, whether at the Federal, State, or local level.

The reality, as is pointed out by a guy by the name of Laurence Kotlikoff, who studied a thing called generational accounting at Boston University, is that a child born into America today will face roughly an 82 percent tax liability, which is to say, if that is the cost of civilization, many people would say: I want a much less civilized society, because 82 percent does not allow me to be civilized in the way to offer Christmas presents to my kids at Christmastime, help out at the local church or charity, pay for my kids' education, or all the other things that go with life.

So, yes, we recognize that taxes are a part of civilized society, but the degree of tax load that faces this next generation is not only astounding, but it ultimately brings with it the roots of our civilization's undoing if we don't watch out, which will bring me to what I wanted to talk about just a moment ago.

In the military, they have a thing called an after-action review. An after-action review is simply saying: Let's look at what just occurred and analyze for one moment what did we get right and what did we get wrong and how might we not get it a little bit better the next time around.

In that light, I want to look at the omnibus bill. Debate is done. We will vote on it tomorrow morning, and we will head for Christmas and holiday seasons across this country. In that regard, I offer empathy to HAL ROGERS, the Appropriations team, and all in leadership who were involved in the negotiating process, which—I get it—was hard. I think that it is easy to Monday afternoon quarterback these kind of things, and my attempt to analyze is not an attempt to do that. There was a plus and minus, in essence, for every Member of Congress.

There is something to like in a trillion-dollar bill, and there is something to dislike in a trillion-dollar bill of 2,000 pages. So when I go down the pluses and the minuses, coming from Charleston, South Carolina, you would look at something like Guantanamo Bay, and you would say: I think it is a plus that there is another prohibition on domestically relocating high-value targets from Guantanamo Bay to the United States of America. I think that makes sense. It is, in fact, the third prohibition that this Congress has put in place. The other two the President has signed, and my hope is that he will certainly adhere to that here for the last couple months of his Presidency.

I think that fully funding the military, which is a core function of the Federal Government, is a plus. I could go with a number of other pluses. I will mention minuses, though.

I don't think what should have been done was done with regard to Syrian refugees.

I don't think what could have been done was done with regard to Planned Parenthood.

I look at a program like the Maritime SEA program—\$5.4 million a ship. It is corporate welfare if you want to cut to the chase. I think that is a real challenge. Programs like that shouldn't have been in this bill.

I look at the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015. I think it is an infringement upon our Fourth Amendment rights as Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I think that civil liberties are really the foundation to every other liberty that we enjoy as Americans, and I think that there are real challenges there. The Founding Fathers were so deliberate about putting in place civil liberties because they didn't like the idea of a British soldier coming into a house and rooting around long enough until they found something to charge you with. I think what we have in this bill is an extension of that infringement that was guarded against at the time of the founding of the Republic.

I look at the crude oil export ban coming down. I know that is viewed as a positive thing within the Chamber. As a coastal resident, I view it as a negative. To me, it is a bit of an oxymoron. To say, "I tell you what. We are going to ship oil offshore, but we are now going to begin to open up for exploration areas that had been prohibited, not been open for exploration, off the Carolinas under the guise of energy independence, but we are going to take what we might find there and ship it to France," to me, that just doesn't make sense. I struggle with that.

I struggle with the EPA ruling. The EPA has made a giant territorial grab with regard to waters—or nonwaters, if you want to call them that—of the United States. So I think, again, more could have been done.

For those different reasons, I am ultimately going to vote "no" on this tomorrow.

□ 1615

I think that, in terms of my after-action review, the point is not to pick the pluses and the minuses because they are in a bill this big, but to highlight the way in which the taxpayer always loses when you end up with a giant amalgamated total at the end of the session.

An omnibus bill inherently is bad for the taxpayer because it gives everybody in the world of politics a reason to vote for it or to vote against it. Whoever comes up at your townhall meeting or at the rotary club back home, you are able to say: I was for you. I was with you.

Because there is unlimited disguise in one's ability to be for or against a Christmas tree sort of bill with as many ornaments as this one has on it.

I just want to highlight that this bill ultimately is a plus of about \$50 billion. \$50 billion, if broken out across the United States, is about \$400 of additional spending per family.

The question I think we each have to ask, as taxpayer advocates, is: Is an-

other \$400 going to Washington in line with what my taxpayers want or would they rather have that money at home to spend, indeed, on Christmas presents under the tree or a host of other family needs?

If you add to that the entitlement spending that is going to occur at the same time—that is roughly about another \$194 billion—you begin to look at startling increases that continue to progress.

I look at this bill and I say that the one loser in this equation is the taxpayer, regardless of what a good job HAL ROGERS and others on the appropriation team attempted to do because of the nature of the bill—the fact is that we are looking at an omnibus bill.

It is my Christmas tree wish, as we go into the season, that next year come this time we are not going to face an omnibus bill. Speaker RYAN has promised that that will be the case and we will go back to so-called regular order.

I just want to emphasize that it is vital from a taxpayer standpoint that we do so. Because, if we don't, the undoing of our civilization is being laid at rest not with the threat of terrorism. Terrorism brings with it the capacity to hurt a nation, to kill thousands or to kill hundreds. It doesn't bring with it the ability to bring down a nation.

What brings the ability to bring down a nation is rot from within. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said it best when he was asked what is the biggest threat to America. His answer was not the Chinese, not terrorism, not a whole host of threats around the globe. His answer was the American debt.

The omnibus bill that we will pass tomorrow is a threat with regard to the growth of entitlement spending, domestic discretionary spending, and overall spending. It is vital that we get this process right next year.

Mr. Speaker, I do wish you a Merry Christmas.

Before I call it quits, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS), who I also wish a Merry Christmas to.

HONORING DR. MEG WHITLEY

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Merry Christmas to my dear colleague from South Carolina as well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a constituent who has put her beliefs into action.

Dr. Meg Whitley has dedicated her life to meeting the needs of her community. She is a professor emerita at Young Harris College in northeast Georgia, where she teaches French and Spanish.

In addition to empowering her students through education, she has spent the past 25 years leading CROP Hunger Walks to raise awareness and funds to help end hunger and poverty in both northeast Georgia and around the world.

Through the efforts of Dr. Whitley, the Towns County Food Pantry, the Clay County Food Pantry, the SAFE

House in Blairsville, food boxes in Suches, numerous families, and other non-profits, emergency needs were served.

When Dr. Whitley is asked about her efforts and how long she will continue to give selflessly to our community, her response is always: Have we put an end to hunger yet? Also, by the way, Mr. Speaker, as of today, they have met their \$200,000 goal.

Northeast Georgia is a better place because of the efforts of Dr. Whitley. I celebrate Dr. Whitley and her volunteer team on their 25th CROP Walk anniversary and thank them for all they have done for families in need in northeast Georgia and throughout the world.

This is what makes representing the Ninth District of Georgia special. Especially at a time like this, with Christmas approaching, it is always the season when others give. Dr. Meg Whitley is one who does that over and over again.

Mr. SANFORD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia, and I thank him for the way he highlighted great action from folks there at home.

I yield back the balance of my time.

ISSUES OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Mr. Speaker, here is an article just in Politico by Burgess Everett. It is today. It concludes with a quote from Senator CHARLES SCHUMER of New York:

"Sen. McConnell wants to see the Senate work," Schumer said. "But the good news for us is, to make it work, he has to do basically our agenda."

That is what we have been telling people for so long, Mr. Speaker, that people across America say: We would like to see you guys in Washington work together. We would like to see government not shut down, that you guys work together and get things done.

But as we explained repeatedly—and now it has been confirmed by Senator SCHUMER—there is only one way that some folks here in this Capitol building will reach an agreement with Republicans. Normally, that is if we do exactly their agenda.

I go back to the spring of 2011, when Republicans resumed the majority in the House of Representatives. There was a CR that was going to expire. The Government would run out of money at midnight. As I recall, it was a Friday.

It appeared to me—and I have said since then that it certainly appeared that HARRY REID believed and the White House believed the conventional wisdom here in Washington—that, if the Democrats could force a shutdown, then their massive friends in the mainstream media would blame Republicans and that would be their best shot at regaining a majority in the House and keeping it in the Senate.

So, basically, to avoid a shutdown at midnight, although our Speaker at the time, Speaker Boehner, gathered us together late that evening and said, "Look, we have gotten \$29 billion in cuts. I know we said it would be \$100 billion originally and then \$60 billion, but we have \$29 billion," it turns out we didn't get those, that we may have spent more money.

In essence, it appears that the Speaker had to basically cave to what HARRY REID wanted in order to avoid a shutdown in the spring of 2011. That continued to occur. We would come up on deadlines. The Senate would not pass any of the appropriations bills, would sit back and say: We are not going to do our work. We are not going to comply with our constitutional responsibility. We are going to sit back. We are going to wait, get bills from the House, and then demand our agenda. If they don't give us our agenda, then we will shut things down. Our friends in the mainstream media will blame Republicans. Then we will get the majority back in the House.

Finally, in September of 2013, we gave HARRY REID basically everything he wanted and he still shut the government down. Just as conventional wisdom had indicated, the mainstream media blamed Republicans.

In fact, the mainstream media mantra was so overwhelming that even Speaker Boehner got confused or maybe—I guess maybe he did blame Republicans because we didn't totally capitulate on everything HARRY REID wanted. We gave him most everything he wanted.

The last thing we did was appoint—this is at 1:10 a.m. on the morning of October 1 of 2013—we approved the appointment of conferees. HARRY REID wouldn't even approve conferees so we could have a deal worked out by 8 a.m. and nobody would miss work. He wouldn't even do that. He didn't want a deal worked out. He wanted a shutdown.

They had already contracted to bring barriers to shut down open air memorials so people couldn't even walk down the sidewalk. Apparently, the people in this administration believed, if we can jerk around World War II veterans, then Republicans will get blamed for that, too. So they violated the law. They spent more in shutting things down than they would normally spend in keeping them open.

That violates the law as it exists. They shut down things that there was totally no reason to shut down. They brought in more Park Service people to help shut them down than are normally ever out there.

All of that was to try to make people blame Republicans when it was clearly the calloused, intentional desire to inflict harm on people, including World War II veterans, by some people within this administration.

But America didn't fall for it, and they didn't give Democrats back the majority in the House. In fact, they

gave Republicans the majority in the Senate.

Today we get this story quoting Senator SCHUMER, a Democrat from New York: The good news for us is, to make it work, Senator MCCONNELL has to do basically our agenda.

Then we find out a story today from Carolyn May:

"Senior officials rejected a proposal to incorporate social media screenings in the vetting process of foreign visa applicants in 2011."

Four years ago this administration said: We are going to continue our effort to blind ourselves of our ability to see our enemy and to know who our enemy is. That started back in 2009, when this administration came into town.

Basically, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a coconspirator named in the Holy Land Foundation trial for supporting terrorism, has an open door and they answered their phones at the White House anytime they called and complained.

They wanted documents purged so our FBI agents, our intelligence officials, our State Department people, could not be adequately trained on what radical Islamists believe.

This administration still will not even recognize that such a thing as radical Islam exists. Not one person in the administration that is elected that is making these decisions or that has been confirmed by the Senate has an advanced degree in Islamic studies and especially not advanced degrees from the University of Baghdad in Islamic studies, as one of the world's most renowned experts on Islam does.

That world-renowned expert on Islam with a Ph.D. from the University of Baghdad in Islamic studies makes very clear that the Islamic State is Islam. His name is al-Baghdadi. He is the head of the Islamic State.

As the very learned Carolyn Glick has pointed out, the failure of any administration, Republican or Democrat, to recognize that radical Islam is a part of Islam is performing a huge disfavor for moderate Muslims who want to stand up against radical Islam.

□ 1630

But, by this administration's saying there is no pluralism in Islam—it is all good, and there are no bad people who are claiming to be and who actually are Islamic—it does a great disservice to moderate Muslims who would like to stand up and take it on. There have been wonderful friends of the United States who have. President el-Sisi in Egypt has, and others have. For some reason, this administration chooses to alienate those who are Muslim who would stand up against radical Islam, as if they don't have enough problems as it is.

It was a friend in intelligence, here in the U.S. Government, who made that statement that I used a moment ago—"We have blinded ourselves of our ability to see our enemy"—and that continues.