

Now, much has changed. 2014 and 2015 were the strongest 2 years of job creation since 1998 to 2000, when Bill Clinton was President. The private sector is powering the economy forward. Our businesses have added 14 million jobs over a record 70 consecutive months of job growth. Wages have finally begun to rise. Nominal average hourly earnings for all private employees have now risen 2.5 percent over the past year. The ratio of unemployment seekers to job openings has fallen from 7 to 1 to 1.5 to 1. That is about the lowest this ratio has been since early 2007.

Since the start of the Obama administration, our real GDP has increased by 14 percent. The U.S. auto industry, which was on death's door when President Obama took office, is now healthy, thriving, and enjoyed record sales in 2015. Our auto industry is now exporting and creating even more jobs. Oil and gas prices are low. Mortgage rates remain low. Inflation is simply not a factor. The dollar is strong, and housing prices are back up to where they were in 2007.

All of this recovery was not an accident, not a stroke of good luck. Things certainly would have been quite different if we had only listened to the counsel of our colleagues across the aisle. They vehemently opposed efforts taken by the Obama administration to stimulate the economy, and they opposed actions by the Federal Reserve that turned out to be very critically important.

What would have happened without these actions by the Federal Reserve and the Democrats in Congress? The recession would have lasted twice as long, according to a recent study by highly respected economists Alan Blinder and Mark Zandi. The Blinder-Zandi study found that without these actions, the unemployment rate would have reached nearly 16 percent, and we would have lost twice as many jobs, more than 17 million. It is a bit scary to even think about.

So the facts show that we have had a very strong recovery. Are we done? Absolutely not. There is much more work to do to ensure the recovery reaches everyone. Big challenges remain. Many families are struggling to make ends meet, to make the mortgage payment, to save for their children's education. We need faster wage growth, accessible child care, and higher education that is affordable to all families. It is time to pass comprehensive immigration reform and to protect Americans from gun violence.

I am excited about the opportunity to make real progress on these issues this year, and I look forward to working in a bipartisan way to continue to focus on the challenges facing middle class families.

PRO-LIFE

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

Mr. RATCLIFFE. Mr. Speaker, the Declaration of Independence contains a passage that every student in America learns at an early age. It explains that each of us are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, chief among them the right to life. This highlights and reminds us just how much our Founders valued the right to life.

As an elected Representative, the words in our Declaration that follow are equally compelling: To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men. How often we forget that government exists first and foremost to secure the right to life.

Now, this is an immense responsibility, one that I take very seriously, because one of the highest honors I have in representing the Fourth Congressional District of Texas is defending the most vulnerable among us, our unborn children. I am proud to have a voting record that reflects my unwavering commitment to protecting unborn life and ending taxpayer funding of abortion.

I will also be the first to tell you that legislators represent only one piece of the puzzle in the ongoing and vital effort to promote a culture of life. There are literally thousands of unsung pro-life heroes in the Fourth Congressional District of Texas, whose effort to promote a culture of life are not about gaining recognition or notoriety, but are simply rooted in an abiding sense of protecting the inalienable right to life, which our Founding Fathers spoke of.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a few of these pro-life heroes in my district, people like Melanie Grammar and Deborah Butts with the Texas Federation of Republican Women; Michelle Smith and Ann Hettinger in Rockwall, Texas; Chip Adami at the True Options Pregnancy Center in Sherman; Mason Randall and Robin Stevenson at Lake Pointe Church Adoption Ministry; Kristie Wright at the First Choice Pregnancy Resource Center in Texarkana; Threesa Sadler and Tim Stainback at the Raffa Center in Greenville; Joanne Vuckovic at the Rockwall Pregnancy Resource Center; and the great folks at both the Paris and Fannin Pregnancy Care Centers.

The dedication of individuals like these and thousands of others across the Fourth Congressional District of Texas is appreciated, it is necessary, and it certainly does not go unnoticed. Thank you all for your commitment to protecting the incredibly important cause of life.

BILL TO COMPREHENSIVELY ADDRESS COMPACT IMPACT IN AFFECTED JURISDICTIONS

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

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, today I introduced legislation that will help

address the impact of the Compact of Free Association—these are the Pacific Islands—on affected jurisdictions like Guam and the State of Hawaii.

I continue to support the intent of the Compact, and I do understand the benefits that these agreements have for our Nation and our security. However, the costs borne by our local governments amount to millions of dollars for providing social services to Compact migrants are unsustainable, and Congress must act to provide relief for affected jurisdictions who have spent millions of local funds to support the Compact and the migrants.

COFA migrants make positive contributions to our community, but insufficient support from the Federal Government causes a significant socioeconomic strain on our island communities. This strain only increases, especially with uncertain economic conditions in the Freely Associated States, as well as the impact climate change is having on Pacific Island nations.

The bill I am introducing, as well as proposals that I have made in the past, will provide relief and empower local jurisdictions with solutions to reduce the burden of the Compact.

The best solution to Compact impact would be an increase in annual mandatory funding from the current \$30 million to the \$185 million recommended by the GAO. However, the current budget environment makes appropriating this very difficult.

Nonetheless, I am proud to also cosponsor another bill, a bill introduced by Congressman TAKAI of the State of Hawaii, that would increase this annual appropriation, and I hope that we can at least have a debate on this measure.

However, as we work to find long-term solutions to Compact impact, I believe that there are important and innovative fixes that would provide much-needed relief to our local governments without much cost to taxpayers.

Now, this approach is a more budget-friendly way to address this challenge. The bill's provisions address four areas to reduce the burden.

□ 1045

First, my bill would permit the affected jurisdictions to use the amount that they have spent to provide social services to COFA migrants toward the non-Federal portion of providing Medicaid to their local residents. The bill proposes a new formula that would increase the Federal medical assistance percentage for each of the affected jurisdictions, and this would go a long way toward alleviating the burden on affected jurisdictions by increasing the percentage assistance provided by the Federal Government for Medicaid.

Secondly, the bill would categorize elementary and secondary education-aged COFA students as federally connected students and make them eligible for Impact Aid. I understand the fiscal challenges that the Impact Aid community faces, and I am committed

to working with them to address the effect this bill may have on them. The bill attempts to offset this effect by increasing funding authorization and ensures that we are not taking from one group just to pay another.

Thirdly, this legislation would clarify Congress' intent when we extended eligibility for housing assistance programs to the COFA migrants. This bill ensures that U.S. citizens, nationals, or lawful permanent residents are not displaced and are given priority when applying for housing benefits.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, this bill would commission independent research on the viability of the current compacts and make recommendations on policy alternatives moving forward. I do hope that this research will provide strategic guidance as we move toward renewal of the compacts in 2023 and ensure that we are administering these agreements in the best way.

I am so very pleased to count the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. TAKAI) as an original cosponsor of my bill.

As this Congress discusses solutions for the crisis in Puerto Rico, it is important that we also discuss challenges that the other territories face, especially the challenge of supporting the Compact of Free Association. While the challenges facing affected jurisdictions are nowhere near as serious as Puerto Rico, Mr. Speaker, doing nothing would only welcome economic and security challenges down the road.

I do look forward to this bill becoming law and it being a tremendous help to jurisdictions affected by the Compact impact.

INDEPENDENCE PLAZA HONORS AMERICA'S SPACE PROGRAM

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

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 1972, my dad was transferred from northwest Alabama to southeast Texas. I remember the first time I got off the Gulf Freeway, headed east down NASA Road 1, and saw the Johnson Space Center and the Nassau Bay resort hotel with an NBC studio on top. Right then, it hit me: my neighbors were astronauts, Moon walkers. My life was changed forever.

The next 9 years were rather dull. Three missions of Skylab and one handshake with the Russians on Apollo-Soyuz.

The excitement came back in 1981. The Space Shuttle *Columbia* flew for the first time. The space shuttle was the heart and soul of human spaceflight until July 21, 2011, when three words ended the program: "Houston, wheels stop."

Those words were heard in the dark, 4:57 a.m. Texas time. My home was dark for 4½ years. That darkness will end on January 23 when Space Center Houston opens Independence Plaza right by the Johnson Space Center. Independence Plaza will have the Space

Shuttle *Independence* atop the 747 transport carrier.

Our space shuttles flew 133 successful flights, with crews as small as two or as large as seven, with 55,000 pounds of payload. Our shuttles carried astronauts from 17 nations: Belgium, Canada, France, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, and America.

Our shuttle built the International Space Station, which has had a human being on board since November 2, 2000. Scott Kelly has been on board the ISS since March 27, 2015. Scott must love the view because he will come home after 1 year in orbit.

The Hubble Space Telescope would have been the biggest piece of space junk ever without the space shuttle. When it was launched in 1990, it was a telescope that needed glasses. Its vision was blurry. Five shuttle missions followed, fixed its vision, gave it decades of new life, and changed history.

But Independence Plaza will do more than remind us of the achievements of our space shuttle. This exhibit will ensure we never forget the two crews we lost on space shuttles. Dick, Michael, Judy, Ron, Ellison, Greg, and Christa touched the face of God when *Challenger* exploded after 73 seconds of flight on January 28, 1986. Eighteen years later, on February 1, 2003, we lost Rick, Willie, Michael, Kalpana, David, Laurel, and Ilan when *Columbia* returned mortally wounded and broke up over their home, my home State of Texas. Independence Plaza will ensure that these 14 heroes will always be revered, and a new, young generation of Americans will follow their lead and soar into the heavens.

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FINAL STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, one recalls the state of the Union that President Obama inherited upon taking office: overwhelming problems occasioned by the near collapse of the economy, 700,000 jobs lost before he was even in office half a month. It would take many months more to arrest the slide. There were fierce battles, arguments about whether we should spend money to try to help people and industries.

His work was complicated by the announcement early on by the Republican leader in the Senate that his number one goal was not to fix the economy or deal with health care or the environment or national security; it was to prevent President Obama from being reelected to a second term.

Time has shown that the money that was spent was critical, and most independent experts agree that we should have invested more heavily in things like rebuilding and renewing America.

Even so, our performance has been better than any of the other developed economies.

Those results were achieved with divisions and arguments that continue to be played out today on the national political stage as there are people seeking the Presidency later this year. But my hope is that, as the President addresses this Chamber tonight, there might be an opportunity to move past some of the divisions and controversy.

My hope is, as the President looks up in the gallery and sees the First Lady, that he might pause and acknowledge her important work in health and nutrition; that he might spend just 3 minutes on a topic that can bring people together; that he would admit that we as a government still pay too much to the wrong people to grow the wrong crops in the wrong places, that we would be far better off if we weren't subsidizing people to grow food that actually makes Americans sick.

I would hope that he would propose that the Federal Government help more farmers and ranchers with research and market access at home and abroad. Let's pay those farmers and ranchers to protect water quality and water quantity.

I would hope that he would propose that we subsidize more healthy food in our schools and for senior citizens and low-income people.

I would hope that he would acknowledge the revolution that is taking place in food and agricultural thought and policy in this country, as documented in the recent PBS special, "In Defense of Food," with Michael Pollan.

There is an exciting national movement promoting value-added agriculture, healthy food, animal welfare, and environmental protection that will strengthen rural and small town America and provide more satisfaction for the men and women who work in agriculture.

It would only take 3 minutes, but it would be an important milestone for this revolution of food and farm policy that cannot happen soon enough.

RECOGNIZING COACH FRANK BEAMER ON HIS RETIREMENT

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

Mr. GRIFFITH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Coach Frank Beamer on the occasion of his retirement as the head football coach at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University—more commonly known and fondly known as Virginia Tech—located in Blacksburg, Virginia, as Coach Beamer concludes his highly successful career. For almost three decades, Coach Beamer has been a tremendous leader in Virginia and a mentor to hundreds of student athletes.

In 29 seasons under Coach Beamer's leadership, Virginia Tech football has enjoyed unprecedented success, notching 237 wins, three Big East championships, four Atlantic Coast Conference