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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. NEUGEBAUER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
December 7, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable RANDY NEUGEBAUER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2016, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

PROTECTING PENSIONS OF COAL MINERS

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

Mr. JENKINS of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, miners and their widows in West Virginia and across the country are asking us to protect their pensions and health care, families like Robin Workman of Boone County, who wrote to me about how she and her husband depend on these benefits. These are the benefits that they earned.

She said: "My husband put in 35 years underground, a promise made to

them shouldn't be broken. West Virginia helped keep the lights on back then as well as today. Please don't forget about us."

This promise dates back to 1946 when the Truman administration signed an agreement with coal miners, an agreement that guaranteed their pensions and health care would be there for them when they retired. Now that agreement—no, that promise—is in jeopardy.

In just a few weeks, tens of thousands of miners and widows will lose their health insurance. These miners have back problems, knee problems, and breathing problems, all from their work in the mines. They simply cannot go without insurance.

Kenny Meade's father is one of those retired miners. He lives in Chapmanville and reached out to me to share the story of his parents. Kenny wrote about his father. He said: "He worked 31 years in the mines and often for less than other miners so he could bargain for their right to health care and pensions."

This is an issue we can fix, but it is not an issue that arose overnight. The war on coal has decimated coal jobs in West Virginia and across the country. An onslaught of overreaching Federal regulations have made it harder to mine coal and harder to burn coal. Coal-fired power plants have shut down, making electricity more expensive and reducing the market for coal.

As demand has decreased and regulations have made it harder to mine coal, mines are closing and companies are filing for bankruptcy. A company in bankruptcy isn't going to have the resources to meet its pension obligations.

All of these market forces, regulations, and the war on coal have had devastating impacts on our miners and their families. It is time for Congress to act to keep the promise and protect the benefits the miners worked their entire life to earn.

The Coal Healthcare and Pensions Protection Act won't cost taxpayers anything. It uses existing funds paid for by mining companies to provide for retired miners. This is not a tax. Taxpayers won't be on the hook for these pensions. This is about ensuring a promise made is a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach the holiday season, I hope we will remember the retirees and widows worried about what the new year will bring. We must act now to pass a solution to this crisis to keep our word.

FAREWELL TO THE HONORABLE STEVE ISRAEL

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about my friend and colleague, STEVE ISRAEL, who is retiring from Congress after 16 years. We came into Congress together and have been the best of friends and brothers ever since.

Now, the last time I mentioned STEVE ISRAEL on the House floor was after making a bet with STEVE over the Dodgers-Mets series, a bet that I lost, and I had to sing the "Meet the Mets" song on the House floor. I want to assure all my colleagues that is never going to happen again either on the playing field or on the House floor.

When we came to Congress together, we were given a book, like all incoming freshmen, called "Charting the Course." This is a book that basically says that there are three different models of being a Congressman. You can be the policy expert or you can be the political animal or you can be the pothole Congressman who is focused on district needs and excellent at meeting the needs of constituents, but the gist of the book is you can't be all three. You have to pick where you are going to make your specialization, and if you

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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try to do all three, you will end up not doing any one of them very well. STEVE ISRAEL proved the premise of that book wrong because he proved to be superlative at each and every aspect of being a Member of Congress.

On policy, STEVE developed an expertise in energy policy and became a leading champion of the development of renewable sources of energy. He became an expert on defense issues; and as one of the members of the Appropriations Committee, he helped eliminate wasteful expenditures on systems we didn't need and investment in defenses that would really protect the country.

He became an expert on Middle East policy and sorting out the difficulties of all the complicated relationships between the nations in the Middle East. He became an expert on the Syrian conflict.

He also became an expert on issues affecting the middle class and has always been a champion for what needs to be done to make sure that people in this country can enjoy a secure retirement, can get a good job, can raise their family, and that their kids will enjoy a quality of life at least as great as that of their parents, and hopefully even better.

He also founded and co-chairs the Center Aisle Caucus, doing something very difficult in this institution, and that is bringing people together of both parties—something we need to see a lot more of.

In addition to those policy strengths, he was also and has been one of our greatest political leaders. He served for many years as the DCCC chair and had an encyclopedic knowledge of each and every district in the country belonging to friend or foe alike. He was an extraordinary chair, not only in terms of raising resources, but recruiting some of the finest candidates, and a great many Members of this institution owe their very presence here to his incredible work.

He then became the chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee and was a very effective Member at shaping our message and at helping us articulate what the Democratic Party was about and has been among the most effective surrogates the Democrats have.

In addition to his political expertise and policy expertise, having visited his district and having met his constituents, I know he was also so attuned to the needs of his constituents, particularly the veterans and the homeless, but also in championing the economy and bringing improvements to Long Island Sound. His casework was renowned within New York, and his staff was among the most superb anywhere on the Hill or in any district office.

In addition to all that—and that would be enough for any of us—he also wrote a fabulous novel on his iPhone, "The Global War on Morris." Who can do that? Who can write a book at all, let alone one on his iPhone, let alone it

gets published by a major publisher and does phenomenally well?

When STEVE retires, this Congress is going to lose another of its great Members, someone of genuine talent, intellect, and integrity, someone who has come to be relied upon by Presidents. We are also going to lose someone with a great sense of humor, who is a wonderful friend and a bit of a practical joker—like the time he convinced his chief of staff that one of his district staff had run over his dog. Yes, STEVE is a cruel man, but funny. We are going to miss him tremendously.

I want to wish him all the luck in the world in the exciting career that awaits him when he retires, and all his new endeavors. I look forward to finding him not in the center aisle necessarily, but in a different aisle in the bookstore near me with his latest work.

I want to join my colleagues in thanking STEVE ISRAEL for his tremendous years of service and for his wonderful friendship. We will all miss him as, indeed, will this entire institution.

TRAGIC LOSS OF AMERICAN LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am back on the floor again today to discuss the tragic loss of American life in Afghanistan. This past week, I was touched by George Stephanopoulos and ABC as they publicly listed the nine servicemembers that died in Iraq and Afghanistan during the month of November.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD the names of the nine American heroes.

Sergeant John W. Perry of Stockton, California; Private 1st Class Tyler R. Lubelt of Tamaroa, Illinois; Sergeant 1st Class Ryan A. Gloyer of Greenville, Pennsylvania; Captain Andrew D. Byers of Rolesville, North Carolina; Senior Chief Petty Officer Scott C. Dayton of Woodbridge, Virginia; Specialist Ronald L. Murray, Jr., of Bowie, Maryland; Staff Sergeant James F. Moriarty of Kerrville, Texas; Staff Sergeant Kevin J. McEnroe of Tucson, Arizona; Staff Sergeant Matthew C. Lewellen of Lawrence, Kansas.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that the last moment of silence for our men and women in uniform who have died serving this Nation during wartime by the House Chair took place on March 23, 2015, almost 2 years ago. I, frankly, do not understand how House leadership is not more concerned about those who have given their life serving this Nation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter several weeks ago regarding an article that said that there are 200,000 Afghan soldiers who do not exist—they call them ghosts—who are on the payroll of the Department of Defense. I asked him in the letter: Why are we wasting this money, and can you identify where the money is going?

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD my letter to Secretary Ashton Carter.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, October 14, 2016.

Hon. ASHTON B. CARTER,
Secretary of Defense,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY CARTER: I am responding to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Acting) Jedidiah Royal's October 3, 2016, response to the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)'s letter to you (dated August 5, 2016) regarding "ghost soldiers" in Afghanistan.

I am appalled that the U.S. taxpayer has, and continues to pay, for "ghost soldiers" in Afghanistan. Moreover, I am also concerned about the risks that inadequacy of data concerning personnel levels of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) may pose to American forces in Afghanistan.

In Deputy Assistant Secretary Royal's response to SIGAR, he indicates the systems that U.S. Forces-Afghanistan are putting in place to try to verify Afghan personnel data will not be ready until at least July 2017. Given the estimate that there may be up to 200,000 "ghost soldiers," I would respectfully request an estimate of how much funding provided to the ANDSF for salaries in fiscal years 2016 and 2017 is expected to be wasted on "ghost soldiers."

Additionally, Deputy Assistant Secretary Royal indicates that a limited amount of funds has been withheld from the ANDSF for not adhering to the agreed-upon timeline for implementation of personnel verification systems. How much money was withheld, and what percentage does that number represent of the amount originally designated to be allocated?

Given that many Afghan military and police outposts have limited, if any, access to electricity and telecommunications systems, I would also ask whether there is a contingency plan to back-up the biometric database and personnel system given that units may not always have regular access to the technology needed to operate them? Further, under the current deployment arrangement ordered by President Obama, U.S. forces do not have the capability to witness firsthand, at the lowest levels of the ANDSF, whether there is fraudulent use of the biometric cards. With that in mind, does DOD expect there will be salary overpayments even after July 2017?

I am also concerned about the effect the "ghost soldier" problem is having on U.S. forces in Afghanistan. While the Afghan Minister of Defense was recently quoted as saying there is not a single "ghost soldier" in Afghanistan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary's letter makes clear that is not the case. We know the collapse of the 215th Corps in Helmand in 2015 was at least in part due to an overestimation of ANDSF personnel in Helmand based on inflated numbers reported to the Ministry of Defense. USFOR-A subsequently deployed additional personnel closer to the front lines in Helmand to assist with improving that corps. The "ghost soldier" issue clearly is affecting decision-making within the Defense Department that affects U.S. personnel. I would like to know how DOD plans to mitigate any further risk to U.S. military and civilian personnel that may result from the ongoing "ghost soldier" problem.

Finally, how confident is the Defense Department that the ANDSF and the Afghan government have the capability and the will to effectively implement the new systems, and when will that implementation be fully achieved? When implemented, does the Defense Department expect the "ghost soldier" problem to be eliminated, or merely reduced?

Mr. Secretary, the "ghost soldier" problem has clearly existed in Afghanistan since the