

I heard from constituent after constituent about the negative repercussions of the shutdown.

I heard from store owners who couldn't accept EBT cards because their SNAP vendor license expired with no possibility of renewal.

I heard from Federal employees, more than 4,200 of whom I am proud to represent in Congress, who worried about losing their dental and vision insurance.

I met with members of the U.S. Coast Guard, the only military personnel who went without pay during the shutdown.

And I heard from small business owners, more than 27,000 of whom live in my district, about the effect of the shutdown on their bottom lines.

All of this for what purpose?

From day one, I joined any colleagues in vote after vote to reopen the government on a bipartisan basis.

It is incumbent on Congress to ensure that the government remains open when the current spending package expires on February 15.

The border wall is a monument to division that, according to experts, is ineffective and wasteful. Holding the government hostage over it was wrong. Indeed, not a single Member of the House body—Democrat or Republican—representing a border district is for the construction of a wall.

When discussing the need for improved border security, we must move past fear-driven partisan politics which seek only to divide us and paralyze our democracy. Moreover, we cannot allow ourselves to fall short of our constitutional obligation as Members of Congress.

Let us not forget that our Founding Fathers began with the legislative body in Article I of our Constitution. This is the one body that represents the will of the people, legislatively.

Our work should not be contingent upon the whims and desires of another branch of government meant to only execute the laws our body is obliged to legislate. This is not how to preserve a democratic order anchored in the separation of powers and sustained by healthy checks and balances.

To be clear, now is not the time to run away from our responsibility as a coequal branch of government. Democrats and Republicans, alike, need to come together and have an evidence-based and transparent debate on the question of border security, have a vote, and then send legislation to the President. It shouldn't take a costly shutdown and a threat of another looming one in order to accomplish this.

As Members of both parties from both Houses begin budget negotiations in a conference committee, I ask that they remember the hardships endured in recent weeks not only by the Federal employees who went without pay in upstate New York, but also by business owners, farmers, and so many others in our region who were harmed because of ripple effects of the shutdown.

The government must not close again. My district and our country can't afford another shutdown. It is our collective responsibility to ensure we do not find ourselves on February 15 at the start of yet another shutdown.

In short, I urge this body to do as envisioned by our Founding Fathers, get to work, and do our job.

IN RECOGNITION OF COLONEL PETER NEZAMIS

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Colonel Peter Nezamis of Belleville.

It was recently announced that Colonel Nezamis will be promoted to brigadier general and will lead the Illinois Air National Guard, where he will lead over 3,000 personnel.

He commanded the Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base, which received the Outstanding Unit Award, under his guidance.

Colonel Nezamis has commanded numerous expeditionary operations and flew over 275 combat and combat support hours. He first joined the Air National Guard in 1986 and has served our State and Nation over 30 years.

Colonel Nezamis, we know you will serve the State and Nation to the best of your ability, and congratulations in your new role.

ENHANCING AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MILITARY VETERANS

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I also rise to bring awareness about a coming crisis in our Nation's agricultural workforce.

According to USDA, the average age for a farmer is now 58 and has been on the rise for over 30 years. Our Nation faces a shortfall of 700,000 agricultural workers over the next 20 years.

How can we reverse this trend? According to the Department of Labor, 45 percent of armed servicemembers are from rural America. Many of our returning heroes struggle to find employment after serving our Nation.

Agriculture is a sensible solution to fill the economic gap our veterans face. That is why I joined with my friend and colleague on the House Agriculture Committee, AL LAWSON of Florida, to introduce the Vets to Ag Act. Our bill streamlines the process for veterans getting apprenticeships in the agricultural industry.

Despite dysfunction in Washington, we are still fighting for bipartisan, commonsense solutions to help our farmers and our veterans. I encourage my colleagues to support this bipartisan effort.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I also rise today in recognition of Human Trafficking and Prevention Month.

Human trafficking cases are on the rise nationwide. As the grandfather of 11 grandchildren, I am angry about

that. My appreciation goes out to members of law enforcement who are on the front lines combating these crimes and making our communities safer.

Programs like the Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign help combat human trafficking. The program works to make sure, if trafficking victims are taken over the border, they are rescued or have a resource that they can turn to for help.

These are important steps, but there is still so much more work remaining. Both parties must work together to do our part in wiping out this evil before it does any more harm.

□ 1030

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

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

Mr. CURTIS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the Transparency in Student Lending Act.

College education can be a life-changing investment, but it can come at a tremendous cost. Right now, 44 million Americans collectively hold \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt. The Federal Government lends 90 percent of these dollars. However, unlike other lenders, the Federal Government does not provide students with complete information about the total cost of their loan, leaving borrowers unaware of hidden costs and fees until they enter the repayment phase. I have introduced this bill to require complete information be provided to students before they take out a loan.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the youngest congressional district in the United States, and many of my constituents are struggling with student debt. With this legislation, we can help young people make fully informed financial decisions for their families and their futures.

VENEZUELA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DIAZ-BALART) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to call on all of those who support freedom and democracy to stand with the long-suffering people of Venezuela. We have finally reached the tipping point where freedom for the Venezuelan people hangs in the balance.

On Friday, President Trump recognized the duly elected leader of the National Assembly, Juan Guaido, as the constitutional interim President of Venezuela. Shortly afterward the vast majority of Western Hemisphere nations affirmed their recognition of the Guaido government.

On January 10 the OAS passed a resolution, Mr. Speaker, that refused to recognize the illegitimate Maduro regime, and OAS Secretary-General Luis

Almagro expressed his congratulations to Mr. Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate sitting President.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is time to choose to stand with the courageous protesters demanding freedom, many of them bruised and bloodied from the violence perpetrated on them by the Maduro thugs. Reports indicate that at least 29 protesters have been killed just since last week, and the Maduro regime holds hundreds of political prisoners. The Maduro regime has ruthlessly corrupted Venezuela's once-democratic institutions, including the Supreme Court.

The U.N. High Commissioner of Human Rights and others have documented egregious human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and torture. We have seen that the Venezuelan people continue to demand freedom in the face of teargas, imprisonment, and, yes, even bullets.

The United States is standing with the Venezuelan people, sanctioning 65 of the most corrupt and abusive members of the Maduro regime, including Maduro himself. Congress and the administration are also working to alleviate the grave humanitarian crisis that the Maduro regime has caused, providing nearly \$100 million in humanitarian aid to those Venezuelans who have fled to other countries and an additional \$37 million in development assistance to Colombia.

Earlier this year, my colleague, Congressman DARREN SOTO, and I worked together to introduce the Venezuela TPS Act of 2019 which would provide Temporary Protective Status to Venezuelan nationals here in the United States. The situation in Venezuela is way too dangerous to force them to return now.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, the humanitarian crisis rivals the grave democratic crisis in Venezuela. Under Venezuela's socialism, its people are suffering skyrocketing inflation, profound destitution, and shortages of necessary food and medicine.

Venezuela was once, just recently, one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Now the vast majority of Venezuelan people have sunk into poverty. Hospitals are abandoned, Mr. Speaker, and food and medicines are scarce. But, Mr. Speaker, we have entered a time of critical importance. Rarely is there such an obvious choice between good and evil, freedom and enslavement, and accountable government and tyranny.

From Venezuela's one last vestige of democracy came a glimmer of hope. From the democratically elected National Assembly, a leader emerged who was courageous enough to lead the opposition and face certain persecution. Juan Guaido stepped up to represent the Venezuelan people and work with the international community toward a democratic transition to unite the many voices in the opposition behind a common purpose: freedom, human rights, and free and fair elections.

He has designated his charge d'affaires here in the United States, Carlos

Vecchio, whose leadership was welcomed by Secretary Pompeo and who is coordinating between the Guaido government and the United States Government.

Already as President Guaido is gaining strength, we are seeing signs of cracks from the Maduro dictatorship. The United States must continue to be the world leader in defense of those struggling for democracy, and others in the world community who value freedom also must stand with the people of Venezuela in their quest for democracy.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Eastern Europe have not forgotten that we stood with them during those decades in their struggle against Communism for decades. They were victorious; and today they are free, and they are allies. The people of Venezuela will also be victorious.

(The English translation of the statement made in Spanish is as follows:)

To the Venezuelan Armed Forces, this is the time to recover your honor, to recover your dignity and stand with the Venezuelan people in this noble cause, which is freedom.

And to the brave Venezuelan people, you are not alone. The Trump administration, the United States Congress, the United States is with you.

A las Fuerzas Armadas de Venezuela, este es el momento de recuperar su honor, de recuperar su dignidad y ponerse de lado del pueblo Venezolano en esta noble causa que es la libertad.

Y al valiente pueblo Venezolano, no están solos. La administración del presidente Trump, el Congreso de los Estados Unidos, si todo los Estados Unidos están con ustedes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida will provide a translation of his remarks to the Clerk.

RECOGNIZING CAPTAIN JOHN HEARN

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

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a law enforcement official who was recently named Police Chief of Newtown Township in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Earlier this month, Newtown Township's Board of Supervisors unanimously supported Philadelphia Police Department Captain John Hearn to become the next police chief. John, a Northampton Township resident, is a 29-year veteran of the Philadelphia Police Department. He previously served as a lieutenant in that department's highway patrol, helping to escort dignitaries such as Pope Francis and former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush.

Throughout his esteemed career, John distinguished himself as an innovative leader. He represented Philadelphia when five neighboring counties established protocol and a coordinated response to terrorist threats, and he served as a volunteer with fire companies in Montgomery County.

Mr. Speaker, we congratulate John on his new role, and I look forward to working closely with him to keep our Bucks County families safe.

RECOGNIZING OFFICERS MEGAN KLOSTERMAN AND GINA FERZETTI

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize members of our law enforcement community who recently joined our Bucks County family as members of the Solebury Township Police Department.

Earlier this month, Officers Megan Klosterman and Gina Ferzetti were sworn in by Magisterial District Judge Maggie Snow as the department's first full-time female officers.

Officer Klosterman is a graduate of Upper Dublin High School and Pennsylvania State University. Officer Ferzetti is a graduate of Ridley High School and previously served with the Temple University Police Department. Both of these dedicated public servants served as part-time members of Solebury Township Police Department prior to their full instatement.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud Officers Klosterman and Ferzetti on their promotions and their dedication to keeping all of our families safe in our community. Their hiring is truly an inspiring moment for Solebury Township and for Bucks County.

I would also like to thank Police Chief Dominick Bellizzi and Township Manager Dennis Carney for their leadership.

RECOGNIZING JULIE UCHITEL

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a student from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, who was recently awarded a coveted scholarship to study in the United Kingdom.

Julie Uchitel, a resident of Upper Southampton, was selected to receive a Marshall Scholarship, one of only 40 recipients out of over 1,000 applicants. Julie is a senior at Duke University where she is a neuroscience and French double major. She is the president of the Neuroscience Majors' Union at Duke and has conducted clinical and basic pediatric research at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Duke Children's Hospital. She is the author of two published articles and has volunteered in Paris and in Honduras to offer medical assistance to those in need.

Mr. Speaker, Julie's resume is too voluminous to summarize. We are so proud to have her as part of our community, and we wish her all the best as she pursues her studies at Cambridge and King's College in London. I look forward to seeing all of her accomplishments in the years to come.

RECESS

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

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 39 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.