

fighter squadron there as well, commander in the F-105 wing in Okinawa, and two assignments at the Pentagon, as well.

Bud was decorated 25 times. His awards include 2 Legions of Merit, 5 Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star, 16 Air Medals, the French Legion of Honor, and the French Croix de Guerre, as well as many other campaign service ribbons.

When Bud retired from the Air Force, he joined the McDonnell Aircraft Company and served for 12 years as the manager of the company's flight test facility there.

After his full retirement in 1984, Bud and Ellie moved back to Auburn where he continued to travel, hunt, fish, and speak at air shows and just be the great man we knew him as. God bless him. I am going to miss him personally. What a great friend he was. He was a great human being, and I am glad to have known him.

May God bless you, Bud, and hold you in His hands.

Fly high, my friend.

NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

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

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago, the month of May was designated National Military Appreciation Month by an act of Congress introduced by the late Senator John McCain, a war hero from the State of Arizona.

Since then, throughout every May, our Nation observes a series of military events: On May 8, Victory in Europe Day, the date Nazi Germany surrendered in World War II; May 10, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, to recognize the exacting service of military spouses; and, May 18, Armed Forces Day, to honor the roughly 1.4 million people who serve as Active-Duty troops in all six branches and the 760,000 National Guard and Reserves, every one of them volunteers.

Lastly, on May 27, our Nation will observe its most solemn national holiday, Memorial Day, when across the country events will be held at military gravesites and veteran gathering places to remember and pray for those who gave their lives in defense of our Nation's freedoms and security.

Mr. Speaker, the definition of appreciation is to express gratitude. Gratitude can come in many forms, verbal, which certainly counts, but the most meaningful is tangible support for the disruption and sacrifice that the hard work of military service entails.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honor to represent eastern Connecticut, home to the largest military installation in New England, with 9,000 sailors, officers, and DOD support personnel, the Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Connecticut, and the highest

concentration of veterans in the State of Connecticut.

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend a Veterans' Coffeehouse nearby the submarine base, a monthly event hosted at Filomena's, a restaurant owned and operated by Michael Buscetto, whose amazing staff and volunteers donate a piping hot breakfast to 50 or so local vets to share war stories, have a few laughs, and catch up on new developments for the veteran community. I was asked to provide a legislative update on a variety of those issues.

The most prominent was a progress report on the milestone PACT Act signed into law by President Biden in 2022 that finally knocked down barriers to healthcare and benefits to millions of veterans exposed to toxins during the Vietnam war, the Gulf war, radiation cleanup, and Camp Lejeune, the most significant expansion of benefits and services to toxic-exposed veterans ever.

Since the bill was signed, implementation has moved fast, as this chart shows. As of a few days ago, the VA reported that over 1 million PACT Act-related claims have now been granted, delivering more than \$5.7 billion of benefits to veterans and their survivors. Over 145,000 new veterans have enrolled in VA healthcare, and over 5.4 million free toxic exposure screenings were given to all veterans whether they are enrolled in the VA or not. The law was further expanded a few months ago, to include veterans who not only served overseas, but also those who only served in the continental U.S. and are suffering from the cancers and heart disease caused by toxic exposure.

I also briefed the coffeehouse on a new measure, which the House Armed Services Committee, on which I sit, will take up tomorrow, the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act as part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act. This bill, thanks to the bipartisan efforts of the Quality of Life Panel, will provide additional resources and new authorities for servicemembers and their families. This effort could not come too soon.

Last year, for the first time in over 20 years, the Air Force missed its Active Duty enlisted recruiting goal. The Army fell short of 10,000 enlisted recruits, and the Navy fell short over 7,000 enlisted sailors and 2,000 officers.

Included in this bill for tomorrow are authorities to alleviate pay discrepancies for junior enlisted servicemembers, combat food insecurity, support childcare, and spousal employment opportunities. Importantly, the bill authorizes a 19.5 percent increase in military pay for junior enlisted servicemembers.

The bill will also cover 100 percent of basic allowance for housing to ensure that servicemembers can cover the cost of housing no matter where they are stationed. It will also make the basic needs allowance available to all servicemembers with dependents whose in-

come is less than 200 percent of the poverty guidelines, making more servicemembers eligible for the program.

Incredibly, the panel documented that 25 percent of junior enlisted servicemembers today are forced to enroll in food stamps in order to put food on the table for their families.

Lastly, the DOD will be given the authority to transfer professional licenses between States for military spouses, and fully fund childcare fee assistance programs to eliminate wait lists for eligible families.

This is the sort of meaningful gratitude that truly adheres to the goals of Military Appreciation Month. As John McCain often quoted George Washington: "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive how the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

These powerful and wise words are true today more than ever with an all-volunteer force, and we should finish the job for successful implementation of the PACT Act and pass this year's quality of life bill as soon as possible.

THE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE COMMITTEE HAS SOLUTIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, employers across all industries are looking for qualified workers to fill in-demand jobs. Job creators are consistently finding that skills-based credentials can successfully, oftentimes more effectively, prepare workers for success on the job.

It is not just employers who are recognizing the value of upskilling. A recent poll found that 82 percent of American voters are in favor of bolstering the Nation's workplace development programs.

The Education and Workforce Committee is proud to spearhead this effort with legislation like the A Stronger Workforce for America Act, which makes critical updates to the Nation's workforce development system.

Additionally, the Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act will help connect low-income students and workers with the experiences and programs they need to gain relevant skills for in-demand jobs.

In conjunction, these pieces of legislation will be transformative for America's workforce and prepare more Americans for success in the 21st century economy.

DIGITAL ASSETS MARKET

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

Mr. NICKEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Financial Innovation

and Technology for the 21st Century Act, or FIT21.

I am proud to have played a critical role in crafting this bipartisan legislation. As a member of the House Financial Services Committee, I worked with my fellow North Carolinian and Chairman PATRICK MCHENRY and Digital Assets Subcommittee Chairman FRENCH HILL, to ensure this bill brings regulatory clarity to the digital assets market while protecting consumers, promoting innovation, and advancing U.S. national security.

The FIT for the 21st Century Act represents a bipartisan effort to regulate centralized intermediaries in the digital assets markets, prevent the next FTX, safeguard consumers, cement the U.S. as a global leader in finance and technology and promote a secure, innovative, and inclusive financial future.

This commonsense legislation is designed to stop another FTX from happening by giving regulators increased power over bad actors, filling regulatory gaps between the SEC Commission and CFTC, creating accountability through registration and disclosures, requiring companies to mitigate conflicts of interest, and requiring firms to segregate customer funds from their own.

This legislation provides the CFTC with the resources they requested to undertake the new rulemaking required by FIT21 and authorizes the CFTC to charge fees to intermediaries seeking to register.

This would be a big deal for the United States. Congress has never voted on a regulatory structure for crypto. In fact, we are operating under a 100-year-old securities law. We are the global leader in financial services and technology today. If we want to be the global leader in 50 years, then we need to pass the FIT for the 21st Century Act.

The legislation will allow the digital asset ecosystem to thrive in the United States, cementing American leadership of the global financial system and the next generation of the internet. Without this, the SEC's regulation by enforcement will push the industry overseas where Americans are not protected.

Additionally, I am proud to have secured an amendment to this legislation during the markup, supported by leaders in both parties on the Financial Services Committee, expressing the sense of Congress that the U.S. should seek to foster advances in this exciting new era of the internet to improve our financial system and create more fair and equitable access to Financial Services for everyday Americans.

Much like the dawn of the internet, this new blockchain technology sometimes feels like uncharted territory with immense possibilities. We are responsible for ushering in this new era in a way that harnesses innovation and ensures consumers are at the forefront.

Digital assets and blockchain technology have the potential to revolu-

tionize our society. They can grow the economy, foster collaboration, enhance transparency, increase efficiency, and reduce transaction costs for working families.

Given the rapid pace of digital innovation, we must ensure these advancements are not at the cost of consumer safety.

FIT21 will address these challenges by establishing stricter regulatory requirements for emerging financial technologies and ensuring that these innovations are secure and transparent before they reach consumers.

Here is the reality: roughly 20 percent of Americans have invested, traded, or used crypto, so it is not going anywhere.

Unfortunately, the SEC's open hostility toward the digital assets industry is not serving President Biden's best interests. The SEC is turning cryptocurrency regulation into a political football and forcing President Biden to choose sides on an issue that matters to many Americans.

As a result, the U.S. is falling behind jurisdictions like the EU, U.K., Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and the UAE. We can't afford to lose our status as the economic and technological powerhouse of the globe.

Whether you love crypto or you hate it, you should support regulation. The status quo just isn't working, and we can't wait until the next crisis to take action.

It is past time for Congress to act, and we have the opportunity to do this, this week, with the FIT for the 21st Century Act.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this legislation to send a clear message that our priority lies in protecting consumers, cementing the U.S. as a global leader in finance and technology, and promoting an innovative and inclusive financial future.

SOCIAL SECURITY REFORM

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

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to address a pertinent issue for all Americans, that being Social Security.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, it has been more than 50-plus years since Congress, the only body that can, has taken action to enhance Social Security.

What becomes even more confounding, Mr. Speaker, is that with 10,000 baby boomers a day becoming eligible for Social Security, Congress has not acted to enhance this program.

I was talking to my good friend, JOBEY ARRINGTON, the other day, and reminded him that in his district in Texas, for example, he has 128,000 Social Security recipients, and 90,000 retirees, 9,000 children, almost 10,000 widows, 4,679 spouses, and 14,000-plus dis-

abled workers. They haven't received a benefit enhancement in more than 50 years.

Moreover, Social Security has nothing to do with the debt or deficit. It is an earned benefit. It is fully paid for, and the increases that we are calling for, well, the President said it best, we are going to pay for those by lifting the cap on \$400,000.

You could have people in the audience, for example, raise their hand if they are making more than \$400,000. I doubt that you would find anybody. It is about six-tenths of 1 percent, but most people are astounded to learn that there is a cap, and they haven't paid anything into the system, a system that all Americans pay into.

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For example, Mr. Speaker, in Tennessee's Eighth District, 189,000 of your citizens receive Social Security benefits, and 136,000 of them are retirees, 25,000 disabled people, 4,000 spouses, and the list goes on.

Here is the most important thing: Your district gets \$330 million monthly. That goes into your district.

I say this to my colleagues and good friends on the other side of the aisle who are always talking about economic development: What better economic development tool is there than for your citizens to get payments?

Nobody gets wealthy on Social Security. They haven't had an increase in more than 50 years.

This money would go right back into my colleagues' districts and be spent at the local grocery store, at the pharmacy, at the dry cleaners, to pay for rent or a mortgage, or to put gas in an automobile. The money all comes back, but Congress hasn't acted in over 50 years.

Mr. ARRINGTON at least says this about Social Security 2100, the bill that we have put forward: It enhances benefits across the board by 2 percent and repeals WEP and GPO.

Do you realize, Mr. Speaker, that there are more than 23 million Americans who pay taxes on their Social Security? My colleagues are quick to make sure that there is tax relief for billionaires. How about for people who are actually working for a living and then have to pay double taxation on their Social Security? Twenty-three million Americans.

There are 5 million Americans who get below-poverty-level checks from the Federal Government, from Social Security, even though they have paid in all their quarters. Why? Because Congress hasn't taken action, the only body that can. The President can't do this through executive order. The Supreme Court isn't going to act. We need to act on a bill.

As Representative ARRINGTON says: Well, I don't agree with LARSON.

I said: What don't you agree with? If you have a better idea, put it forward.

At least he is honest enough to say they don't have a plan, that they