

one of the Commonwealth's leading hunger relief organizations.

Under her leadership, Feeding South-west Virginia has grown from distributing 1 million pounds of food annually to more than 20 million pounds, serving 26 counties and 9 cities, and helping more than 127,000 neighbors each month.

Guided by compassion, faith, and an unwavering belief that no one should go hungry, Pam Irvine has transformed the fight against hunger throughout southwest Virginia.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Virginia's Sixth Congressional District, I thank Pamela Irvine for her extraordinary service, congratulate her on an exceptional career, and wish her every happiness in her well-deserved retirement.

RECOGNIZING LURAY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Mr. CLINE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Luray Fire Department of Luray, Virginia, as it marks an extraordinary milestone: 125 years of dedicated service to the people of Luray and Page County.

Founded in 1901 and chartered in 1933, the Luray Fire Department has stood as a proud, all-volunteer, and nonprofit organization with the goal of protecting the lives and property of so many for over a century. From its early days when the department attended its first State Firefighters Convention in Staunton and a year later sent its first reel team to a State contest in Portsmouth, the department has remained the cornerstone of community safety and pride.

With a membership of nearly 100 volunteers, the LFD has celebrated many milestones and accomplishments since then, and it continues to strengthen community ties through annual traditions such as the concert and ceremony held on September 11 as well as its raffle and fundraiser held on September 12.

Today, we honor the men and women, past and present, whose selfless service reflects the very best of our Commonwealth. Join me in celebrating the strong and brave Luray Fire Department on 125 years of steadfast commitment to not only their community but to the Nation.

PROVIDING CERTAINTY FOR AMERICA

Mr. CLINE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the passage of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2027 out of the Budget Committee last week.

Congress' primary responsibility is to defend the American people and preserve the strength of our Nation, and this resolution reflects that duty. It invests in our warfighters; supports our ranchers, farmers, and producers; and secures the integrity of our voting systems with the SAVE America Act.

For rural districts like Virginia's Sixth, this resolution delivers real support and stability for our farmers. It empowers our national defense, stands behind our warfighters, secures our food supply, and ensures American elections are decided only by American citizens.

This budget reflects a commitment to responsible governance while restoring the faith and confidence of voters in our election system.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution reflects a vision of a stronger, safer, and more prosperous America. It demonstrates our commitment to defending our Nation, supporting the American people, and governing with responsibility. I urge my colleagues to support this resolution this week and join us in advancing policies that strengthen our country for generations to come.

CONSIDER NEW APPROACH TO CUBA

(Mr. MCGOVERN of Massachusetts was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about United States policy toward Cuba, or rather our lack of a coherent policy and our decades-long failure to help the people of Cuba.

Cuba is our neighbor. We have lived side by side for centuries. Our histories are intertwined. Our futures are, too.

Almost 10 million people live on the island of Cuba. They go to school and work, raise families and go about their lives, and crave freedom and justice, but the people of Cuba struggle to realize their aspirations.

The Cuban Government deprives the people from enjoying their civil and political rights. Freedom of expression and assembly are severely curtailed. The recent release of 2,000 prisoners was welcome, as is the recent release of Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, a political prisoner in the Defending Freedoms Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, but over 700 prisoners of conscience remain behind bars, according to Human Rights Watch.

Yet, for all the abuse of the Cuban people by the Cuban Government, so too has the United States deprived the Cuban people of enjoying their economic and social rights. The crushing U.S. embargo has stunted their economic development and caused immense hardship. These U.S. policies are human rights violations.

America's cruel and illegal blockade is creating a severe humanitarian crisis, denying energy imports, which the Cuban people depend on for their healthcare, food distribution, and livelihood.

Cubans recently experienced the eighth collapse of their power grid since October 2024. Some 3 million Cubans experience water shortages every single day, and the U.N. reports that infant mortality has doubled to 9.9 per 1,000 births. Childhood cancer survival rates have fallen from 85 to 65 percent. Supplies of essential medicines are only 30 percent of normal.

What we are witnessing in Cuba, as some have characterized it, is basically Gaza in slow motion: man-made starvation with the help and complicity of the United States of America.

Meanwhile, arrogant politicians in Washington tell Cubans on the island that they must suffer violations of their economic and social rights as the only way to restore their civil and political rights. This is an insult to their dignity, and it is wrong.

The six-decade embargo has been a miserable failure. Over and over we see that it does not work. It only emboldens hard-liners and makes things worse for regular people.

Now, we hear that the administration is plotting military action against Cuba. This would be horrible, wasteful, inhumane, and illegal.

Cuba is not doing anything that would legitimize a war. Congress has approved no declaration of war, no Authorization for Use of Military Force. Military action against Cuba would make America a rogue State, aligning us with Russia, China, Iran, and others that believe that international rules don't matter.

If we want to know why invading Cuba would be such a disaster, look no further than Venezuela. Meet the new boss; same as the old boss. The Venezuelan people still have no democracy or human rights, while listening to Marco Rubio lecture them with empty promises about freedom and self-determination. Their economy was still in shambles even before the earthquake.

Trump and Rubio are pals with the new President. The U.S. has immense leverage, but we are not using it to restore democracy, improve human rights, or fight hunger. The security apparatus remains in place. Political prisoners remain in jail. Oil revenues go to the elites.

The people of Venezuela deserve better, and the people of Cuba do not deserve to be screwed over in the same undignified and illegal manner.

Cubans deserve to shape their own future, not have it selected for them by arrogant politicians in Washington.

There is a better way. Ten years ago, the U.S. tried a better approach. We tried diplomacy. We tried engagement. We tried talking to each other, working through our differences, and guess what. It started working.

American tourists went to Cuba. We dropped barriers. We opened up relations. Things started getting better for the Cuban people, and there was hope that some day they could shape their own future.

My U.S.-Cuba Trade Act, H.R. 7521, would reverse our decades of failed policies toward Cuba. It would repeal the statutory basis of the embargo. It would give us tools to work with the Cuban people on economic and political progress. It would ensure that Americans and Cubans can be good neighbors.

We must chart a shared path to the future, built not on fear and threats or marked by invasion and blockade. The future we must build is one of good will and diplomacy, reinforced by trade and exchange.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to consider a new approach to Cuba. It is

time for a new path forward. The Trump administration has damaged our Nation's standing in the world. They have totally screwed up the Middle East by ignoring human rights and embracing war. I urge my colleagues to stand with me in demanding that they not repeat the same cruel mistakes in Cuba.

REMEMBERING WES ANDERSON

(Mr. BAUMGARTNER of Washington was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to note the passing of a great American, a great patriot, and a friend, Mr. Wes Anderson of Spokane, Washington.

Wes was known across the communities of Spokane County for his exemplary service to fellow veterans who knew him best as "Doc."

Wes was a lifelong Spokaneite whose life was defined by service, first in Vietnam where he served as a hospital corpsman and later across our communities where he had time for every veteran.

The moments in Vietnam crystallized a lifetime of determination to serve veterans when, on his return to the United States, he had to fight his way through a crowd of war protesters on his flight home. His service to veterans took the form of over five decades of service through leadership roles in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, where he was honored for his work as a chaplain, and through various initiatives, small and large, that included his support for the residents of Spokane's veterans homes, 20 consecutive years of cleaning the Spokane Vietnam Veterans Memorial on each Memorial Day, and his volunteer work for veterans organizations such as Heroes Homestead.

With Wes' passing, there is a void in our community that will be felt for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Wes was a patriot, a great American, and a friend. I speak for the entire Spokane community when I say that he will be sincerely missed.

RECOGNIZING THE EWU EAGLES FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Eastern Washington University Eagles football team as they prepare for what promises to be a fantastic 2026 season.

Everyone in eastern Washington knows that EWU plays some of the most exciting brands of football in the Western United States, and I know personally that their tailgating in Cheney is second to none.

They are led by Coach Best, a former All-Big Sky center and Eastern Washington alum who has had an exemplary career as coach of the Eagles.

The Eastern Washington Eagles have a stacked schedule this fall with away games at Northern Arizona, South Dakota, University of Washington, UC Davis, University of Idaho, and Utah Tech, while welcoming schools like

Northern Iowa, Cal Poly, Northern Colorado, Montana, Montana State, and Portland State to Cheney.

I look forward to a great season of Eastern football, and I know the Eastern Eagles will be very competitive. I am sure the coach, his staff, every student-athlete, and the student body of Eastern all look forward to this exciting season.

Go Eagles.

□ 1045

RECOGNIZING TIM MERCK

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Spokane native Tim Merck, an outstanding businessman, philanthropist, and family man. He and his wife, Beth, have raised an outstanding family.

Tim built a multimillion dollar business in Spokane from the ground up, Old World Christmas, which was known across the country and across the world as providing the best Christmas ornaments anyone can find.

Today, I also want to recognize a bit of trivia about Tim. When he sent his son and daughter to Notre Dame, he realized that there was not a leprechaun sculpture on Notre Dame's campus, and Tim set out to rectify that. Tim and Beth Merck, along with their children, Jon and Katherine, have long demonstrated a commitment to preserving stories and dreams in their operation.

Jon and Katherine fulfilled a dream for their grandmother by attending and graduating from Notre Dame. When they noticed that the leprechaun was not there, they reached out to the president, and today, there is this leprechaun statue at gate 10 of the Purcell Pavilion, the very gate through which the Leprechaun Legion enters the arena to cheer on their basketball and volleyball teams.

This is a tremendous story. Tim is also a very proud graduate of the University of Idaho, and upon presenting the leprechaun, he said: I guess it takes a Vandal to make sure that the students of Notre Dame have a leprechaun to celebrate.

Mr. Speaker, Tim is a great American and a great friend. I love him and Beth. Go Vandals. Go Irish.

STANDING UP FOR CUBA

(Ms. DEXTER of Oregon was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. DEXTER. Mr. Speaker, the American people need to know that their government is intentionally suffocating the nation of Cuba. There is no other way to describe what is happening.

Earlier this month, I traveled to Cuba with a congressional delegation to see firsthand how U.S. policy is affecting this country that is just 90 miles off our shore.

This is a country that is known for its joy and for its culture. It is a country that has had a glimpse of prosperity and promise during the Obama

administration when relations were normalized and decades of sanctions lifted, only to have Trump reinstate the blockade in 2017.

Normalized relations led to an explosion of opportunity for small businesses, international investment, and cultural exchange. Hope was contagious.

Today, much of that hope has disappeared.

Ultimately, it comes down to fuel. Immediately after coming back into office in January of 2025, Trump decisively cut off the ability for any fuel to get into their country—fuel the country depends on to run its electrical power plants, vehicles, and generators.

Cuba is not a nation that can produce its own, so without imported fuel, there is no electricity. This has reverberations across every aspect of Cuban life.

Families cannot go to the grocery store as they always have done and keep their groceries in a fridge or a freezer because they do not have reliable electricity. Meat, milk, and medicine spoil with the power outages that plague the nation. Basic services have broken down. Daily life is a constant struggle.

Cuba's public health system and its medical training programs are the envy of much of the world. Their healthcare system is filled with highly qualified, well-trained physicians, and yet the hospital I toured in Havana was nearly empty.

Physicians have no patients because they have no transportation, no buses to get there. They have tens of thousands of people waiting for surgeries because supplies are insufficient and only a fraction of their operating rooms are running.

I saw three CT scanners, their only scanners in this hospital, all broken down, an MRI machine also not working, and a handful of working ultrasounds, because parts cannot be imported.

I sat face-to-face with these doctors and understood the deep pain that they are feeling, having the skills and the will to care for people but being denied the opportunity for political reasons.

The difference is here in the U.S. we have never had the political will to ensure that every American has access to healthcare.

As a physician, I do not know what it is like to care for every patient that comes in my door without worrying whether they can afford it. In Cuba, they have spent decades fulfilling their promise to make healthcare a human right. Every person has access to healthcare for free. Can you imagine?

They made it a reality. We should be aspiring to that commitment to human health, not punishing an entire population for it.

Congress must not continue standing by while our own government intentionally inflicts hardship on an entire nation.

The Cuban people deserve dignity, safety, and self-determination. It is