

of 50 years. The American taxpayer should not be forced to subsidize the abortion industry directly or indirectly.

I will close with this, coming back to what we said 1 week ago in celebrating the courage, for example, of the people who stood up on United Flight 93 and confronted terror, with Todd Beamer's famous words: "Let's roll."

Before that what did he do?

He asked a woman that he called to recite the Lord's Prayer. Life matters.

Who are we, as a people, if we cannot stand up in defense of the most innocent form of life there is: a child in the womb of its mother?

That should be our calling, and we should be able to unite as human beings in defense of the defenseless.

Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for hosting this hour.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much for his comments and his leadership on so many bills, including the FACE Act. I was here when that passed. I led the opposition to it, and we lost. Now wonderful people who are accused of physically obstructing an abortion clinic lose, not only can they get up to 2 years in prison for what was the staple of the civil rights movement, and that was nonviolent civil disobedience. They can have their entire bank account and 401(k)s taken away from them and given to Planned Parenthood. It is too much, but the gentleman led the effort on that.

My friend mentioned Todd Beamer. He is from just the next town over from my district, from Cranbury. I got to know his wife and many of the widows. They have such strength and such courage. They saved many lives that day, as my friend knows, to make sure that that airliner did not end up here or wherever their final terrorist designation may have been.

It is great that the gentleman brought that in. That was so very, very important, and I thank my friend for his leadership.

Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

VETERANS BENEFITS

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. TAKANO of California was recognized for 19 minutes.)

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. Fedorchak). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to highlight for the American people just how badly the Republican

majority has failed veterans in this Congress.

First, before I get into that, I want to talk about something especially important. September is Suicide Prevention Month. We lose far too many veterans to suicide. Suicide Prevention Month is a perfect time to bring attention to this critical issue and to show support for veterans who need it.

It is important to remind veterans that the Veterans Crisis Line is always reachable at 988 and you need to press 1. Responders are standing by to offer help and support.

Unfortunately, my Republican colleagues declined to hold a single suicide prevention hearing in the month of September last year, and, sadly, no hearings were planned for this year.

I will take this opportunity to say to any veterans watching: You are not alone and support is available.

We all have a role to play in preventing veteran suicide by reaching out, checking in, and letting veterans know that they have support.

Now, one of the most important things that Congress should do for veterans is to ensure that they have the resources and programs that they need. House Democrats have been demonstrating our commitment by leading the charge to do what is right for veterans without consideration for politics or party.

For example, last night, the discharge petition Representative RAUL RUZ and I introduced on the Major Richard Star Act received the 218th signature to force a vote in the House.

This bill, sponsored by my honorable Republican colleague, Representative GUS BILIRAKIS, has for years sat without action as veterans service organizations came to Congress repeatedly to demand relief for combat-injured veterans.

My Republican colleagues offered excuses that it was too expensive, that helping wounded veterans would require cuts to other benefits, and my Democratic colleagues and I refused to accept that.

Now, together with veterans service organizations and veteran partners and a few courageous Republicans who put veterans before partisanship, we can finally have a vote on this priority legislation.

I thank every person in this room, in the galleries, people watching at home who use their voice to advocate to end the wounded veteran tax. This victory belongs to them, but our work is not over until the Major Richard Star Act is signed into law. We have come too far, built too much momentum, and brought together too powerful a coalition to stop now. We must force the majority to act.

Madam Speaker, the House has spoken, and these veterans have waited far too long for the benefits they deserve. Do not make them wait another 2 months for a vote on this bill.

I ask this question to the Speaker: Is it more important for Congress to

leave town than for us to stay here and take care of these 59,000 combat veterans?

Instead of sending everyone home this evening, we should vote on this bill so it can be sent to the Senate and passed during this work period. Combat-injured veterans fulfilled their duty to this country.

Will Congress fulfill our duty to them?

Right now, veterans are struggling to access their care and benefits, including mental health care. Too many veterans are facing the affordability crisis, which is leading to spikes in homelessness and home foreclosures. Republicans have failed to advance a single bill to move the needle on those issues and others over the last 2 years. Instead, they have focused their attention on cobbling together politically divisive mega bills that would expand care and benefits for some veterans only at the cost of cutting benefits to others.

Meanwhile, the administration's big donors continue to line their pockets with taxpayer money while they bilk the government for billions of dollars in lucrative VA contracts.

Now, my Republican colleagues wasted months pushing their deeply flawed taking benefits away from America's veterans act, which they claim was the "only viable path for the Major Richard Star Act". However, in reality, H.R. 9237 never had a path to passage. They brought it to Congress, to the House floor twice, but it was resoundingly rejected by the VSO and the veteran community because it includes the largest cut to veteran benefits in history. Now the House is recessing with nothing for veterans.

For my Republican colleagues to try and rip veterans' benefits away now, while we are in an active conflict with Iran, is a slap in the face to every servicemember in harm's way. They should have to look in the eyes of our sailors who were on the USS *Lincoln*, our soldiers and our airmen and marines in the Middle East and tell them: Thank you for your service, but we are cutting your benefits.

Nothing illustrates this point more than the majority's inaction on any new presumptions of service connection for veterans who desperately need help.

The presumptions include blast overpressure, the Nevada Test and Training Range, missileer cancer, Atsugi Air Base, Fort George, Fort McClellan, Guam, Panama, infertility, fast boats, Red Hill, toxic base housing, cultural support teams, and the list goes on and on and on.

All these veterans and their families are looking to us for relief. Yet all has been left by the wayside by this majority. Republicans haven't seen fit to address even one of the issues I just mentioned.

Why? I can only speculate.

□ 2130

History has shown that when push comes to shove on veterans benefits,

my Republican colleagues' first question is always about cost and never about need.

We see what they are doing right now, trying to actually cut benefits. What makes it even worse is that the \$60 billion in benefits that my Republican colleagues want to cut in H.R. 9237 would not just fund increases in benefits for some veterans. Most of those cuts would go to lining the pockets of government contractors and privatizing the VA.

Their bill even includes a \$500 million slush fund for VA IT contractors at a time when the agency is preparing to spend \$17 billion more on its Electronic Health Record Modernization program with Oracle. Billions of dollars are going to private industry on the backs of veterans serving our country.

Oracle isn't the only company getting rich or richer while the rest of America struggles with rising healthcare costs, expensive groceries, and sky-high gas prices. VA is also giving American taxpayers the opportunity to line the pockets of healthcare conglomerates, like UnitedHealthcare and private equity giants, with the VA's new community care contracts, amounting to \$1 trillion. That is trillion with a t.

I would say I am surprised, but I am not. It is no secret that this administration and sycophants in Congress like to pat themselves on the back, professing to put America first, all the while picking America's pockets. We should all be watching what they are doing instead of what they are saying and just follow the money.

For instance, in 2022, after Oracle purchased Cerner for \$28.3 billion, Oracle's CEO Mike Sicilia testified that they would actually eat the cost for the deployment of VA's electronic health records system in the case of cost overruns.

However, we know that this is no longer the case. After Larry Ellison, Oracle's executive chairman and the eighth richest man in the world, made more than \$45 million in donations to Donald Trump, Oracle is getting a \$17.5 billion contract augmentation, a shocking amount that was initially hidden from both Congress and the public.

Look at this contract that shows the augmentation of Oracle's contract by \$17.5 billion. As you can see, VA has redacted, meaning blacked out, this number when it was quietly posted on SAM.gov on August 11, 2026.

In fact, VA never even notified Congress of this \$17 billion increase. To this day, VA still has not provided the committee or the public with an unredacted copy of this justification.

The fact that Secretary Collins chose to hide the amount that the American taxpayer will be shouldering in order to shore up Oracle's bottom line should be concerning to all of us.

Everyone can certainly draw their own conclusions here, but it is extremely clear to me that we are in des-

perate need of more facts. We need more information about how VA landed on this \$17 billion number and just what led Oracle to be awarded this massive sum, despite no proven success.

This is exactly what I am attempting to do.

On September 2, the Veterans' Affairs Committee voted unanimously to adopt Congresswoman MAXINE DEXTER's motion to subpoena Oracle Chairman Larry Ellison and Oracle Health CEO Mike Sicilia.

While I was glad to see that the subpoena was finally issued Monday night by Chairman BOST, I would like to reiterate that compliance with the subpoena must occur in a public hearing this Congress.

Congress has a duty to examine the sequence of events that led us to this point, especially while the administration and congressional Republicans contemplate tens of billions of dollars in cuts to benefits that veterans earned for their service.

Chairman BOST scheduled Mr. Sicilia and Mr. Ellison's appearances before the Veterans' Affairs Committee for November 19 and December 10, respectively. I can't help but cynically wonder if the chairman is delaying enforcement of the subpoena to run out the clock on this Congress, hoping the Speaker adjourns the House for early holiday recess.

Subpoenas effectively die and lack enforcement power when the 119th Congress ends, but I can assure Oracle and the public that my Democratic colleagues and I will not back down from our demands for transparency and accountability.

As VA continues to push more and more care out to the private sector and outsources even more of its IT services to Oracle and other Trump donors, it is clear, at least to me, that veterans are the ones who will suffer because of this corruption.

I want to go on to another issue. House Republicans' posture this week—our last week of session before an unexpected recess—is honestly symbolic of their posture with veterans in this Congress. At every turn, the majority has ensured that veterans were at the end of their priority list, from benefits-cutting legislation to canceled oversight hearings.

Just months into the 119th Congress, Chairman VAN ORDEN and Chairman BOST urged President Trump and Secretary Collins to end the most important foreclosure relief program for veterans. With no warning, no foresight, and no planning for what comes next, Secretary Collins pulled the plug on the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase program, known as VASP.

The VA informed the committee that the decision sent over 15,000 veterans and their families into foreclosure and tens of thousands more at risk of losing their homes. Our own estimates now put that figure in excess of 17,000 foreclosures.

Let's review how we got here. The unprecedented crisis of COVID-19 required action from the VA to prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of homes. President Biden, with the support of Congress, used existing authorities to pause foreclosures that were occurring during the pandemic.

Then, by the authorities granted by the National Disaster Declaration, the VA was able to implement a partial claims program, saving tens of thousands of veterans from losing their homes. That is what this chart shows, the plummeting number of foreclosures.

Chairman BOST and Republicans repeatedly called for the termination of the U.S. National Emergency for COVID-19, which happened on April 11, 2023. This resulted in VA losing authorities to continue foreclosure mitigation.

Action was still critically needed, or veterans would have lost their homes. President Biden instituted a second foreclosure moratorium to give VA time to offer a solution.

That is what you see here.

President Biden and then-Secretary McDonough launched the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase program, otherwise known as VASP, on May 31, 2024. From 2023 to 2024—that is what you see here under 3. This is when they implemented the VASP program. Look at what happens to foreclosures when they implement and address the issue, following through on the pandemic.

Most lenders worked with the Biden administration to ensure that very few veteran foreclosures occurred. This new program used explicit existing authorities by Congress to offer veteran homeowners a last resort before losing their home.

However, last year, Secretary Collins, President Trump, and Elon Musk's DOGE abruptly ended the VASP program, giving veterans no notice that a critical lifeline for borrowers was being ripped away. The decision was for and celebrated by Chairman BOST and subcommittee Chairman VAN ORDEN.

It is now 18 months since VASP was terminated, and still, veterans are unable to use the new replacement program. According to VA's own data from June, this has led to over 15,000 veteran foreclosures. Based on this current trend, we estimate that figure to have grown to over 17,000.

Let me say that again: 17,000 veterans and their families have lost their homes because Secretary Collins, Chairman BOST, and, most of all, Chairman VAN ORDEN decided to call for an end to the VASP program, unnecessarily.

Industry estimates are even more dire. Mortgage industry representatives told me today that they believe VA is underestimating the numbers. They think at least 22,000 veterans have lost their homes, and the actual number may be approaching 30,000. That is astronomical.

□ 2140

That is astronomical. Tens of thousands more veterans and their families are at risk if Secretary Collins does not reverse course.

While my Republican colleagues created an unnecessary veteran housing crisis, they have simultaneously turned a blind eye to the plight of the most vulnerable veterans.

At the beginning of this Congress, both Chairman BOST and Economic Subcommittee Chairman VAN ORDEN announced ending veteran homelessness as one of their top priorities. Yet, there has not been a single piece of legislation related to veteran homelessness brought to the House floor, nor a subcommittee hearing on the topic. In fact, the policies that Chairman BOST and Congressman VAN ORDEN advocated actually produced more housing insecurity among veterans by ending VA home loan foreclosure protections.

I have asked repeatedly how VA has helped these families who are facing foreclosure, but the Trump VA has refused to provide that information. I have gleaned what I can from available VA data, which shows a massive increase in the number of veterans using VA homelessness prevention services.

Nearly 10,000 more veterans and their families were served this year through the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families program of 2022. The VA has refused to tell me how many of these families became at risk of homelessness due to their home foreclosure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. TAKANO. I wish I could tell you more, but I think I have told you quite a bit.

But my Democratic colleagues and I will not quit asking the hard questions and pushing VA to use its resources to help vulnerable families.

There are still an estimated 32,000 veterans experiencing homelessness on any given night. One veteran sleeping on the streets is too many—32,000 should be treated by both sides of the aisle as an emergency.

I remain committed to leading the fight to end veteran homelessness and creating a housing ecosystem that serves the needs of everyone, instead of prioritizing profits and the bottom line of billionaires. I will continue to push back on needless policies that create housing insecurity for veteran families. If Chairman BOST and Congressman VAN ORDEN were truly committed to ending veteran homelessness, they would be fighting next to me, but sadly they are sitting on the sidelines while veterans sleep on the streets.

Madam Speaker, I've spent this past half hour walking through what this Majority has done—and hasn't done—for our veterans over the past two years. And I want to be clear about something: my Republican colleagues do not lack for words on this floor. They will tell you, and they will tell veterans, that they care. That veterans come first. That this Congress honors their service.

But talk is cheap, and veterans know the difference between a press statement and real action.

So, let's test it. Last night, the discharge petition for the Major Richard Star Act hit 218

signatures. A majority of this House, Democrats and Republicans together, said enough waiting. That petition is no longer a message. It's a mandate. Combat-injured veterans have earned the right to keep both their retirement pay and their disability compensation, and the House has now spoken.

The only person standing between 59,000 veterans and that vote is the Speaker. But the Speaker has cancelled session until November 9th. Don't make these veterans wait another two months, for a vote on this bill. There is no procedural excuse left, no committee to wait on, no more signatures to chase. Mr. Speaker, schedule the vote. Not next month. Not when it's convenient. This week. Every day this vote sits on a calendar instead of the floor is another day combat-injured veterans go without benefits this House just told the world they deserve.

To the veterans watching tonight: last night you won something. Not because Washington finally decided to do right by you—but because of you and the organizations who fight for you refused to let this go quietly. That's how every real gain for veterans in this country has happened—not from a Congress that moved first, but from veterans who MADE it move.

You've watched this body take 18 months to fix what VASP's termination broke, while families lost their homes. You've watched a VA Secretary spend more energy attacking the VFW than answering for a contract increase he tried to hide. You've waited on hold, waited on a claim, waited in a clinic that still isn't staffed. Tonight is proof that waiting isn't the only option. Democrats will keep pushing this House to prove, with votes and measurable actions, not just words—that this time is different.

Mr. TAKANO: Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

AMERICANS ARE ASKING QUESTIONS

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. ROY of Texas was recognized for 19 minutes.)

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, yet again, I am sitting here in an empty Chamber late at night. People have gone home to campaign. I understand that it is campaign season.

But while some are preparing for elections, American families are preparing for another trip to the grocery store, are filling up their cars, are paying their mortgages and their rent, and are looking at their utility bills.

A lot of Americans are asking a simple question: Why are things so expensive? Why is life so hard to afford? Inflation, lower than it was 2 years ago, is still built on the back of the massive inflation after COVID.

Today, the Federal Reserve raised rates another .25 percent, raising rates for the first time since 2023. Gasoline prices and diesel prices continue to go up and rise as the war in Iran rages on. Americans have difficulty affording their homes.

All of these things are true. Now, why is that the case? Let me pause for a second and say that until a little over 18 months ago, 19 months ago,

President Trump comes in, and this Republican Congress got to work. I am deeply proud of the work that we have done to take on the biggest challenges that our Nation faces.

I also want to say that I am deeply proud of the United States House Freedom Caucus, conservatives who stood up in defense of the things Americans sent us here to do. But for conservatives and but for the Freedom Caucus, we would not have reduced spending on welfare, Medicaid, and the various programs ripe with fraud that are racking up mountains of debt and causing the American people to have to spend much more in inflation.

But for the Freedom Caucus, we would not have saved \$1.7 trillion. But for conservatives and the Freedom Caucus, we would not have repealed \$500 billion in inflation-causing subsidies put on by green new scam companies trying to make money off of the back of taxpayers.

But for the Freedom Caucus, we would not have eliminated a tax on guns that infringe on our Second Amendment right. But for the House Freedom Caucus, we would not have made the tax cuts permanent all the way through. But for the House Freedom Caucus, we would not have passed the Laken Riley Act, with the SUE Act in it, giving power to States to sue the Federal Government if they fail to secure the border. But for the House Freedom Caucus, we would not have gotten a 5-year ban on a central bank digital currency, to protect you from surveillance.

But for the House Freedom Caucus, we would not have held off on just an automatic renewal of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, carrying out surveillance on the American people.

I can go on and on and on. But the people that are in here trying to fight every single day for the hardworking American feeling screwed by their government and screwed by corporate America, those men and women, those patriots in the House Freedom Caucus and conservatives, are going to bat for you.

I can tell you, a lot of people in this town are not. A lot of people in this town want the easy road. A lot of lobbyists and a lot of people who are more interested in their election certificate or climbing the ladder of being a committee chairman or in some leadership post, they don't dare care about what that means for you. That is true on both sides of the aisle, and we need to recognize that.

Even as we speak, there are candidates who are in an R plus 20 or R plus 15 district who are already jockeying for committee positions. Even as we speak, there are current Members of this body spending money to try to raise money for their colleagues in large amounts to try to buy a committee chair, to try to buy a seat in leadership.

I think we ought to be here right now. I think we ought to be finishing