

lost a great American, a great patriot, a great friend, a great husband, and a great father.

So while we here in the United States Congress bid farewell to our friend and colleague, we do so always remembering the enduring spirit and sense of service that Steve imparted on every life that he touched. Steve Vermillion's life serves as an inspiration to all of us who knew and loved him. May God receive him mercifully into His glory and bless the family, the Nation, and everyone that he leaves behind.

Stevo, we'll miss you, Big Man.

#### MOURNING THE PASSING OF STEVE VERMILLION

(Mr. SENSENBRENNER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RIVERA) in mourning the passing of Steve Vermillion. I gave Steve Vermillion one of his first jobs on Capitol Hill and taught him about the legislative process. He was a man of unquestioned ability, a man of deep integrity, and a man of great commitment to his principles and love of this country and the democracy that we have built and nurtured over the last 230-plus years.

His service to other Members of Congress, as well as in the private sector, was marked by making a difference. No one who worked with Steve Vermillion or who was touched by his life came away a poorer person from it. He enriched all of our lives. He made a great contribution, and I join with the gentleman from Florida in expressing our sympathies to his wife, Jennifer, and to his two children on his passage.

May his soul rest in peace.

#### ACCELERATING END TO AFGHANISTAN WAR

(Ms. LEE of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, as we gather here for the first time since the election, it's important that we continue to talk about and work to resolve the questions that cannot wait until the 113th Congress. President Obama will soon be meeting with his military advisers and considering various plans for Afghanistan.

My Republican colleague, Congressman WALTER JONES, and I will be sending a letter to the President renewing our call for an accelerated withdrawal from Afghanistan. I encourage all Members to join us on this letter. Keeping our troops in Afghanistan through 2014 will not bring about a meaningful difference on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, it is really time that we catch up with the American people, who are calling for an accelerated end to the war in Afghanistan. Let's bring

our troops home, end the war in Afghanistan, and invest in jobs and nation building here.

□ 1220

#### AMERICA'S TO-DO LIST

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALBERG). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, as is obvious in this room, the business for the week has now concluded. This is a week which commenced on Tuesday; and prior to that, the Congress, the House, had not been in session for 7 weeks despite the fact that this country has a to-do list a mile long in terms of the critical issues that affect our health care system.

Whether it's doctors' fees that are going to hit a cliff on January 1, a 37 percent cut for Medicare providers of all stripes, particularly in the physician community, we have the fiscal cliff, where tax rates are going to go up for almost every American wage earner if Congress fails to act. We have the sequestration, which is a measure which will be the equivalent of a chain saw going through the government, cutting .2 percent from every budget, whether it's defense or nondefense issues.

We have a farm bill which needs to be acted upon. We have, again, the 2008 farm bill which was a 5-year measure that has expired; and it's critical for rural America. We need to renew the farm bill. And to give one small example, which the dairy industry has reminded people of, that the price of a gallon of milk starting in January could potentially go as high as \$7 if we don't restore and reauthorize the system of price supports that we have in our dairy industry.

The Violence Against Women Act expires. Again, a critical measure so that law enforcement officials all across the country can continue the progress that we're making in terms of the issue of domestic violence and violence against children.

Again, the list goes on and on.

And, incredibly, despite the fact that we have been out of town for 7 weeks—this House convened on Tuesday and is recessing again today for another week's break. And Thanksgiving is obviously an important national holiday for our country and is certainly something that is important to my family, just like every other Member's family—but the fact of the matter is, if you look at the number of legislative days between right now and Christmas—where, again, Congress has never been in session beyond that date—there are literally only 17 potential days; and the Speaker's Office has only scheduled 12.

This is not the way to run a government. And I would just say—as someone who, again, was grateful about the

support I received from my congressional district in eastern Connecticut on election day a few days ago—the message that I heard loud and clear is that it's time for this body to knock it off, to start working together, and to try to start getting some of these critical measures dealt with so that the U.S. economy can have a horizon so that employers can make investment decisions, so that employers can make hiring decisions, so that issues of tax policy and budget can give, again, sectors all across the U.S. economy the confidence to move forward.

We have a very fragile recovery that we're going through right now. We are roughly averaging about 100,000 to 200,000 jobs a month, which is not enough to make a real dent in the unemployment rate in this country. And part of the reason, I believe—and I think, frankly, many economists and observers of the U.S. economy today believe—that we have not gotten a faster recovery is because of the uncertainty that surrounds the failure of Congress to act in terms of the fiscal cliff and sequestration.

Again, going back to the farm bill, as one example of a huge sector of America's economy, our agriculture, the Senate passed a farm bill, a bipartisan farm bill on June 19. This was a measure that was a 5-year authorization bill that sets food policy, food security policy, food safety policy. Republicans and Democrats in the Senate—which is, again, one of the most difficult legislative bodies in the world—actually came together and passed a farm bill. It will reduce the Federal deficit by \$23 billion. It reforms the whole system of commodities support so that we're not going to be sending cash payments to farmers but, instead, modify the system in favor of a risk insurance so that producers actually have a little more skin in the game, which is a healthy thing and is a much more market-oriented approach to having a safety net for agriculture.

In the area of dairy, which is unlike almost every other commodity, it is harvested every day—actually two or three times a day. In terms of the herds of cows, the dairy farmers are out there working hard every day with, again, a very challenging market environment. We have a solid reform in the farm bill in terms of setting up a risk-insurance plan. For the first time in American history, we had full support from the dairy industry and dairy providers. Lots of compromise and negotiation. And, again, a \$23 billion reduction to the deficit in terms of the last farm bill. That was done on June 19.

Since then, the House leadership has refused to bring a farm bill to the floor despite the fact that the House Agriculture Committee, which I sit on, actually passed a bipartisan measure. So it was teed up and ready for action here on the House floor, and yet we have gone 5 months since the Senate acted. We had 7 weeks of recess prior to this past Tuesday. We have American