about a couple of unrelated topics, except that they both are examples of officials in positions of power overreacting to situations and making very bad decisions as a result.

Mr. Speaker, when I read that a 5-year-old boy in Calvert County, Maryland, had been suspended from school for 10 days simply for showing a toy cap gun to his friend on the school bus, I was shocked and saddened. I became even sadder when I read the little boy was questioned for over 2 hours by school officials before his parents were called, and the boy uncharacteristically wet his pants during this interrogation. His mother said later this boy was all boy and all about rocks, frogs, and cowboys.

This interrogation was ridiculous, and a 10-day suspension was ridiculous overkill. I wondered if these school officials who did this to this little boy had lost their common sense and human decency. I am now pleased that the situation has been partially rectified by cutting the 10-day suspension back to the 3 days he has already served, and I hope the parents' request to remove the incident from the boy's school records are granted.

Rigid one-size-fits-all solutions almost never work and frequently lead to very bad, very unfair solutions. I hope that school boards all across this country will at least come to their senses and do away with so-called ''zero tolerance policies,'' especially when it comes to very small children, and especially 5-year-old boys who simply want to be boys.

A second topic that I wanted to mention today, Mr. Speaker, is about the Dodd-Frank law. The Dodd-Frank law has produced many thousands of pages of rules, regulations, and red tape in a misguided attempt to rein in abuses by some of the Nation's biggest banks; however, as is the case with most Federal regulations, this law ended up hurting the smallest banks in this Nation and, thus, helping the big banks to get even bigger.

Listen to these words from a columnist from the Washington Times:

> It's been 3 years since the Senate passed the Dodd-Frank financial reform legislation.
>
> So far, the effects are not what Washington promised. More than 200 smaller banks have failed in the wake of Dodd-Frank.
>
> Does it comfort them that politicians proclaim smaller banks were exempt from the market distortions lawmakers created?
>
> Since community banks are being forced to stay below the asset threshold forced on them by Dodd-Frank, they are lending less and making less.
>
> This further strains banks and limits job growth.
>
> We have learned once again that whenever Washington announces new regulations, hold on to your wallet.

Increasing Federal regulations, Mr. Speaker, always end up helping extremely Big Business, but makes it even harder for our smallest businesses to survive. We have this Big Government, Big Business duopoly in this Nation, and I hope those who continue to vote for bigger and bigger government realize that all they're really helping are the extremely big giants in any industry and they're hurting the small- and medium-sized businesses. I hope that this trend will at least slow down so we don't run more small- and medium-sized businesses out of existence in this Nation.

Now, finally, as I hadn't intended to say anything, Mr. Speaker, but my friend, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES), spoke about the very unnecessary wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was 100 percent correct. I admire his courage in speaking out in the way that he has done.

Unfortunately, the Armed Services Committee is about to produce a bill that continues this war funding at the rate of $85 billion for the war in Afghanistan just to continue in other overseas situations like in Iraq where we happen to have had the most deadly month in May that we've had in several years.

The situations are not getting better, and this country will be far better off when we start putting our own people and our own country first and stop trying to be the policemen for the world and start doing things that need to be done in this country.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. CHU) for 5 minutes.

Ms. CHU. I rise today to bring much-needed attention to a serious threat to our Nation: climate change.

There are those of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that routinely dismiss this threat or brush it under the rug as normal or even false, but the true consequences of climate change are not lost on the American people.

Extreme weather is real. From monster tornados destroying Oklahoma, to Hurricane Katrina destroying the Jersey shore, to wildfires raging out of control in the West, climate change is not an issue that we can put off.

As Environment Task Force chair on the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, this issue is extremely important to me. In fact, it should be important to all of us because we all bear the cost. Climate change does not have geographic boundaries and it does not discriminate on whom it wreaks havoc.

If you do not believe that climate change is a threat or that the costs are real today, let me share with you a few facts:

In 2011 and 2012, there were 25 extreme weather events affecting 43 States.

In 2013, we have already started with an early and intense wildfire season in my home of southern California.

□ 1030

Extreme weather events in 2011 and 2012 caused $188 billion in economic damage and cost American taxpayers $136 billion. That is nearly $1,000 per individual taxpayer, or the equivalent of approximately a 2 percent tax increase. And these are low estimates. Literally thousands of heat, rain, and snow records were broken.

My State of California is particularly vulnerable to wildfires. In the previous decade, the average size of these wildfires was 89 acres. But in 2012, the average size was 165 acres, nearly double. And 9.2 million acres, mostly in the western U.S., were burned. And in the last 5 years, fires have been more damaging and more costly than ever before.

Other regions are vulnerable to floods, droughts, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Just recently, while storm waters were inundating homes in one part of our country, ships were unable to navigate the Mississippi River due to extremely low water levels. These are facts we cannot afford to ignore.

It is true that changes in the Earth's climate have occurred cyclically over eons. But human activity has accelerated these changes, fundamentally jeopardizing our environment. And, we do not have eons to fix it. We rely on this environment for water, air, food and so much economic activity. We cannot turn a blind eye to climate change. Instead, we need to start preparing for it and work harder to stop it. That's why I call on Congress to stop the attacks on our environment and finally pass legislation to reduce greenhouse gas and carbon pollution.

MISHANDLING OF COMPETITIVE BIDDING PROCESS

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise to voice my serious concern with Medicare's implementation of the durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies competitive bidding program.

Despite strong congressional concern about the need for further transparency, the lack of binding bids during the contract process, and the improper vetting of the financials of many firms that have been awarded contracts, Medicare still plans to move forward with implementing round two of the program on July 1.

We learned that Medicare awarded contracts under the program to dozens of firms that do not have the proper credentials to serve these contracts. In other words, leaving Medicare beneficiaries without the needed access to the durable medical equipment that allows them to live with dignity during times of disease and disability.

Unfortunately, CMS has created a situation where servicing these contracts will either violate State licensure requirements or leave contracts unfulfilled, again leaving beneficiaries and consumers without access to the

health care equipment that they need. Furthermore, unqualified bids from firms that are unlicensed to service contracts create significant distortions of the bid prices in every bidding area nationwide.

I'm extremely concerned that mishandling of the bidding process is going to have a devastating impact on Medicare beneficiaries. This is a serious issue that warrants a full review of the process and a delay of round two until this fatally flawed program is fixed.

I encourage my colleague to join me and Congressman BRUCE BRALEY in cosigning a letter to the Medicare administrator requesting an administrative delay of the durable medical equipment competitive bidding program. This is absolutely necessary to ensure that older adults have access to the equipment that they require to live at home with independence and dignity. It also is about jobs as one of the unintended consequences, I believe, but it is still a devastating consequence regarding how the implementation of round two will continue to see the loss of small businesses all throughout this great Nation. And so I just encourage my colleagues to join Congressman BRALEY and I in signing this letter to the Medicare administrator.

HOW MANY MORE CHILDREN HAVE TO DIE?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, it has now been almost 6 months since the tragedy of Newtown. The American response to that tragedy was quick and overwhelming. And yet, we have done nothing to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

In fact, many of my colleagues here in this institution seem all too ready to forget Newtown and the gun violence epidemic that is devastating families and communities across our country every single day.

According to Slate's gun-death tracker, an estimated 4,620 people have died as a result of gun violence in America since Newtown—4,620 people.

In 12 U.S. States, gun deaths now outpace auto deaths.

A new analysis from the Violence Policy Center found that in 2010, there were 31,672 firearm deaths and 35,498 motor vehicle deaths, compared with 1999, when there were 28,000 firearm deaths and 42,000 motor vehicle deaths, which is startling considering more than 90 percent of the American households own a car while less than one-third of American households own a gun.

We require auto manufacturers to include safety features like seatbelts and airbags, and to pass crash safety tests, and lives are being saved as a result.

By 2015, gun deaths will outnumber auto deaths on a national scale. Think about that. More gun deaths than auto deaths, and we require all these precautions and restrictions on manufacturers to make sure our cars are safe and we do nothing—nothing—when it comes to gun manufacturers. Think about that. Mandatory safety measures, and auto manufacturers can be held liable for defects in their products. We expect cars to be built safely, but when it comes to guns, a product designed to kill, manufacturers have been given a free pass. They can't be held liable for the deaths and destruction their products may cause. We don't even require gun manufacturers to make guns child-safe.

How many more children have to die as a result of senseless gun violence and avoidable gun accidents? New York Times columnist Joe Nocera is producing a weekly ''Gun Report'' that compiles gun deaths and injuries from around the country. I'm going to read a few of the recent posts since Newtown that deal specifically with children.

A 2-year-old boy is dead after an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound. Trenton Mathis shot himself in the face with a 9-millimeter pistol in a house in Cherokee County, Texas, while at home with his great-grandmother.

A 6-year-old girl was shot in the leg by her father during a boisterous party in Federal Heights, Colorado.

Joshua Johnson, 4, was playing with a gun at a Memphis apartment complex when it went off. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

A Garland, Texas, toddler was fatally shot in his home in what police are calling a tragic accident. Three-year-old John O'Brien was shot in the head with a handgun in front of his mother, father, and two young sisters. He was taken to Children's Medical Center in Dallas, where he later died from his injuries.

The 4-year-old son of a Jackson County, Michigan, sheriff's deputy accidentally shot and killed himself. Authorities say it happened around 5 p.m. in the deputy's home.

Michael Easter, a 3-year-old boy in Liberty Township, Michigan, died after he accidentally shot himself in the head while alone in his parents' bedroom. Police are unsure how the boy gained access to the gun. Michael was home with his mother and two sisters at the time.

A 3-year-old toddler accidentally shot himself in the head with a relative's gun but was listed in stable condition at a Nashville, Tennessee, hospital.

A teen boy accidentally shot and killed his 12-year-old brother in Orlando, Florida. The shooting happened at home in the Lake Nona area. Investigators said they are working to determine what led to the shooting.

A dad accidentally shot his son dead as he cleaned his gun in the family's living room. Christopher Stanlane, 34, was wiping down a loaded weapon in his home in Fairmont, North Carolina, when it discharged. His 10-year-old son, Christopher Stanlane, Jr., was watching television, and was struck in the back of his head with a bullet. His 8-year-old daughter was also in the room. The boy was pronounced dead at the scene.

How many more children have to die before Congress acts?

□ 1040

MORE CAN BE DONE FOR VETERANS ACROSS THE NATION

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

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about the veterans' disability backlog, but this time on a positive note.

First I want to thank Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Committee Chair JOHN CULBERSON and Ranking Member SANFORD BISHOP for their work on the fiscal year 2014 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill and for including report language that my California colleague, Representative PAUL COOK, and I recommended to address the backlog of claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our veterans are heroes, and they deserve the benefits they've earned. The VA has set a goal of processing all disability claims within 125 days by the year 2015. This is an ambitious goal that deserves our attention as the agency works to meet its self-imposed deadline.

Unfortunately, too many VA regional offices across the country are underperforming by failing to process benefits claims for veterans in a timely manner. Recent data indicates that it takes 552 days, on average, for a claim to be processed at the VA's Oakland regional office, which serves the veterans in my district. This is unacceptable. While I'm pleased that the VA has made a concerted effort to improve accuracy and timeliness at the Oakland RO, more can be done for veterans across the Nation.

The VA has made a genuine effort to help veterans suffering from Agent Orange, posttraumatic stress, and to recognize the special needs of women veterans, among others. In addition, the VA recently announced it would mandate overtime at its regional offices and place a priority on claims pending for more than 1 year.

However, we must hold the VA accountable for its results. Additional oversight and accountability will not only benefit our Nation's veterans and their families, but it will allow Congress to ensure the VA has the resources it needs to properly support our heroes.

In addition to these efforts, I was joined by a bipartisan group of colleagues in requesting that the VA submit quarterly reports for each regional office where disability claims are pending for an average of 200 days or more.