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House of Representatives

The House met at noon and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HARRIS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 16, 2015.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ANDY HARRIS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 6, 2015, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 1:50 p.m.

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION WORLDWIDE

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

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, soon Pope Francis will deliver a historical address to this Congress. During this year, he has addressed a form of genocide happening in the world.

Globally, Christians are being imprisoned, tortured, and killed because they are Christians. In 2013, Christians faced persecution in 102 out of 190-plus countries. In Iran, American Christian pastor Saeed Abedini has been languishing in jail for the last 2½ years because he is a Christian.

According to the 2015 Open Doors' World Watch List, North Korea is the worst persecutor of Christians in the whole world. There, Christians are often sent to prison camps for possession of Bibles, sometimes even executed because they are Christians. The State Department estimates that 80,000 to 120,000 North Koreans are imprisoned in labor camps because of their religious beliefs. In November of 2013, 80 North Korean Christians were reportedly executed for possession of Bibles and possessing South Korean religious films.

In Pakistan, in one city, Christian churches have been bombed. A 14-year-old Christian boy was beaten and set on fire because he was a Christian. Burns now cover more than 55 percent of his body.

In Egypt, over a 3-day period in 2013, Coptic Christians experienced the worst single attack against their churches in 700 years, with 40 Christian churches destroyed and over 100 others severely damaged. Thousands of Coptic Christians have fled Egypt to other countries.

In Libya, ISIS captured and beheaded 21 people because they were Christians. When the victims' families tried to build a church in their honor, they were attacked by a Muslim mob and beaten.

It is not just Assad's thugs in Syria killing Christians; religious cleansing takes place in other places. In Syria, militants expelled 90 percent of the Christians in the city of Homs. Patriarch Gregorios III of Antioch says, out of a population of 1.75 million, 450,000 Syrian Christians have fled in fear.

Mr. Speaker, no Christian anywhere on Earth should have to leave their homeland because of their faith.

In Iraq, where Christians have been calling home since the time of Christ, the story is just as dark. Its Christian population has almost entirely disappeared—dropping 90 percent since the first gulf war. The number of churches has declined from 300 in 2003 to 57.

In Africa, the terrorist group al Shabaab attacked a university in Kenya, going door-to-door to find and execute Christians. Al Shabaab attacked a shopping mall in Kenya in 2013 and took shoppers captive. One of them was Joshua Hakim. When Joshua got close to his attackers, he showed them his ID, and he covered up his Christian name with his thumb. ''They told me to go,'' Joshua recalled later. ''Then another man came forward, and they said, what is the name of Muhammad's mother?'' The individual couldn't answer; so they shot him.

Mr. Speaker, history tells us that the persecution of Christians has been going on since the day Stephen was stoned for his faith in Acts 7.

As a country, the United States needs to reexamine its relationship with countries and states that persecute or tolerate the persecution of Christians. Countries should get no U.S. foreign aid until they start protecting Christians instead of persecuting them. And let's call groups like ISIS what they truly are: a radical and dangerous Islamic extremist terrorist group.

Religious liberty is a basic civil right, a humanitarian right, and an inalienable right. Since Pilgrims came to America to escape religious persecution in their homeland, our Nation has stood as a bright beacon to the world for religious freedom for everyone—Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and others.

It is written in the Good Book that a man was traveling on the Jericho road and fell among robbers. The man was beaten, his property was stolen, and he was left for dead. Other people traveled down the same road, saw him in the ditch, but passed on by him on the

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other side of the road. They went their own way. They did nothing.

The United States cannot be silent and walk on the other side of the road while Christians worldwide are beaten, beheaded, and brutalized because they are Christians. We must be that beacon that shines in proud protection of religious freedom for all—including Christians.

And that is just the way it is.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY WISHES TO THE HONORABLE RON PAUL

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

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, one of my dearest friends, and a man nationally known for his knowledge and wisdom on so many subjects, recently celebrated his 80th birthday on August 20. That special friend is Ron Paul.

Those who had the pleasure to serve with Ron know how he served with unwavering principles. Whether he was fighting the Federal Reserve, speaking out against unnecessary war, or defending life, Ron Paul lived out the principles he holds dear and upheld the Constitution. That is why I supported him when he ran for the President of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, it was Ron Paul who started the Liberty Caucus, of which I am still a member. I will always remember very fondly when we met in his office in the Cannon Building for lunch meetings. He would invite speakers who were expert in everything from monetary policy to foreign policy. We all got so much out of those Liberty Caucus meetings.

He helped me and many of my colleagues have a better understanding of monetary policy, what are good policies and what are bad policies. Too many times our leaders don't understand the impact and complexities of monetary policy. Mr. Speaker, it is obvious, with our growing debt of $18.3 trillion, that our leadership in both parties should call on Ron Paul and ask his advice.

In my 20 years in Congress, I have not had a better friend than Ron Paul. I have always been able to count on Ron as both a personal and professional confidant.

In his many years as a ''citizen patriot,'' as his son United States Senator RAND PAUL calls him, the cause of liberty has never had a better friend than Ron Paul. Ron is a great fighter for the Constitution; and even though he is out of public office, his fight is just as strong today as ever.

I'm sure many of my colleagues in the House would join me in wishing a belated happy birthday to Ron Paul, my dear friend, and a friend of the Constitution.

U.S. FORESTRY BUDGET

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, this has been, once again, a really catastrophic wildfire season. In fact, we saw the loss of lives of individuals who serve our country in the United States Forest Service, and so we certainly keep them and their family members in our thoughts and prayers.

It is time that we address this issue in terms of the expansive fires that we have seen. The administration has been very vocal for the need to provide more funding to combat more wildfires and also stop more fire-borrowing from the Forest Service budget. As a matter of fact, there was a press release yesterday regarding the administration's letter to Congress addressing the budget issue.

I agree there needs to be a solution, but fixing the budget is not the final solution. However, addressing the fire-borrowing will not solve the problem alone.

Mr. Speaker, in 1995, fighting wildfires consumed one-sixth of the Forest Service budget. In 2015, this August, it is consuming one-half, 50 percent, of the Forest Service budget. We have to address, though, the root cause of this problem, which is not just warmer temperatures, but it is largely the fuel load, the fire load, from the lack of active management, insufficient active management, in our national forests.

It is also very important that the Forest Service have the ability to expediently treat national forest acres for forest health and wildfire prevention. The Agriculture Committee passed through the House H.R. 2647. I was very proud to be a cosponsor of that bill and managed that bill on the floor. It passed with bipartisan support. This bill is called the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015. This legislation is an earnest attempt to give the Forest Service more authority and much-needed flexibility to deal with these challenges of process, funding, litigation, necessary timber harvesting, and much-needed active management in our national forests.

Now, the Obama administration strongly opposes this legislation despite, yesterday, in an Agriculture oversight hearing where we heard from the Under Secretary words like ''collaborative'' and the ''need for expedited NEPA,'' which is a national environmental assessment. It doesn't mean there is no assessment; it just does it in an efficient way. It provides what is necessary, not overregulation, providing more categorical exclusions to NEPA. Those were all things the Under Secretary said that this administration is supportive of.

Well, Mr. Speaker, those are all things in this bill, and yet the administration, for whatever reason I have a hard time understanding, is opposed to this bill.

One of the solutions here, obviously, is to do good, active timbering. I want to come back, Mr. Speaker, to those years, 1995, where one-sixth of the Forest Service budget was consumed for fighting wildfires—and that is a lot, one-sixth. That year, they generated 3.8 billion board-feet of timber. That was the harvesting that took place. Just 7 years prior to that, we were harvesting 12.7 billion board-feet. That was the high in recent decades, in 1987.

As you can imagine, when you are doing that much harvesting, you are reducing the fuel load. You are reducing the risk. Fire needs oxygen, it needs fuel, and it needs some type of energy to ignite it. If you take away the fuel, any of those three triangles, as a long-time firefighter, I can tell you that is how you prevent fires. Yet today, August 2015, where we are spending one-half of the Forest Service budget, we are taking money out of timbering programs and multiuse programs, they are only producing 2.4 billion board-feet from our forests.

Now, you look at what is the value of that? So you take the difference between where we were at a high of 12.7 billion board-feet—and that wasn't at a sustainable rate; we were growing much more timber than what we were cutting even in 1987—so that is a difference of 10.3 billion board-feet.

How do we put an economic value on that? Well, if you just look at what the most recent average is for board-foot of timber harvested in national forests, Mr. Speaker, and you calculate that difference, if we would be harvesting and active timbering, active management the way we should, just looking at that 1987 standard—which is well below what we potentially could be cutting—that is $169 billion in revenue coming into the Treasury of the United States.

Our national forests are meant to be resources that provide for our Nation. With $169 billion, do you know what, I think we would have the resources to fight the fires. But if we were truly timbering where we should be, we wouldn't be having those fires.

The U.S. Forest Service did recently announce that it has already surpassed its more than $1 billion budget for fighting wildfires and that it will have to transfer an additional $450 million from programs which benefit national forests across the Nation. This is the eighth time since 2002 that the service has had to transfer such funds because of wildfire costs. Such transfers take money directly out of timber harvesting and salvage logging, recreational activities, grants to States, and even funding for fire suppression.

There is a better way to do things. I look forward to working with our Forest Service, and I encourage the Obama administration to support that.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with many of my colleagues that these wildfires should be treated as natural disasters and the Forest Service needs budget flexibility.

This is why I strongly support H.R. 167, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

Avoiding these funding transfers, keeping funding where it belongs, and increasing our