

appreciate his comments and thank him for sharing his wisdom and experience with us.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my classmate and colleague from Arizona (Mr. GALLEGO).

Mr. GALLEGO. The omnibus has been billed as a compromise, but in reality it is packed with Republican policy provisions that only compromise our values.

The omnibus bill should be about funding the government, not about pushing through policies that would never receive enough votes to pass on their own. Asking us to support this bill is asking us to support bad policy.

Among the legislation's many serious shortcomings is its failure to address the mounting fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Puerto Rico are American citizens. They vote in our elections. They swear allegiance to our flag, they fight, and they die in our wars. Yet, at a time when massive bills are coming due, this Congress has turned its back on Puerto Rico.

Including a provision in the omnibus to allow Puerto Rico to restructure its debt wouldn't cost the American taxpayer one penny. We did not put that in. Every single State in this union can access the protections afforded by chapter 9. Puerto Rico is unfairly denied this ability. That is simply unfair, and our refusal to come to the island's aid is un-American.

Mr. Speaker, the omnibus will also deal a blow to our efforts to save our planet. Less than a week after reaching a historic climate change pact in Paris, Republicans want to undo the progress made by giving Big Oil a major victory, while leaving our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico behind.

Lifting the oil export ban on the heels of new studies warning against the drastic rates of warming of lakes across the country and around the world is a major blow to all efforts made in Paris.

According to the Energy Information Administration, lifting the ban will increase gross profits of the oil industry by more than \$20 billion annually, at the direct expense of America's wildlife and natural resources. By the oil industry's own projections, lifting the ban will result in more than 7,500 additional wells being drilled annually, resulting in the degradation of more than one million square acres of wildlife habitat.

Increasing drilling without protections for wildlife, and without permanently reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund, takes us backwards and will harm domestic jobs, while exacerbating the huge challenges we currently face in preserving our outdoor heritage and tackling climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Democrats are being asked to supply two-thirds of the votes for this bill, but this agreement does not reflect even two-thirds of our values. We should reject this bad deal for Americans.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

LAUNCH OF THE BIPARTISAN CUBA WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding and, really, thank the Progressive Caucus for allowing me to use the remainder of this time. Thank you for your very steady and clear and very powerful leadership.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that today, myself and Congressman FARR, we rise to mark 1 year since President Obama's historic announcement that started the process of normalizing relations with Cuba. On December 17, 2014, the President took a very bold step to end more than five decades of failed policy and, instead, chart a new path for relations between the United States and our Cuban neighbors.

For more than half of a century, the United States pursued a shortsighted isolationist policy born of Cold War tensions. This policy was wrongheaded and ineffective. It alienated us from our allies and estranged us from one of our nearest neighbors.

Yet, through the President's persistence and very bold leadership, we are finally making some headway in reversing this, and Congress is finally beginning to catch up. Yesterday, I was proud to join nine of my colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans, in announcing the launch of a bipartisan Cuba Working Group that will promote a commonsense United States-Cuba policy that reflects the interests of the American people engaged with Cuba.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to my friend and colleague from Monterey, California (Mr. FARR), who has been such a leader on so many issues, but especially on ending the embargo and normalizing relations with Cuba. He understands that this is good for trade, that this is good for jobs in America, that this is good, basically, for our foreign policy, and it is in our national security interest that we normalize relations with Cuba.

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman and congratulate her on probably being the Member of Congress who has been to Cuba more times than anyone else, has done more to lift the nuances of the embargo, and to, essentially, start the end of the cold war that we faced in Cuba.

For Cubans today, I would like to say Feliz Cumpleanos. For the Americans, I would like to also say Happy Birthday. And I would like to include that as a Happy Birthday to my wife, Shary Farr, whose birthday is today, because her biggest wish has been that she could go to Cuba before she dies. And guess what? Now she can go. This is a

great birthday present to her that she will be able to visit Cuba, after 55 years of failed foreign policy where our government prohibited American citizens from traveling to Cuba.

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So with this lift, I would also like to thank President Obama, and I would like to thank President Raul Castro. I think what you saw were two nation leaders getting together and doing what nation leaders should do: figure out how to get along rather than how to fight.

What we have done in Congress has not progressed, not helped.

I would like to have, BARBARA, your comments on this, too, because we imposed legislatively in law these embargoes that say: Americans, you can't travel; Americans, you can't trade; Americans, you can't use your dollars; Americans, you can't use your credit cards; Banks, you can't do it; Farmers, you can't sell.

We have created all these barriers, and the Presidents of each country don't—at least the President of our country doesn't have the ability to just use his administrative authorities as he has in being able to do some wonderful things. Fifty-five years of frozen policy has changed. You can't do it all and change everything in 12 months.

We have been able to open up embassies for the first time. It was delightful to be in Washington, D.C., last night at this celebratory time of the year, holiday season, and have the Cuban Embassy invite all the Members of Congress, staff, and people over to their Embassy for a holiday party and bring one of the best Cuban music groups—exciting, beautiful music—to celebrate all this. We couldn't have done that a year ago. We couldn't have done it a year ago today. But today is the day that will go down in Cuban history as the day that they remember the U.S. beginning to break the cold war relationships.

We have sent Secretary Kerry. And did you know that Secretary Kerry's visit to Cuba was the first Secretary of State visit to Cuba in over 70 years? We have begun bilateral discussions. We have created a bilateral steering commission, and Secretary Kerry was instrumental in getting both countries to sit down and discuss the differences in economic policy, in social policy, and in cultural issues. They have already done some work on joint environmental issues.

Cuba is so close to American soil that the environmental policies in our country affect them and vice versa. It would be great to have them develop some really good ocean standards and marine standards as we are trying to do along the Florida coast.

They have already done some work with law enforcement, of integrating information and trading, particularly on narcotics trafficking and things like that, and opened up mail service from the United States.

They have lifted what they could on the travel ban. Americans are allowed to go. Today I am real excited to learn that both countries have agreed to begin commercial air service, scheduled air service. You have had to go on charter flights. I believe your city of Oakland, California, is one of those cities that is designated as a scheduled airline airport so people can fly directly from Oakland, California, to Havana to visit.

We have opened up a claims process, and we need to do more particularly in Cuba on human rights processes. On global health, Cuba and the United States got together jointly to help the Haitians with the critical needs that Haiti has in their delivery of medicine and care to that really poor country so devastated by the earthquake.

Mr. Speaker, what I am very excited about, frankly, is that Cuba has hosted probably one of the most important discussions going on in the world, and that is how to end the longest revolutionary war, the best financed revolutionary war in the history of the world, which is the FARC, supported by all the drugs in Colombia; and the Colombian Government and the FARC rebels have been sitting down in Cuba and working out a very complicated “how do we end a war,” “how do we get you back into civil society,” “how do we stop the violence.”

With that, and with the recognition of Cuba, it is the first time that an entire hemisphere, the higher hemisphere in this world, has been in diplomatic relations and peaceful relations with no country fighting another country within the hemisphere. What a great model for the rest of the world, and what a great model to show those countries in conflict, internal conflict, that if FARC and Colombian Government can sit down and work out a peaceful resolution, then any country can do that.

So I want to thank you and celebrate today. December 17 will be a day I will not only remember as my wife's birthday. We will remember it as the day that the Cubans and the Americans started breaking the cold war, the frozen foreign policy.

BARBARA LEE, you had a lot to do with it.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Congressman FARR. Let me thank you for laying out much of the history and the rationale for what seems so simple, to normalize relations between our country and Cuba.

And December 17 marks another milestone, and that is the release of our good friend, Alan Gross. He and Judy Gross, of course, are very excited about the forward agenda that we have here in Congress to lift the embargo and to lift the travel ban. Also, it is a day that we just want to say to Alan that a year later we are really pleased that he is home with his family. We salute Alan Gross, the people of Cuba, and our own government for making sure that this happened on December 17 of last year.

Mr. FARR. Yes. You were so instrumental. Think about it. A year ago, Alan Gross was on a plane coming back after spending 5 years—longer—in a Cuban prison. You and I had the chance to visit him there. As we knew, his state was frail, and if he hadn't gotten out, I really worried about him.

I saw him the other day here on the Hill, and he looked just fantastic. His spirit is back, and what a great spokesman for America and for foreign policy that countries can resolve differences.

Ms. LEE. Absolutely. Thank you, Congressman FARR.

I now yield to Congresswoman KAREN BASS, who has been a great leader for many, many years. In the day, I think Congresswoman BASS was really very clear on why we needed normal relations and should have normal relations between their country and the United States. It is in our own national interests to do that. She certainly knows that and has been before a lot of people very involved in ending the embargo.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Congresswoman LEE.

I want to applaud your leadership and the leadership of Congressman FARR. We will miss him, as this is his last session in Congress.

For years, you have worked to have normal relations between the United States and Cuba. Although I have only been here for 5 years, I know that you have put in many, many years working to see that our two nations cooperated. It is really amazing if you think that we are only 90 miles away and where else is there in the world where we have two countries that are so close but yet we have not really been able to communicate and have normal relations? So I am happy to celebrate this 1-year anniversary, and I look forward to our nations continuing to work together.

There are a few things that I would like to mention: the fact that even in spite of the embargo and the travel ban, over 100,000 Americans visited Cuba every year before the policy change. But Americans had to go through all sorts of changes in order to have the opportunity to visit the island. Now, with travel opening up—and I am glad that the flights will go from your city, Congresswoman LEE. They will also go from Los Angeles, direct from Los Angeles to Havana.

Oftentimes when we think of establishing and reestablishing relations in Cuba, we think about it from the vantage point of what the United States has to offer the island, and certainly we can talk long about that. But the Cubans actually have things to offer the United States. I can think of several examples.

Right now, there are over 50 U.S. students that are studying medicine for free in Cuba. The only obligation that those students have is that, when they come back to the United States after graduating, they have to commit to practice medicine in an underserved area.

The Cubans have been pioneering medication and a vaccine to prevent lung cancer. They have also been able to develop a medication that has helped reduce the need to amputate limbs secondary to diabetic neuropathy. They have developed this medication, and that is something that we could use from the Cubans.

So I am looking forward to our continuing to establish and deepen our ties with the island.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the gentlewoman from California, once again, for being here and for her leadership. We have legislation, H.R. 3238, to lift the embargo; H.R. 664; and H.R. 403, also to lift the embargo and travel ban.

I yield back the balance of my time.

THE PRICE OF CIVILIZATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SANFORD) for 30 minutes.

Mr. SANFORD. Mr. Speaker, I want to dovetail for one moment on the conversation that was just held by my colleagues from across the aisle. I think that they have been courageous. I think about SAM FARR and I think about BARBARA LEE, and what they have pushed for, ultimately, has less to do with Cuba—though they might argue otherwise—and more to do with American rights.

I would give, just as an example, that this whole notion of a travel moratorium as it now exists from the United States to Cuba is nonsensical—they have been bold enough to point that out—and many other things for quite some number of years. They have led the way on this issue.

I just want to applaud them because, if you stop and think about it, as an American, you can travel to any country on the globe—except for one. You can go to North Korea. You can go to Syria. You can go to Iran, and you could go to Iraq. It may not work out well for you, but you can go to any place on the globe except for a place roughly 60 miles off of Key West. That is a remarkable infringement on American liberty at the end of the day. So I thank them for what they have done not only on behalf of the Cuban people, but, ultimately, to advance this larger notion of individual liberty here in this country.

With that having been said, I also want to touch for one moment on the Progressive Hour that preceded my time. It was said during that hour that taxes “are the cost of living in a civilized society.” I think the question that all of us would have to ask is: How civilized a society do you want to live in then?

I have told my boys about this magazine that they will one day read, entitled, Reader's Digest, and when they poll the different readers, they came out with the finding that Americans would be roughly happy with one-quarter of their wages garnished and sent