

and across the Nation. An employer in my district shared with me how the new 100 percent expensing provision has helped their customers afford more of the products they sell, which has, in turn, boosted their business.

Each time I return to my district, I hear about the different ways families and businesses are utilizing savings from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Delivering on these reforms was long overdue, but the tax reform is truly working for the American people. After more than 30 years, Americans are finally able to reap the benefits of a simplified Tax Code that cuts middle class taxes and supports expanding businesses. I am thrilled to see the continued success of tax reform and am eager to see more lasting changes that will strengthen our workforce and economy.

HONORING FOREIGN NATIONAL EMPLOYEES

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

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and thank the thousands of foreign national employees who work for United States Embassies overseas supporting our Foreign Service and promoting democratic ideals throughout the world.

Many Americans may not know exactly what the Foreign Service does both at home and abroad, but I can assure you that our diplomats are out every day promoting the interests of the United States, our constituents, our businesses, and our values.

Last August, I invited Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, president of the American Foreign Service Association, to Minnesota Farm Fest, a trade and policy forum that brings together about 40,000 people out on the rich soils near Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Her message was simple yet important: the work our Foreign Service officers do throughout the globe has a direct and substantial impact on the citizens of this great Nation—in that case, promoting export markets and food safety throughout the world so that the world's greatest producers of food and fuel and fiber are able to find those markets and able to grow our economies.

But what often goes unnoticed are the thousands of foreign national employees who work at U.S. Embassies in support of our diplomats as they build and strengthen democratic institutions, create and sustain markets for American products, and promote democracy in some of the most hostile, austere environments in the world.

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These dedicated professionals are called LESEs among the Foreign Service, Locally Engaged Staff. And that is exactly what they are. They are engaged locally in a way that is simply not possible, even for the most expert

of American diplomats. They are that engaged because they are from the country they work in. And it is this understanding that only people native to a country can have, which makes them critical to the success of our diplomats and America's mission overseas.

I would like to tell you about one such unsung hero of the State Department's mission in Havana, Cuba. Olexis Lugo was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1966, and worked for the U.S. Interests Section, and later, the U.S. Embassy in Havana for more than a decade. Lugo, as he was known to diplomat colleagues, was a driver in the embassy's motor pool and supported countless missions with U.S. diplomats.

More than a driver, Lugo aided diplomats in understanding the nuances of Cuban culture, and provided critical insight that helped our diplomats do their jobs effectively. And more than that, Lugo was a friend and confidant to all of the U.S. diplomats posted in Havana, and a friend to America.

This past year, Lugo suddenly passed away in Havana, but his legacy will live on in the American lives he touched and the ideals of democracy and freedom that he helped support. I hope when it comes time to talk about our Foreign Affairs budget, we will remember our diplomats and the folks from foreign countries, like Lugo, who are working hard for the American people to keep this world safe for democracy.

WORKFARE

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

Mr. HOLDING. Mr. Speaker, we must reform our Nation's welfare programs.

President Ronald Reagan once remarked: "The Federal Government declared war on poverty, and poverty won." Unfortunately, his assessment remains all too accurate to this day. Over the past five decades, the United States Government has spent more than \$22 trillion on welfare, only to see the poverty rate remain unchanged.

Mr. Speaker, to solve this problem, we must first properly diagnose the cause. Too often, Washington's prescribed cure is yet another government program or increased spending on existing programs. However, we already have 13 Federal agencies running more than 80 Federal programs that provide food, housing, healthcare, job training, education, energy assistance, and cash to low-income Americans. And we should not gauge the success of our war on poverty by how much is spent, but on how many people are actually able to get out of poverty. That is the point.

The root cause of the failed "war on poverty" is that the structure of our current welfare system entrenches a culture of dependency rather than promoting a path to self-sufficiency.

Overwhelming evidence supports what should be a commonsense conclu-

sion: that there is a direct correlation between work and poverty. For example, before Congress reformed the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program to incorporate a strict work requirement, there were 4.9 million families on the rolls of this program. Two decades later, thanks to these workfare reforms, we have seen 3.3 million families come off of the welfare rolls. Now, that is a success.

In my home State of North Carolina, reforms to unemployment insurance benefits led an increase in both employment and labor force participation. Later research has found that Congress' decision in 2013 to not extend Federal unemployment benefits resulted in 1.8 million new jobs nationwide the following year.

Furthermore, in 2014, when Maine began enforcing strict work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food stamps, their caseload decreased by 80 percent within months. This requirement was paired with substantial job search assistance and job training opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we should apply the lessons of these success stories to all government welfare programs, particularly food stamps and housing. It is imperative that welfare recipients understand that the government is not offering a one-way handout, but rather, a two-way deal. We are willing to help you, but only if you are willing to help yourself. And with the American economy growing, thanks to tax reform, opportunities are available.

Mr. Speaker, job openings recently hit a record-high of 6.6 million across the country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By incorporating education and training, benefit time limits, and strong work requirements, we can move millions of Americans from welfare to work.

In addition to fiscal benefits, engaging in workfare increases self-sufficiency, encourages community engagement, and offers recipients a sense of purpose and dignity.

We have a unique opportunity with this year's farm bill, Mr. Speaker, to enact such reforms, and I encourage my colleagues to not be afraid to seize on this chance and promote work over welfare.

CONGRATULATING ANDY MERFELD

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

Mr. EMMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Andy Merfeld, an outstanding educator from my district, for being named Principal of the Year by the Central Minnesota Association of Secondary Principals. The Central Minnesota Association of Secondary Principals consists of over 200 administrators from more than 18 counties. The Principal of the Year is selected for excellence as a collaborative leader, unique curriculum, and personalization. With this

distinction, Principal Merfeld will be considered for the Principal of the Year award.

As principal of St. Michael-Albertville Middle School West, and after 16 years with the St. Michael-Albertville school district, Principal Merfeld has built a legacy as an educator and as a leader. He goes above and beyond, serving on the district's finance advisory committee and co-chairing a working group that aims to expand math opportunities for high-achieving middle school students.

To Principal Merfeld, thank you and congratulations. Minnesota's Sixth District is grateful for dedicated educators like you.

CAPITAL ONE

Mr. EMMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Capital One, its executive team, and its employees for their generosity and commitment to our local communities.

Since 2012, Capital One has generously donated over \$80,000 to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota to support the mission of enabling young people to reach their full potential.

In particular, a Capital One grant to fund Project Learn helps advance the goal of equipping our kids with coding skills to meet the needs of the future. Capital One recognizes the importance of STEM- and tech-related skills to the future of our Nation, and I thank them for investing in our Nation's future leaders.

Thank you, Capital One, for your commitment to the young people of central Minnesota. We are grateful for your team in our community.

RECOGNIZING ANOKA RAMSEY ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Mr. EMMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association, a volunteer service organization, committed to providing opportunity for students across all skill levels to play and compete in recreational athletics. Comprised of coaches, parents, directors, commissioners, and board members, the organization serves nearly 40,000 Minnesotans each year.

For over 40 years, Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association has sought to provide character development through competition. Selfless volunteers have donated over 300,000 hours planning, coaching, training, maintaining fields, working concessions, and overall operations to ensure that our kids have the opportunity to participate in sports like baseball, basketball, football, lacrosse, softball, volleyball, wrestling, tennis, and soccer.

To the volunteers of the Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association for your decades of service, thank you.

CONGRATULATING ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY WRESTLING

Mr. EMMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the St. Cloud State University Wrestling team for winning this year's NCAA Division II National Championship. The young men on this team strive every year for excellence,

and for the third time in the last 4 years, it paid off. But this year was special.

For the first time in Husky history, the team also clinched four titles in one season. The Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference title, the National Duals, and Regional and National tournament titles were all achieved. The perseverance and success of our Husky wrestlers reminds us all that when you commit to excellence and you work hard, the results will follow.

Congratulations to the outstanding student athlete wrestlers of the St. Cloud State Wrestling team for your remarkable achievement and another memorable season.

RECOGNIZING TEACHERS, COACHES, AND FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. EMMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding teachers, coaches, and first responders who saved the life of my constituent, Ryan Monahan of Big Lake, Minnesota. Ryan, who is only 15 years old and a student at Monticello High School, unexpectedly went into sudden cardiac arrest after a basketball practice.

The quick thinking and preparedness of the people around him saved his life. A call was immediately placed to 911 and five heroic coaches and teachers worked together to use the automated external defibrillator to revive Ryan. We are grateful to all who helped save Ryan's life.

Ryan was lucky. Unfortunately, more than 7,000 Americans lose their life to sudden cardiac arrest every year. It is my hope that Ryan's story serves as a reminder to all of us of the value of being prepared for an emergency like this.

Our local community back home in Minnesota is so grateful to those who reacted so swiftly, as well as all of the first responders who saved Ryan. Thank you all.

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

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

Mr. KELLY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, last week was National Small Business Week. The end of the week brought, appropriately, not just good news, but great news:

Unemployment is now below 4 percent for the first time in nearly 20 years.

164,000 new jobs were created last month—24,000 new jobs in manufacturing and 17,000 new jobs in construction.

Nearly 3.2 million new jobs have been created since the election of November 2016;

We currently have 6.6 million job openings in the United States. This is an all-time high.

Wages for small business workers increased last month by 3¼ percent. That

is the strongest rate of increase in over 2 years.

All this, plus:

Female unemployment is at its lowest level since 2000;

Black unemployment is at its lowest level ever;

Hispanic unemployment is at its lowest level ever;

Consumer confidence is at its highest level since 2004;

Job market confidence is at its highest level ever; and

Small business confidence is at its highest level ever.

Because of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, since February, 90 percent of American workers—that is nine out of 10 American workers—have been opening bigger, less-taxed paychecks. They have more take-home pay, which means that they get to keep more of their hard-earned money to spend the way they want to spend it, not the way Washington wants to spend it.

More than 530 companies, and counting, have reinvested billions and billions of dollars into their businesses and our Nation's economy. As a result, more than 4 million American workers, and counting, have received major bonuses and/or pay raises and/or benefit increases.

This includes employees at local companies in western Pennsylvania like Erie Insurance, who gave their workers a \$1,000 bonus, and then another \$1,000 to their retirement plan. NextTier Bank did the same thing, \$1,000 to their workers. And PNC Bank, as well. There are a lot of good people who work for national companies, like Home Depot and Walmart. Walmart alone employs 4,000 people in western Pennsylvania.

Energy bills have gone down for more than 87 million of our fellow citizens in 48 States. That is an incredible lowering of their cost of living.

According to the International Energy Agency, the United States is on track to be the world's largest oil producer by 2023. The significance of this is that we no longer have to be held hostage by bad actors around the world when it comes to energy. We will be the biggest exporters of energy in the world. And when we ask other people not to buy from these folks because of their intentions of how to use that money, we can replace what they are not able to buy there with our own homegrown energy. That is an incredible advantage.

Thanks to the most recent National Defense Authorization Act—now, think about this—our sons and daughters who serve in uniform are going to be enjoying their largest pay increase in 8 years.

The facts are clear: America is winning again.

Speaker RYAN was addressing a group the other day, and I want to quote him, because I think this is so appropriate for where we are today: "We are working on reforms to get more people out of poverty and into the workforce. We