Chesapeake Bay—there is no index more important than Bernie's annual ''Sneaker Index.'' Bernie's sneakers have now been the leading non-scientific measure of the river's health for a quarter century.

Each year, in order to gauge the health and water quality of the Patuxent River, Bernie has waded into its water to measure its clarity, stopping at the point at which he can no longer see his sneakers. As a young man, he recalled being able to see them clearly when the water was already up to his chest—through as much as sixty inches of river water. When Bernie first waded in the river to measure in 1988, he could only get as far as his shins, recording only eight inches of water before his sneakers disappeared beneath the polluted waters. In 2011, Bernie measured this level at 31.25 inches—slightly lower than the previous year and much lower than the over–42 inch record in 2004. This is a sign that we still have much work to do.

I have had the honor of joining him, along with other Maryland elected officials, at the banks of the Patuxent for many years at this annual event. Throughout his career, Bernie has done much to draw attention to the health of the river and the Chesapeake Bay into which it flows. The Patuxent is the Chesapeake's only tributary to flow entirely through our State, and Marylanders feel a special responsibility to protect it for future generations.

Let us continue to follow in Bernie Fowler's footsteps and heed his call to conserve and protect the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay, and let us leave our children and grandchildren a cleaner and clearer Patuxent and Chesapeake to enjoy and treasure.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2013

SPEECH OF

HON. STEVE ISRAEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 31, 2012

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 5854) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2013, and for other purposes:

Mr. ISRAEL. Madam Chair, I rise today in strong opposition to section 517 of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. That is because it would prevent the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related construction agencies from using project labor agreements (PLA) when they determine that they would benefit from doing so. If an agency decides that it is in their best interest to enter into a PLA, they should be given the ability to make that call.

Project labor agreements increase efficiency and quality of construction projects and are an effective tool for ensuring that large and complex projects are completed on time. They provide construction contractors with access to a highly skilled and well trained workforce and ensure that contractors comply with equal employment rules and environmental standards. And, workers have found that it protects their safety and wages. For these reasons, PLAs have been used in all 50 states and the District of Columbia; on the local, state, and federal level; and in the public and private sector.

You might have even heard of the Tappan Zee Bridge, Fort Drum, Walt Disney World and the Kennedy Space Center—all were built with project labor agreements. And any attempt to restrict even the consideration of project labor agreements where they would promote economic efficiency is simply the height of anti-union tactics getting in the way of good government.

There is an Executive Order that encourages agencies to use project labor agreements if it finds that an agreement would promote economic efficiency. During this time of fiscal restraint when the government must tighten its belt, it does not make sense to prohibit use of a proven business model that increases efficiency and keeps costs down. That is why I support the use of project labor agreements and am opposed to this anti-labor provision.