

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, 1 year ago tomorrow marks the anniversary of the Federal Reserve Board reporting that student loan debt exceeded \$1 trillion. What that means for the average student loan borrower in America is a debt level of \$27,000. That's just the average. Many students graduate, sadly, with debt levels of six figures.

Despite the fact that we have that looming burden on middle class families all across the country, in 67 days the Stafford student loan program interest rate will double from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent, adding even further interest debt to students unless Congress acts.

Mr. Speaker, I've introduced H.R. 1595, the Student Loan Relief Act, with my colleague in the Senate, Senator JACK REED—we have 95 cosponsors in the House—which will extend the lower rate for 2 years and give this House time to come up with a comprehensive solution for higher education access and affordability, which, again, extends back to giving students better information for when they enter college and helping those who graduated in terms of allowing them to refinance.

It is time, however, to pass the extension of the lower rate. Let's not go backwards. Let's help middle class families all across America.

BUDGET CONFEREES

(Mr. BERA of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BERA of California. It's core to our job, Mr. Speaker, to pass a responsible budget. That's job number one. A budget tells us how we're going to be stewards of the taxpayer resources.

One of my first acts in Congress was to cosponsor the No Budget, No Pay Act. We now have a budget that the House has passed; we have a different budget that the Senate has passed; and the President has submitted his budget. It is now time for us to go to conference.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to appoint conferees so we can get a real budget and start moving this country forward. That is core to our job. We must produce a budget in order to start addressing our debt and deficit and making sure that the public understands what our priorities are.

Mr. Speaker, now's the time to act. I ask that you appoint conferees, and let's get this country moving forward.

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

(Ms. WILSON of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it's now been 843 days since I arrived in Congress, and the Republican leadership has not allowed a single vote on serious legislation to address our unemployment crisis.

At the current rate of job growth, we will not get to pre-recession unemploy-

ment levels until after 2020. This means another decade of people losing their health care, losing their homes, and losing their dignity.

Where is the outrage?

Congress is delaying America's recovery and making their plight worse by pursuing destructive policies like the sequester instead of productive policies like the President's American Jobs Act.

The American Jobs Act deserves a vote.

Mr. Speaker, the American people are looking to you to address the only deficit that matters right now: our jobs deficit. It's time for a vote on a serious jobs bill.

Our mantra here in Congress should be: jobs, jobs, jobs.

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND THE KENTUCKY DERBY

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, 2 weeks ago I came to the floor to congratulate Virgin Islands jockey Kevin Krigger on his Santa Anita win and qualifying for the Kentucky Derby. Kevin will be riding Goldencents co-owned by Rick Pitino and trained by Doug O'Neill.

Since then, another Virgin Islands jockey, Victor Lebron, riding Frac Daddy, co-owned by Carter Stewart and Ken Schlenker and trained by Ken McPeck, has also qualified.

They are making history, and the entire Virgin Islands is gearing up to cheer wildly for them on May 4 as they make a "Run for the Roses."

Another Virgin Islander, Gareem Nicholas, is an assistant trainer for Derby-bound horse It's My Lucky Day.

As a person who grew up in a horse racing family and who has always followed the sport, I could not be prouder than to see my young men riding and training in such a prestigious event, and I hope to be there to witness it.

Although there have been many people who have had a role in the success of the young Crucian jockeys who began their career on the Randall Doc James Racetrack in my home island of St. Croix, I again congratulate their parents Averill Simmonds and Albert Krigger, Jr., and Reina and Victor Lebron, Sr. The name Julio Felix also stands out as a mentor of theirs and many other young Virgin Island jockeys.

I wish both jockeys luck in their maiden runs at the Kentucky Derby, but they and Nicholas are already winners to me and in the eyes of their fellow Virgin Islanders.

GMO LABELING

(Ms. GABBARD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. GABBARD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight an issue that's very

important to me, to my constituents in Hawaii, as well as to people all across the country.

I've long been a supporter of requiring labeling for food containing genetically engineered, or GE, products. Food is a basic necessity in our everyday lives, and people have a right to know what's in the food we're eating.

Today I'm joining a strong coalition, led by Senator BOXER and Congressman DEFAZIO, to introduce the Genetically Engineered Food Right-to-Know Act, which requires labeling of GE foods.

The Food and Drug Administration already requires labeling of more than 3,000 ingredients, additives, and processes, but it has resisted labels for GE foods. Changing this outdated policy would simply add GE foods to that robust list, which would not be cost prohibitive for companies or consumers.

More than 1.5 million Americans have filed comments with the FDA urging it to label GE foods, while surveys show more than 90 percent of people also support it.

Our legislation puts consumers first and empowers them to make informed choices for themselves and their families.

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HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SEQUESTRATION

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it has now been more than 7 weeks since the sequestration cuts were enacted, and we are in new and unprecedented territory. Furlough notices have already been sent to thousands of Federal employees and contractors, and many services are beginning to slow. While many of the worst consequences of the sequester have not yet been realized, the truth is that the wheels have been set in motion, and we are on a course that will have real impacts for millions of Americans.

As a result of employee furloughs, more than 1,200 flights were delayed yesterday because 1,500 air traffic controllers were laid off the job. Because of the Republican majority's refusal to address the effects of sequester sensibly, the FAA estimates that a third of the passengers will face delays during the furloughs, with up to 6,700 flights arriving late at more than a dozen major airports each day.

Beyond crippling our government's ability to provide critical services, the Republican sequestration plan is slowing the economic growth that our country so desperately needs.

In short, Republicans are putting the ability of our government to fully perform basic government functions that we need to keep us safe at risk.

We need to work on an approach that will fix sequestration while reducing our deficit sensibly.

We need to come to a compromise that will prevent these indiscriminate cuts, and keep our economy on track and growing.

ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE

(Mrs. DAVIS of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, over 100,000 victims of gun violence last year, many of them children. What has this House done to prevent other children from being added to this tragic tally? Nothing, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely nothing.

Ninety percent of Americans support effective background checks—90 percent. So when does this Chamber, the people's House, work for the 10 percent? Opponents have said that background checks will not stop every incidence of gun violence. Well, true. They would, unfortunately, not stop all future acts of gun violence, anymore than other laws stop all illegal behavior—but it would stop some. It would save the lives of some of our children. It would be all of us saying we have a moral duty to ensure that those purchasing handguns are not an established threat to our families, and it would be the start of a comprehensive approach to protecting our families.

Congress plays politics on so many issues. Let's not play politics with the lives of so many innocent Americans.

APPOINT BUDGET CONFEREES

(Mr. KILDEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, my constituents and the American people deserve a budget. One of our principal duties in Congress is to pass a budget. Yet Congress has already missed the legal deadline this year because the Republican leadership has not yet appointed conferees to continue budget deliberations.

Yesterday, I joined many of my colleagues in signing a resolution calling on the GOP leadership to appoint conferees to a conference committee to continue working on the fiscal year 2014 budget.

After years of calling for regular order and for the Senate to pass a budget, which they did in March, I now find it ironic that Republicans are dragging their feet and stalling budget negotiations by refusing to appoint conferees.

We certainly have differences of opinion regarding budget priorities, Mr. Speaker; but that's no excuse for continued dysfunction and delay.

I ask you to appoint conferees today, and let's work to find a bipartisan compromise on a budget. Democrats stand ready to act to pass a budget that grows our economy, creates jobs, strengthens the middle class, and replaces the reckless, across-the-board sequester cuts.

UNIVERSAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

(Ms. KUSTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. KUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read into the RECORD a letter that I received today from a 7-year-old in my district:

Dear Congresswoman Kuster. My name is Noah Dutille. I am a second grader at Plymouth Elementary School. I am hoping that you will help make sure no other kids are hurt by guns. Thank you for your service. Sincerely, Noah.

In my district, 90 percent of my constituents support universal background checks, including 75 percent of those who are members of the National Rifle Association. Mr. Speaker, 6.5 million guns sold each year in the United States are sold by unlicensed private sellers, including online and gun show sales, and 40-50 percent of all gun sales have no criminal background check. In fact, a recent national survey of inmates revealed that 80 percent of those who used a handgun in a crime acquired it through a private transfer.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Noah and all of the families in my district, I ask that we schedule a vote to keep our families safe.

BUDGET CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

(Mr. PAYNE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, repeatedly, Republicans have reprimanded Senate Democrats, claiming budget negotiations have stalled because the Senate has failed to pass a budget. Now, Senate Democrats have done their part. Republican leaders in the House must do the same by convening a conference committee to resolve our budget differences openly and honestly. That is a procedure that the Congress has always followed. That is regular order.

The best interests of the American people shouldn't have to sit on the back burner any longer. Unemployment remains too high, wages are stagnant, and sequestration is taking its toll. We need to address our country's challenges and create jobs, reduce the deficit, and strengthen our middle class while creating ladders of opportunity for those to climb into the middle class.

These are our top priorities. Sometimes these priorities get lost in the shuffle of partisan bickering. I urge Republican leadership to follow regular order and create a conference committee now.

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

(Mr. YARMUTH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. YARMUTH. Mr. Speaker, opponents of comprehensive immigration

reform will do anything to stop progress in today's world. Now they're using the terrorist attacks in Boston to somehow draw some connection between those events and the problems that really plague our immigration system. There is no connection, but problems still remain.

We still have to secure our borders. We still have to make sure that employers are only employing legal Americans. We still have 11 million undocumented people in this country. We don't know why they're here or who they are. We still need seasonal workers for many economic activities. We still need highly skilled workers—engineers and technicians—some of whom have been trained here but cannot work here. We still have people overstaying their visas, and we still have the problem that we need to increase the flow of immigration to stimulate our economy.

Delaying immigration reform will only weaken our economy and make us less safe. It is much better that we know everyone who is in our country, why they're here, and make sure they're paying taxes and contributing to American society. We need to pass immigration reform now.

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

(Mr. MORAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, I and 19 of my colleagues wrote to the Energy and Commerce Committee urging them to engage us in a debate on the House floor as to what our national policy should be in response to climate change. That request has been met with silence, but that's a more preferable response than the 53 votes that the House undertook during the last session to block the Obama administration from using its existing authority to address climate change.

In fact, for the year 2012, when this House voted to overturn a scientific finding that, in fact, climate change was occurring, we experienced the warmest year on record. More than half of this Nation's counties were declared Federal disaster areas, due mostly to drought, but also to extreme weather events. We experienced the second worst year of extreme weather events. In fact, Hurricane Sandy cost the Federal Government more than \$65 billion and took the lives of 147 Americans, and we experienced the third worst year for wildland fires; more than 9 million acres were burned.

These severe temperatures and extreme weather events we are experiencing all fit the predictive pattern of global climate change. Our failure to take action dooms future generations to ever more powerful and destructive weather events, altered coastlines, more devastating droughts and