lost a great American, a great patriot, a great friend, a great husband, and a great father.

So while we here in the United States Congress bid farewell to our friend and colleague, we do so always remembering the enduring spirit and sense of service that Steve imparted on every life that he touched. Steve Vermillion's life serves as an inspiration to all of us who knew and loved him. May God receive him mercifully into His glory and bless the family, the Nation, and everyone that he leaves behind.

Stevo, we'll miss you, Big Man.

MOURNING THE PASSING OF STEVE VERMILLION

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

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RIVERA) in mourning the passing of Steve Vermillion. I gave Steve Vermillion one of his first jobs on Capitol Hill and taught him about the legislative process. He was a man of unquestioned ability, a man of deep integrity, and a man of great commitment to his principles and love of this country and the democracy that we have built and nurtured over the last 230-plus years.

His service to other Members of Congress, as well as in the private sector, was marked by making a difference. No one who worked with Steve Vermillion or who was touched by his life came away a poorer person from it. He enriched all of our lives. He made a great contribution, and I join with the gentleman from Florida in expressing our sympathies to his wife, Jennifer, and to his two children on his passage.

May his soul rest in peace.

ACCELERATING END TO AFGHANISTAN WAR

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

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, as we gather here for the first time since the election, it's important that we continue to talk about and work to resolve the questions that cannot wait until the 113th Congress. President Obama will soon be meeting with his military advisers and considering various plans for Afghanistan.

My Republican colleague, Congressman WALTER JONES, and I will be sending a letter to the President renewing our call for an accelerated withdrawal from Afghanistan. I encourage all Members to join us on this letter. Keeping our troops in Afghanistan through 2014 will not bring about a meaningful difference on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, it is really time that we catch up with the American people, who are calling for an accelerated end to the war in Afghanistan. Let's bring our troops home, end the war in Afghanistan, and invest in jobs and nation building here.

□ 1220

AMERICA'S TO-DO LIST

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. WALBERG). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, as is obvious in this room, the business for the week has now concluded. This is a week which commenced on Tuesday; and prior to that, the Congress, the House, had not been in session for 7 weeks despite the fact that this country has a to-do list a mile long in terms of the critical issues that affect our health care system.

Whether it's doctors' fees that are going to hit a cliff on January 1, a 37 percent cut for Medicare providers of all stripes, particularly in the physician community, we have the fiscal cliff, where tax rates are going to go up for almost every American wage earner if Congress fails to act. We have the sequestration, which is a measure which will be the equivalent of a chain saw going through the government, cutting .2 percent from every budget, whether it's defense or nondefense issues.

We have a farm bill which needs to be acted upon. We have, again, the 2008 farm bill which was a 5-year measure that has expired; and it's critical for rural America. We need to renew the farm bill. And to give one small example, which the dairy industry has reminded people of, that the price of a gallon of milk starting in January could potentially go as high as $7 if we don't restore and reauthorize the system of price supports that we have in our dairy industry.

The Violence Against Women Act expires. Again, a critical measure so that law enforcement officials all across the country can continue the progress that we're making in terms of the issue of domestic violence and violence against children.

Again, the list goes on and on.

And, incredibly, despite the fact that we have been out of town for 7 weeks—this House convened on Tuesday and is recessing again today for another week's break. And Thanksgiving is obviously an important national holiday for our country and is certainly something that is important to my family, just like every other Member's family—but the fact of the matter is, if you look at the number of legislative days between right now and Christmas—where, again, Congress has never been in session beyond that date—there are literally only 17 potential days; and the Speaker's Office has only scheduled 12.

This is not the way to run a government. And I would just say—as someone who, again, was grateful about the support I received from my congressional district in eastern Connecticut on election day a few days ago—the message that I heard loud and clear is that it's time for this body to knock it off, to start working together, and to try to start getting some of these critical measures dealt with so that the U.S. economy can have a horizon so that employers can make investment decisions, so that employers can make hiring decisions, so that issues of tax policy and budget can give, again, sectors all across the U.S. economy the confidence to move forward.

We have a very fragile recovery that we're going through right now. We are roughly averaging about 100,000 to 200,000 jobs a month, which is not enough to make a real dent in the unemployment rate in this country. And part of the reason, I believe—and I think, frankly, many economists and observers of the U.S. economy today believe—that we have not gotten a faster recovery is because of the uncertainty that surrounds the failure of Congress to act in terms of the fiscal cliff and sequestration.

Again, going back to the farm bill, as one example of a huge sector of America's economy, our agriculture, the Senate passed a farm bill, a bipartisan farm bill on June 19. This was a measure that was a 5-year authorization bill that sets food policy, food security policy, food safety policy. Republicans and Democrats in the Senate—which is, again, one of the most difficult legislative bodies in the world—actually came together and passed a farm bill. It will reduce the Federal deficit by $23 billion. It reforms the whole system of commodities support so that we're not going to be sending cash payments to farmers but, instead, modify the system in favor of a risk insurance so that producers actually have a little more skin in the game, which is a healthy thing and is a much more market-oriented approach to having a safety net for agriculture.

In the area of dairy, which is unlike almost every other commodity, it is harvested every day—actually two or three times a day. In terms of the herds of cows, the dairy farmers are out there working hard every day with, again, a very challenging market environment. We have a solid reform in the farm bill in terms of setting up a risk-insurance plan. For the first time in American history, we had full support from the dairy industry and dairy providers. Lots of compromise and negotiation. And, again, a $23 billion reduction to the deficit in terms of the last farm bill. That was done on June 19.

Since then, the House leadership has refused to bring a farm bill to the floor despite the fact that the House Agriculture Committee, which I sit on, actually passed a bipartisan measure. So it was teed up and ready for action here on the House floor, and yet we have gone 5 months since the Senate acted. We had 7 weeks of recess prior to this past Tuesday. We have American

farmers who are sitting out there trying to figure out what on Earth is going to be the future in terms of their production and their businesses.

And as I said, if you just look at the one example of milk, without having a farm bill in place on January 1, we are going to see basically the price of milk spin out of control and all the other sorts of ripple effects it would have on cheese products, dairy, dry dairy products, export products. In my opinion, this is not the way to treat some of the hardest working people in America who, by the way, have actually been one of the brightest spots in terms of our economy and economic growth since 2009.

Again, rather than leaving today, what we ought to be doing is taking the Senate bill, which was a bipartisan bill, putting it on the floor, doing our job, working at least partially as hard as the dairy farmers and other farmers across America who don't have the luxury of calling a recess in terms of their operations, and get this done. Just having that one measure would, in my opinion, give us some momentum in trying to start moving forward on the larger issue of the fiscal cliff.

Now, the Senate has also passed a measure regarding the Bush tax cuts. The Senate passed a bill with, again, all the difficulty of the Senate rules which would extend the Bush tax cuts for all income earned up to $250,000, which covers 98 percent of tax filers in America, and would allow the Clinton-era tax rates to revert for income above that level, for income above $250,000. That would reduce the Federal deficit by over $800 billion over the next 10 years. That's from the Congressional Budget Office. That's not partisan talking points. That's actual real nonpartisan data from the Congressional Budget Office. That is sitting, waiting for the House to take it up.

If it was passed, President Obama has indicated that he would sign it within minutes. And that would basically diffuse sequestration, which is that chain saw that's sitting out there which, if we don't get $1.2 trillion of deficit reduction in place by January 1, sectors and programs, critical programs—whether it's FEMA, whether it's the Department of Defense—will no longer be subject to that cut, that cutting process which is going to go into effect on January 1.

I am proud to represent eastern Connecticut, home of the Navy base in Groton, Connecticut, a submarine base that's been in operation for 100 years. We have 8,000 sailors who do incredible work in terms of operating some of the most sophisticated equipment and platforms that the world has ever seen in terms of nuclear submarines.

□ 1230

We have a shipyard, Electric Boat, which has, again, been a proud shipyard that produced submarines during World War II and continues, to this day, to produce the *Virginia*-class submarine, is now going to be working on the next generation of ballistic submarines, the *Ohio* replacement program. Again, these are critical workforces, critical infrastructure, which today does not know what the reality is they're going to wake up to on January 2 if we don't deal with sequestration.

But it's not only defense which is subject to the sequestration provision of the Budget Control Act that was passed in August of last year, the preceding year. It's also non-defense that will be subject to cuts and sequestration. And one that is quite relevant to the Northeast is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, which is the agency that America always looks to at times of natural disasters and catastrophes.

Again, approximately 2 weeks ago, the State of Connecticut, along with New York, New Jersey, and other parts of our country, were struck by one of the largest hurricanes in the history of recorded weather. The size of Hurricane Sandy was a thousand miles wide. When it hit Long Island Sound, where my district is, wind speeds gusted, in some instances, to almost 100 miles per hour at exactly the same time high tide was hitting communities like Stonington, Connecticut; Eastline, Connecticut; New London; and Madison, but all the way down the coastline to New Jersey. The calculation of damages from that storm, which no one could really insure for because an event like that has almost never been recorded, is going to be in the tens of billions of dollars. It may rival Katrina in terms of the need for recovery and infrastructure replacement as a result of that storm.

FEMA, today, has roughly about $12 billion in its account. If sequestration were to go through, the White House estimates that FEMA would lose about $878 million at a time when FEMA emergency centers are being set up from Rhode Island all the way down to southern New Jersey. These are centers where people who have lost their homes, in some instances lost their businesses, have lost equipment, are now flooding in to try and get relief and help, like any other natural disaster in the past. These are people who have paid their taxes year in and year out and made sure that FEMA was there when the folks down in Louisiana and Mississippi were hit by Katrina.

FEMA is the agency which helps communities pay for police overtime, fire overtime, sanitation worker overtime. These are the folks that we always call on at times of emergency. Yet sequestration, which this Congress has failed to address, is now sitting out there, really putting at risk the ability of FEMA to do its critical job.

Another program which is now subject to sequestration is the Medicare program—the Medicare program which serves our population of seniors over age 65, people on disability. Again, it would lose $4 billion under sequestration. Again, an across-the-board chain saw that would go through reimbursements to hospitals, nursing homes, providers of every stripe.

Education, K–12, higher education, Pell Grants, Stafford student loans, all subject to a sequestration cut of 20 percent over time, according to the Congressional Budget Office, if this body does not act.

Rental assistance for the poor would fall by $2.3 billion; nutrition programs for women, the WIC program, would lose $543 million; the Border Patrol's budget would fall by $823 million. Anybody think that's a good idea? The budget for the border fence would drop by $33 million.

NIH, which is doing critical research for cures to cancer and genome research, is showing incredibly promising results that really, I think, give a lot of folks over there hope that we're going to be able to really eradicate or at least treat cancer as we've never done before, again, NIH, National Science Foundation, all of these programs would be subject to sequestration if we don't act by January 1. Now, again, there is clearly sitting out there opportunities for us to avoid that from happening.

I mentioned the farm bill, which would put a dent in the deficit target that the sequestration law requires us to hit; the tax measure, which has already passed the Senate, which would put a huge dent in hitting that target; and a recognition that both Mitt Romney, when he was running for President, and President Obama, during their last debate, acknowledged the need for us to be funding the war in Afghanistan at the rate of $100 billion a year, which is roughly what is the price tag of that measure. If you can actually put those pieces together, we can avoid having sequestration take effect.

We can make sure that FEMA is able to do its job without worrying about whether or not the rug is going to be pulled out from them on January 1. We can make sure that defense workers, whether it's a shipyard in Groton or a shipyard in San Diego, are going to be able to continue to do their work after January 1. We're going to make sure that hospitals and doctors who would be subject to these cuts are not going to basically wake up on January 2 realizing that they lose money every time they treat their patients.

This is not rocket science. The pieces that overlap on a bipartisan basis to solve the sequestration problem are sitting out there. This is not rocket science to say that the Senate, which passed a bipartisan farm bill, can be acted upon in this body so that farmers in rural America can actually have a horizon ahead of them so that they can continue to do their hard work to make sure that America's food supply stays secure and safe.

What's missing is the political will to get this done. And as I mentioned at the outset, we have very little time to

get this done, if you look at the calendar, in terms of how many legislative days are possible between now and January 1.

Again, Mr. Speaker, there obviously are a lot of pundits that are spending a lot of time trying to decipher the results of the election on November 6. But I think every person in America knows in their heart and in their soul that really what the people of this country are looking for is to have a government which functions, to have a government which does its job, a government which is willing to spend the time and not keep going into recess when so many critical measures have to be acted upon to make sure that this country, again, continues the path of recovery and growth and that our citizens are safe and secure.

That's what people were looking for on November 6. And I think any Republican and any Democrat—and as somebody who grew up in a proud Republican family and ended up as a Democrat, I feel like I have some ability to talk like this. The fact of the matter is that that's what this country is looking for. They're looking for people to work—and particularly to work together—to try and solve these problems. We can do this.

Unfortunately, we're not coming back here until the Monday after Thanksgiving. But, hopefully, folks who are listening here this afternoon are going to take the time to contact their Congressman to say: It's time to knock it off. It's time to get the work done. It's time to stop this part-time schedule that makes it impossible for people to sit down and work together and work out the issues that must get worked out between now and January 1 and allow this country's recovery to move forward.

If we just get that cloud of uncertainty moved out of the way, the fact of the matter is the American people can do the rest of the job easily in terms of making sure that our future is going to continue to be as bright as I think the wonderful people that make up this country give us that opportunity and that blessing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

DIGGING DEEPER IN A HOLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 5, 2011, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GOHMERT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's so many problems in the world. There's so many problems here in America. There's so many things that are being hidden, kept secret, that need to have sunlight hit them and come to be known, because sunlight truly is an illumination of not only facts, but creates cleanliness when shining light comes upon things that have been hidden.

We have so many things yet to resolve, so many people that are now in poverty that have not been in the past, an economy that's in trouble, a Congress that can't seem to find its way to reduce spending, so we keep digging deeper and deeper holes. But with all the problems in this Nation, we are the most blessed nation in the history of mankind.

Solomon's Israel did not have the liberties for the individuals that we have. It didn't have the assets that we have. It didn't have obesity as a major health problem for the nation's poor, as we do.

□ 1240

We are so richly blessed. So amidst all the skirmishing, debating, fussing and arguing, we are about to go out of session for the last few moments before we hit Thanksgiving. It's a time when people should pause and understand, without dwelling on our problems, that we are so richly blessed. It's time—as the Founders and as those leaders throughout our great history have every year paused—to thank God for the blessings which we have.

Some people see us fussing and debating and getting angry at times. We have such different views of the way to fix things. I see my friend, ELIOT ENGEL. We don't vote on a lot of things the same way, but I know his heart and I know he's a great, honorable man. I don't agree with ED MARKEY very often; in fact, we are usually crossways in our Committee on Natural Resources. He and I think we can reach some agreements on some issues regarding natural gas. LOUISE SLAUGHTER, she didn't let a bunch of my amendments through when she was Rules chair, but I like her very much and she is a friend. CAROLYN MALONEY, she thinks we should eliminate private guns and I believe the Second Amendment should be enforced, but she's a friend. Having friends in a body in which we disagree over things on the best way forward is another one of those blessings.

So before we recess for Thanksgiving, it is such an honor to get to remind people, you know, we have so many people who have blessed our Nation who were not born here. There are people like the President, who was born in Hawaii but was not educated for his early years, is not aware so much of the history that many of us grew up being taught. So it's a real honor for me to get to share some of our history as we approach the Thanksgiving holiday.

For example, James Madison was given credit as having more to do with our Constitution than any of the other Founders. When he was President, March 4, 1815, he had this proclamation—a guy that should know what the Constitution means and that it was never intended to prevent a people from prayer and thanking God for our blessings, either in a governmental setting or a nongovernmental setting. It was never meant to force people to pray, but never intended to prevent governmental leaders from leading prayers. This was James Madison, March 4, 1815. He said:

> No people ought to feel greater obligation to celebrate the goodness of the Great Disposer of Events and of the Destiny of Nations than the people of the United States.
>
> And to the same Divine Author of every good and perfect gift we are indebted for all those privileges and advantages, religious as well as civil, which are so richly enjoyed in this favored land.
>
> I now recommend a day on which the people of every religious denomination may in their solemn assemblies unite their hearts and their voices in a freewill offering to their Heavenly Benefactor of their homage of thanksgiving and of their songs of praise.

Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the worst war in American history—more Americans died in the Civil War than in any other war of this Nation—in July of 1863, the middle of the Civil War, our President, Abraham Lincoln, provided these official words. For those who are on the Supreme Court and did not have a proper education about our history, these words might be surprising, but Abraham Lincoln made these an official proclamation when he said:

> It is meet and right to recognize and confess the presence of the Almighty Father, and the power of His Hand equally in these triumphs and in these sorrows. I invite the people of the United States to assemble on that occasion in their customary places of worship and in the forms approved by their own consciences to render the homage due to the Divine Majesty for the wonderful things He has done in this Nation's behalf, and invoke the influence of His Holy Spirit to subdue the anger which has produced and so long sustained a needless and cruel rebellion.

Andrew Johnson, October 28, 1865, as President of the United States, he succeeded Abraham Lincoln, as we all know, after the terrible atrocity of Abraham Lincoln's assassination; came at the end of such a cruel war that saw family member fighting and killing family member, and so much destruction, so much hate. Andrew Johnson's official words as President of the United States in 1865:

> Whereas it has pleased Almighty God, during the year which is now coming to an end, to relieve our beloved country from the tearful scourge of civil war, and to permit us to secure the blessings of peace, unity and harmony, with great enlargement of civil liberty; and
>
> Whereas, our Heavenly Father has, also, during the year graciously averted from us the calamities of foreign war, pestilence and famine, while our granaries are full of the fruits of an abundant season; and
>
> Whereas, righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is a reproach to any people.
>
> I recommend to the people thereof that they do set apart and observe the first Thursday of December next as a day of national thanksgiving to the Creator of the Universe for those great deliverances and blessings.

Ulysses S. Grant, as President, responding as did those already mentioned—and actually every President each and every year—I'm just selecting specific official proclamations. This one was President Ulysses S. Grant, 1869. He said: