If the President and the United States Senate want to know why our economy isn't growing, this is why. These are the real life implications for Fifth District Virginians and all Americans created by the regulatory agenda that has been put in place by this administration and the last Congress over the past 2 years. These added costs jeopardize the success of our small businesses and destroy jobs. The added uncertainty crushes the entrepreneurial spirit and stalls economic growth. And the added expansion of the Federal Government strips away our freedoms and our opportunities.

So when a diner owner in Farmville tells me that Washington is taking the breath away from the American people, this is what she's talking about, an ever-growing government that stands as a barrier between a struggling economy and a growing, vibrant economy that we all desperately want.

So as the House continues to lead the way and works to reduce unnecessary regulations, it is my hope that we will keep in mind the convenience store owners, the auto repair shop owners, and all of the small businesses and farmers who are relying on us to get this right, who are relying on us to support those policies that remove the Federal Government as a roadblock to job creation and return our economic recovery back where it belongs—in the hands of the people.

AFGHANISTAN STILL NEEDS AN EXIT STRATEGY

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

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On October 7, 2001, the United States officially began Operation Enduring Freedom, and the war in Afghanistan was underway. The last decade of wars has cost thousands of U.S. lives and hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and as a representative of thousands of servicemembers, military families, and veterans, I'm entrusted with weighing the decision on what the profound effect on our Nation's security this war has brought and on the men and women that risk their lives every day to ensure that security. As we mark the 10th anniversary of the longest war in America's history, we believe it's time for Congress to ask some very serious questions about our military engagement in Afghanistan.

Whom are we fighting in Afghanistan? We entered this war because of the threat posed by the international terrorist organization al Qaeda. While al Qaeda expands its operations around the globe, our military is tied up in a ground war against the Taliban, an Afghan rebel group with domestic ambitions. Senior intelligence officials have estimated fewer than 100 al Qaeda members remain in Afghanistan, yet we plan to have 68,000 U.S. troops there in that country through the next year. If we are to defeat terrorism, we must stick to our original strategic mission, maintaining a laser-like focus on al Qaeda and capitalizing on our technological and intelligence advantages to cut off their financing, intercept their operations, and take out their leaders. The successful operation against Osama bin Laden epitomizes this targeted approach.

Where's our money going? Afghanistan is widely considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world, behind only Somalia, and news reports of new corruption emerge every day. Billions of U.S. dollars are siphoned off by crooked officials and contractors, carried out of the Kabul airport in bags of cash, and even funneled to warlords and the very Taliban that we often oppose. To date, the U.S. has spent nearly half a trillion dollars in Afghanistan, and that pricetag increases by $10 billion every month that we stay there. Meanwhile, we are forced to cut critical services at home in the face of our rising deficit and financial instability. We continue to hemorrhage finite U.S. resources in Afghanistan, and it makes us less, not more safe.

When will this war end? While the current timeline commits 68,000 troops through 2013, there are reports, backed up by some facts, that in the ongoing talks with the Afghan government about the future of the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship, the U.S. is considering having 35,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan until 2025 at an expected cost of over $50 billion a year.

The human cost of this war is immeasurable. The dedication and the commitment of American men and women in uniform is absolute. Our troops in Afghanistan execute their orders that put them at risk because they trust the mission in which they are deployed. That is absolutely essential to our Nation's security. This steadfast loyalty is our Nation's most sacred resource, and thus, it is our most solemn responsibility to ensure that it is never squandered.

There is no U.S. military solution in Afghanistan. A political reconciliation is essential. Afghanistan's future depends upon Afghans, not American soldiers. By ending this war, America can focus on rebuilding the foundations of America's strength and security by paying down our Federal deficit, growing our economy, and putting Americans back to work.

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THE PRESIDENT'S OCEAN ZONING PLAN

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

Mr. SOUTHERLAND. Madam Speaker, yesterday, in the Natural Resources Committee, we held an oversight hearing regarding the President's new National Ocean Policy, an Executive order to tell us how we can best use our oceans.

Yesterday, it was amazing to hear those who believe in this policy applaud the use of the Federal Government in bringing stakeholders together. I will say this: This particular policy has been driven from the White House through Executive order under the auspices of ocean conservation, when its actual effects will be far reaching, economically harmful and hurtful to American jobs and businesses both at sea as well as ashore.

Inside of this policy, there is something called marine spatial planning, how to best use our oceans, totally ignoring the common sense that the God who created us gave us at the moment He did create us. The background of this goes back quite some time.

In 2009, a task force—I love those here. We have so many. We have councils and task forces. Do you know what? We need to form another committee. Well, I'm of the opinion that had Moses formed another committee, they would still be wandering around in the desert today. However, that's the mode of operation here. And in these frameworks and in these task forces, they come out with effective coastal and marine spatial planning.

I believe this is one of the largest efforts of government regulatory overreach in my lifetime. And with the world being 73 percent water, what better way—for if we can capture and make sure that we determine what people do with these waterways, what better way to push our policies forward, to rob the American people of job opportunities and the freedoms that I believe were given at birth?

The National Ocean Policy is less about coordinating fishing activities with other ocean user activities and more about creating new regulatory processes to further restrict fishing opportunities in both the recreational and commercial fishing sectors, according to the director of public affairs for the At-sea Processors Association.

In my State of Florida, we have a crisis when it comes to homes and when it comes to real estate. Yet I know that homebuilders are going to be damaged greatly because this regulatory push does not just deal with offshore, but it also deals, as I stated, with onshore.

The National Ocean Policy has a potential to create yet another set of standards and/or approvals that could unnecessarily impose significant impacts on homebuilders, private landowners, and other businesses while providing minimal—minimal—effects. Yesterday, we heard that what this plan does is bring together, through an adaptive process, stakeholders. Well, do you know what? We have the ability as stakeholders to communicate now.

Since when do we need the Federal Government to tell us that we can talk