

began its operations on July 26, 1775, and Ben Franklin was appointed the first Postmaster General. That's a long time ago.

It has a legal obligation to serve everyone, regardless of geography, and at a uniform cost with uniform services. And it has exclusive access to boxes that are marked "U.S. Postal" or "U.S. Post Office." And it also competes with private package delivery services.

In 2006, Congress forced the United States Postal Service to pre-fund 100 percent of retiree insurance premiums. No other company, public or private, is forced to comply with such an unnecessary and destructive policy.

Mr. Speaker, House Republicans cited declining mail volumes and a growing labor force as the primary reasons why the 2006 legislation was necessary. Yet 2005, 2006, and 2007 were the highest volume years in U.S. Postal Service history. In fact, 2006 was the highest volume year ever.

Mr. Speaker, the real motivation behind the 2006 legislation was to break the back of a public sector union and privatize the mailing industry. Why else would Congress alter an entity that hasn't taken a dime of United States taxpayers' money in 30 years?

According to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. Postal Service was self-supporting since 1971, using postage sales to fund operations. The Postal Service was so profitable that it returned money to the Treasury every single year, while providing free services to the visually impaired and persons overseas.

If the Postal Service was a private corporation, or if it had been a private corporation at that time, my colleagues across the aisle would have hailed it as the model of economic success and sung its praises from sea to shining sea.

Since the pre-funding mandate of 2006, however, the Postal Service has nearly crumbled under the weight of its pension costs. How does an organization that had robust profits for 30 years, leading up to the 2006 legislation, suddenly start running deficits and lose \$25 billion between 2007 and 2011?

How did the U.S. Postal Service go from no debt in 2006 to over \$13 billion in debt today?

Many of my colleagues on the other side have well-connected friends who advocate for Postal Service privatization. I'm here to connect the dots for the American people.

Instead of wasting time today, this do-nothing Congress should vote to stop the damage inflicted upon the United States Postal Service by passing H.R. 1351. This bipartisan postal reform bill protects the hardworking employees of the Postal Service.

The U.S. Postal Service was not in danger of becoming insolvent until Congress decided to meddle in its affairs. It's hypocritically inconsistent for my friends on the other side of the aisle to talk about government being

the problem, while they don't acknowledge that they created a big problem for the post office. It is hypocritical.

Mr. Speaker, the Postal Service already missed a \$5.5 billion payment in August. Congress must act before the post office defaults on another payment later this month. Instead of scheduling political votes that highlight our differences, let's stop the madness and do what is in the best interest of the American people, the economy, and communities across the Nation.

The Postal Service employs 700,000 of our fellow citizens, over 17,000 of whom are from my State of Georgia.

□ 1040

One-third are military veterans who deliver 212 billion pieces of mail to over 144 million locations. This is the middle class that's doing this. If privatization advocates like the Koch brothers get their wish, the Postal Service will slowly be destroyed, causing good jobs to be lost and allowing companies to raise prices of delivery. Taking action to strengthen the Postal Service's finances is not just good for the letter carriers and postmasters; it's also good for business. There is \$1.3 trillion in mailing industry proceeds out there that support 7 million private sector jobs. The time to act, ladies and gentlemen, is now.

#### HUNGER STRIKE UNDERWAY BY PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS IN CUBA

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

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Speaker, just 90 miles away from the coast of the United States there exists a murderous, terrorist regime on the island of Cuba. It is a regime that harbors terrorists, that funds terrorism, that has even held an American hostage since the summer of '09, and that denies all basic human rights to its people.

Currently, 26 pro-democracy activists, it has been reported, have initiated a hunger strike. It started with Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez on September 7 of 2012 in order to protest the brutal oppression by the Castro thugs against the Cuban people and against the political prisoners, and it has now been joined, as I said, by another 25.

You're not going to see that on the front pages of the newspapers. These are individuals who, for some reason, the press will not cover. The only thing you'll see about the Castro regime is, frankly, the beauty of the beaches and the island and the fact that they have old cars—such a quaint thing. It's not quaint when your human rights are violated and when you are forced to drive 50-year-old automobiles—if you're lucky to even get one of those.

Since these individuals, these heroes, are for some reason being denied the

coverage that they deserve, I come to the floor to mention who they are—these heroes that we have to support, that we have to defend, and that we can never forget. So I am going to read their names.

I mentioned Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez. Jorge Vazquez Chaviano, Arturo Conde Zamora, Yerandi Martinez Rodriguez, Orlando Almenares Reyes, Luis Enrique Ponce Sanchez, Roberley Villalobos Torres, Israel Robert Isaac, Yuniel Alvarez Garcia, Luis Enrique Santos Caballero, Yosmel Martinez Corcho, Alberto Reyes Morales, Marta Beatriz Roque Cabello—by the way, who is a very well-known pro-democracy leader of Cuba and whose health is, frankly, in poor shape—Omar Pedrosa Suarez, Yadira Rodriguez Bombino, Ibis Maria Rodriguez Gonzalez, Fermin Zamora Vazquez, Yasmani Nicle Abad, Leonardo Cancio Santana, Pedro Fernandez Vega Cortes, Arcelio Lopez Rojas, Misahel Valdes Diaz, and Jorge Luis Recio Arias.

These heroes, these pro-democracy activists and heroes, have stood up and are standing up to the Castro dictatorship with whatever they have, including their health and their bodies. They need our prayers. They need our support. They need our solidarity at this pivotal time in their struggle for Cuba's freedom.

Mr. Speaker, may God protect these brave heroes. May the international community demonstrate the solidarity that they deserve—and yes, we here in the United States Congress and in this country must continue to work to do what we can to help them and others achieve their final day of freedom.

#### THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF CONGRESS AND THE COUNTRY

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

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Speaker, the American people are going to make a decision on November 6 about the future leadership of this Congress and this country, and they face, as they do every 4 years, two fundamental questions. The first: Who can be in charge of the cash register? Who will best manage the economy? The second: Who will be a firm hand in protecting America's foreign policy interests? If we look at the past 2 years with this Republican-led Congress, which has accomplished nothing and, in fact, has done damage, the question on who is best in charge of the cash register is quite clear.

The Ryan budget that was passed by this House and that stalled in the Senate would actually increase the debt. The whole point, supposedly, of the Republican agenda coming into Congress was to lower the debt. The budget they passed would increase it by \$6 trillion. Why is that? Well, first of all, many of the proponents of this budget are the folks who voted for policies that actually exploded the debt: the war in Iraq