

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, as I speak here today on the comfortable and uncrowded floor of the House of Representatives, all across America, people are standing in lines like cattle, waiting 60 minutes, 90 minutes, sometimes longer, missing their flights to get through airport security. It didn't have to be this way.

We do a lot of things around here that are kind of not quite on the up-and-up, and one of them was a deal at the end of 2013 December, essentially when Americans are celebrating the holidays and not paying a lot of attention. Congress cut one of those year-end budget deals to fund the whole government and theoretically reduce the deficit.

Now, my friends on the Republican side are totally averse to dealing with the deficit through any sort of revenues: can't raise revenues, can't make hedge fund managers on Wall Street pay taxes like other Americans because that would be bad; can't deal with overseas loopholes, corporations re-incorporating in tax havens so they won't have to pay money here, even though they are based here and operate here. We can't deal with any of those issues.

They snuck into that bill a little fee, yeah, just a little tiny fee. They raised the fee for aviation security.

So why are things so bad today? If they just raised the fee in December of 2013, raising an extra \$1.2 billion—B, as in billion—a year for aviation security, why are the lines so long?

Well, guess what. They raised the fee, and they diverted the money. So airline passengers are paying more for their tickets ostensibly for aviation security to keep them safe and maybe to mitigate some of their inconvenience of standing in line, but the Republican majority chose to divert that money to deficit reduction and other things—\$1.25 billion dollars this year.

Now, I heard the head of the union for the screeners on the radio this morning. He said we need 6,000 more workers. And they said, well, God, how much is that going to cost? Six thousand, how could you possibly afford that?

Guess what. It would cost a heck of a lot less than \$1.2 billion to hire 6,000 more screeners so Americans didn't have to stand in 2-hour lines and miss their flights.

What is wrong with this place? Why can't we be on the up-and-up.

If you raise a tax on people to pay for aviation security, both to make them safe and to make it more convenient and predictable, spend the money making it more safe, making it more convenient, and making it more predictable. Don't divert the money to illusory deficit reduction or other things around here. That is incredible.

So all Congress has to do is say: Hmm—of course, I voted against the bill, but the large majority who did—we were wrong. We shouldn't have raised the fees on airline passengers.

We shouldn't have diverted the money. We shouldn't have starved TSA from the funds they need to hire more people, both to deal with baggage and lines. Up above and below, we have got problems in both places with lack of staffing.

Now, we will just blame the management of TSA. Oh, it is the management. It is the management. Don't look over here, because we are taxing the passengers and we are spending the money over here, not on security. That is why people are standing in line today.

I hope this place gets honest and says: Let's change the law and let's spend the money, the taxes the passengers are paying, on aviation security and eliminate the excessive waits in lines.

NDAA AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Speaker, 2 years ago the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. RUSSELL) offered an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act regarding religious freedom. Many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have attempted to use this amendment as a wedge in an effort to divide the American people. I want to take a few minutes to discuss the truth and the facts about its impact.

In September of 1789, the First Congress considered demands made by many participants in the State conventions which called for ratifying the U.S. Constitution. In response to many of those concerns, Congress approved, by a voice vote, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and sent it to the States for ratification. The States ratified it in December of 1791.

The first two clauses of the First Amendment address religious freedom. The first prohibits an establishment of religion so that citizens would not be forced to support a national church, as was the case in Great Britain.

The second clause prohibits any government act that inhibits the free exercise of religion by a citizen, thereby assuring that the government cannot dictate religious beliefs or interfere with citizens as they practice and live out their faith.

□ 1045

Historically, we have a proud tradition of Republicans and Democrats working together to protect free exercise under the First Amendment. A great example of this is the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which passed this House by a voice vote in 1993.

Unfortunately, basic principles of free exercise are under attack today. In response, Mr. RUSSELL's limited amendment would extend religious liberty protection to four categories of government contractors.

It is important to note that one doesn't lose constitutional rights if he or she seeks to become a contractor of the government. Hence, contractors are protected in the free exercise of their religious beliefs and practices. The Russell amendment makes explicit these contractors' rights to such protection in the employment of people who work for them.

So let's look at the Russell amendment. It states: "Any branch or agency of the Federal Government shall, with respect to any religious corporation, religious association, religious educational institution, or religious society that is a recipient of or offeror for a Federal government contract, sub-contract, grant, purchase order, or cooperative agreement, provide protections and exemptions consistent with sections 702(a) and 703(e)(2) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 . . . and section 103(d) of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 . . ."

Again, note that the Russell amendment is limited to these four categories of religious entities, and it does not apply to other private entities or individuals.

Mr. Speaker, the 1964 Civil Rights Act is a landmark civil rights law which bans discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Title 7 of the act deals with discrimination in the workplace. Section 702 specifically protects the four categories of religious employers listed in the Russell amendment.

Hence, the Russell amendment extends to these four categories of religious entities when they are working for or attempt to work for the government, the same religious liberty rights they have had for over 50 years when operating in the private sector. This approach is neither new nor novel.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 extends many of the same rights granted under the 1964 act to people with disabilities. Section 103(d) of that act allows the four categories of religious entities to give "preference in employment to individuals of a particular religion" and to require that "all applicants and employees conform to the religious tenets of such organization."

Again, the Russell amendment extends to these four categories of religious entities the same religious liberty rights they have had for over 25 years when operating in the private sector to when they are doing business in the government.

The opponents of the Russell amendment say it provides for discrimination against the LGBT community. A simple review of the amendment and the underlying statutes demonstrates an absence of any reference to LGBT persons. Indeed, the Russell amendment is narrowly drawn to apply only to the four categories of religious entities in their employment of individuals to carry out their work. Any service or product produced by such an entity in a government contract would have to

be provided to whomever the government requires, and that, obviously and appropriately, will include those in the LGBT community.

Mr. Speaker, if the Russell amendment is discriminatory, then so is the First Amendment, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If allowing a religious entity to employ persons who share its beliefs is discriminatory, then so are all these other Congresses. It is inaccurate to portray the Russell amendment as anything other than a narrowly drawn effort to protect religious freedom.

NEW ENGLAND COMPOUNDING CENTER TRAGEDY

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

Mr. BISHOP of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to a public health atrocity that is being ignored by the current administration and the current administration's continued failure to ensure justice for American citizens.

As many Members in this body will recall, in 2012, the New England Compounding Center manufactured and distributed nonsterilized injections to clinics and hospitals around the Nation. After receiving those injections, more than 750 people nationwide developed fungal meningitis. To date, 76 people have died as a result.

As you can see by the illustration to my left, this is a nationwide issue. The epicenter, however, of the outbreak was in Michigan's Eighth District, which I proudly represent. More than 200 people became sick, and 15 people died after receiving the tainted injection from a clinic in our district.

Because of the reckless disregard for the health and safety of the recipients of these drugs, the Department of Justice secured 131 convictions against 14 individuals, including 25 counts of second degree murder against the two main defendants for the deaths occurring in seven States.

Although this outbreak happened almost 4 years ago, the consequences are still very real today. Just the other week I was approached by a gentleman whose wife had died as a result of a lethal injection she received. It was, of course, heart-wrenching to hear the agony he went through and continues to deal with after losing his best friend and wife to this terrible tragedy.

Whether it is someone who has lost a loved one or a victim now living with chronic pain and sickness or a family member caring for an ill victim, this is a national tragedy, and the people need to be heard.

Not only have the day-to-day lives of these victims been irretrievably altered, they have also been financially ruined. Just to give you an idea, copays on some of the drugs for the treatments required for this illness are

up to \$5,000 per month, and despite multiple bipartisan requests from Members of both this body and the Senate, the Department of Health and Human Services has rejected all requests to waive rights to collect on Medicare liens they have placed on the settlement issued last year. That means that victims will get very little from their compensation funds. In fact, to this date, they have received not a dime.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but now the Obama administration, through the Office of Management and Budget, has blocked the ability of victims to get compensation from the Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program, otherwise known as the AEAP for short. The AEAP was created utilizing funds from the Federal crime victims fund, a fund specifically set aside to compensate victims of crimes. The fund gets its resources from not taxpayer dollars, but through a special assessment on convicted criminals. They get it through criminal fines, penalties, and forfeited bail bonds.

Without any explanation, a bureaucrat at the Office of Management and Budget has blocked the decision of a Senate-confirmed Assistant Attorney General to compensate victims of this act which the Department of Justice has recognized as criminal.

These are innocent Americans whose lives have been destroyed by criminals who will never meet them, will never feel their pain, hear the pain in their voices, will never see the irreversible damage they have caused. But, Mr. Speaker, I see it, and the 17 other colleagues of mine who have signed this bipartisan letter to the Office of Management and Budget see it, too.

Justice must be served. If the Attorney General won't speak up to advocate for justice, as secured by the hard-working Assistant Attorneys General on this case, and the administration won't reverse its decision, then the citizens of this country and the victims and their families deserve to know why they have been denied justice.

As a former prosecutor myself for my local community, I understand full well that victims of crimes need an advocate to stand up for them. Nothing—and I mean nothing—will reverse the harm that has been caused by this act. But at the very least, we must ensure justice for the people, and we must hold those responsible accountable for their actions. I urge my colleagues to join me in this effort.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 54 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois) at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer:

God of mercy, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

We ask Your blessing upon this assembly and upon all to whom the authority of government is given. Help them to attend to the immediate needs and concerns of the moment, all the while enlightened by the majesty of Your creation and Your eternal Spirit.

The season of graduation for millions of American youth is upon us. May our appreciation as a Nation of the value of education among those who are our future be incentive enough to guarantee its importance in our public policy considerations.

May all that is done within the people's House this day be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from New York (Mr. ZELDIN) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. ZELDIN led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ESSAY COMPETITION

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

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have held an essay competition for elementary school students throughout the Second Congressional District of South Carolina. The "Smiling Faces, Beautiful Places" essay competition received