between the zoo staff and Mexican authorities in the conservation efforts of the rare Coahuilan box turtle and Atlantic Ridley sea turtle led to recognition from both the United States and Mexican government. The zoo has also contributed to preservation efforts of endangered and threatened species including, the Western lowland gorillas, Philippine crocodiles, and Rhino hornbills. Over the years, the Gladys Porter Zoo has contributed funds to projects that specifically focus on animals in need of attention. These contributions include funding to Dr. Edward Louis, Jr. in support of his work with Galapagos tortoises, and the International Iguana Foundation, which actively works to conserve iguanas and their habitats.

Madam Speaker, the Gladys Porter Zoo is a cultural staple for the Rio Grande Valley, while also serving the world of wildlife preservation, zoology, research, and education in countless ways. For 50 years, the Gladys Porter Zoo has proven to be a world-class zoological and botanical park through its exceptional work in wildlife preservation, research, education, and the community. I congratulate them on reaching this 50-year milestone; and for their continued efforts to support and educate the South Texas community on the need for conservation and preservation of our wildlife and planet.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022

SPEECH OF

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, my amendment directs the Army Corps of Engineers to provide uniform guidance and to strengthen enforcement of laws that are already on the books to ensure that federal construction projects, particularly on our military bases, are completed with the highest quality workmanship.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO)—the federal government's ''watchdog'' agency—recently completed an investigative report, mandated by an amendment I authored as part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), that found inconsistencies with implementation of the Corps mechanisms for compliance with important worker protection laws. Today's amendment addresses those problems and instructs the Corps' to fully comply with relevant federal laws and regulations for: building quality facilities—labs, hangars, housing, and workspaces—for our military men and women; providing an honest wage for construction workers; and providing the best investment for the taxpayer.

For years, we have witnessed unscrupulous contractors win construction bids for critical federal work, only to have those important projects mismanaged, understaffed, delayed, left unfinished, and in some cases, rebid—then properly redone by high-skilled tradesmen and women who should have gotten the job in the first place.

There is wide-spread concern that irresponsible contractors and subcontractors hire unqualified or underqualified workers and put them in high-skill jobs for which they lack the needed training and expertise—a practice known as misclassification.

There are two different types of misclassification: craft misclassification and independent contractor misclassification. Craft misclassification occurs when dishonest contractors misclassify high-skilled workers as general laborers or lower wage classifications in order to avoid paying the higher prevailing wage rate applicable to the high-skilled work actually performed. Independent contractor misclassification occurs when contractors misclassify employees as independent contractors to avoid paying prevailing wages thereby reducing labor costs and avoiding state and federal taxes.

These practices deny workers of their rights to critical benefits and protections, including prevailing wages, worker's compensation and unemployment insurance, and communities suffer because misclassification results in lower tax revenues for federal, state, and local governments.

Additionally, the end product is often compromised by shoddy workmanship which can lead to do-overs and substantial cost overruns.

Congress has passed laws to prevent such problems and punish the offenders. The Davis-Bacon Act is critical in this effort as it requires contractors working on certain federally funded construction projects to pay their workers a prevailing wage to ensure that our federal projects are completed by skilled workers who have been properly trained, classified and paid according to their expertise and locality. The Act stands as a check and balance designed to protect employees from low-wage, low-bidding contractors who look to do the job on the cheap hurting the workers and the client, i.e. the federal taxpayer.

When it comes to domestic construction projects, the Army Corps of Engineers, procures more than most divisions of the Department of Defense. According to the GAO, in 2019, the Corps obligated over $11 billion for domestic construction contracts.

Each federal agency is primarily responsible for enforcing the Davis-Bacon protections at its construction worksites. The Army Corps has a lot of construction projects and federal construction monies to properly oversee.

Unfortunately, federal construction projects in my district, including Army Corps projects at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst—have fallen short in oversight and compliance and have run into trouble with unqualified, subpar bidders who avoid hiring needed skilled workers. We have seen cases of sophisticated work—HVAC, plumbing and sheet metal—needing to be ripped up and redone after the irresponsible bidders failed to properly do the work.

To examine this problem and find lasting solutions, in 2019, Congress enacted my amendment to the 2020 NDAA directing the GAO to study the contracting practices of the Corps with a focus on how the Corps monitors and enforces the Davis-Bacon Act.

The GAO conducted its audit from May 2020 to March 2021 examining Corps guidance, relevant documents about the Davis-Bacon Act, Department of Labor guidance and other relevant laws and regulations. They conducted ''semistructured interviews'' in four Army Corps district offices—Louisville, New Orleans, New York and Walla Walla—based on the district's activities and representing ''various geographical areas in the U.S. and a mixture of volume and type of construction contracts (e.g. military and civil projects)''.

They interviewed Corps headquarters officials, DOL officials and four external groups including two labor unions and two trade associations.

The GAO said that ''monitoring, including payroll reviews and on-site inspections, are key to ensuring that the Corps enforces contractor's compliance with the Davis-Bacon Act''.

But the report also described implementation inconsistencies across the various districts that can easily lead to gaps in compliance with Davis-Bacon.

The GAO concluded that aspects of the reviews and on-site inspections ''may not be sufficient.'' They found that ''Corps documents lack information'' and said that ''In the absence of directions to consistently document on-the-ground conditions, like the number of employees on site'' district officials ''may not be fully using on-site inspection to ensure contractors' compliance with the Act.''

GAO's final recommendations to Army Corps were that Corps headquarters provide clarifying information on how to conduct payroll reviews and document on-site inspections to ensure the proper monitoring of the number of workers and work performed.

In essence, the GAO found that the Army Corps needs to do a better job in complying with and enforcing Davis-Bacon protections on Corps' projects.

My amendment instructs the Army Corps to provide each of its districts with the guidance it needs to enforce Davis-Bacon. It also directs the Corps to investigate worker complaints and third-party complaints within 30 days of filings and reaffirms transparency and disclosure requirements for certified payroll reports.

With better compliance and more transparency, we will see better workmanship, and a greater return for the taxpayer.

RECOGNIZING PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA MODI'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

HON. A. DREW FERGUSON IV

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Mr. FERGUSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize one of our global partners, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, who is in Washington, D.C. this week for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the Quad Summit, a strategic conversation between the United States, India, Japan, and Australia.

America and India have a strong and valuable partnership, which has allowed both nations to flourish. Welcoming the wide range of collaborative activities undertaken to improve their citizens' lives, we must work to revitalize our existing alliance and find new areas for collaboration and mutual benefit.

I was grateful to meet with the Consulate General of India in Georgia Dr. Swati V. Kulkarni earlier this month, where I reaffirmed my commitment to deepening our ties and advancing practical cooperation between our two countries in combatting COVID–19, partnering on emerging technologies and cyberspace, and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific.