



# The Comstock CONNECTION

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CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA COMSTOCK'S 10TH DISTRICT NEWSPAPER • AUGUST 1, 2016

## Providing Safety And Security On The Homefront

Since the terrorist attack in Orlando, there have already been attacks abroad, additional incidents here in the U.S., and even a recent arrest in our area of a local man planning terrorist actions. There are numerous policy areas we are reviewing to find common ground and to address these ongoing threats to our public safety and security.

This terrorist attack in Orlando was an attack on all civilized people by a man who claimed allegiance to ISIS. This terrorist had actually been identified and investigated by law enforcement. Yet in the course of the investigation, he was taken off the Terrorist Watch List. If he had been on that list at the time he purchased a weapon, law enforcement would have been alerted.

It is important to understand that 98% of watch-listed persons are already prohibited from acquiring firearms in the U.S. because they are not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Congress is considering further actions to address those who pose a risk. At the same time, innocent Americans with no ties to terrorism have been wrongfully included on one of our national security watch lists.

### The Protect America Act

We all agree that terrorists should not have access to weapons of any kind, and I am committed to working with my colleagues to find bipartisan ways to ensure they do not. I support H.R. 4237, the *Protect America Act*, which would establish a process for the U.S. Attorney General to deny

firearms and explosives to individuals engaged in terrorist activities, or where there is probable cause that an individual is furthering a plan to commit an act of terrorism.

The bill also takes necessary steps to strengthen and improve due process requirements to protect law-abiding Americans, requiring that the Department of Justice review and verify the Terrorist Watch List and No-Fly List to remove erroneous entries from those lists. Finally, the bill gives the Justice Department 90 days to review and verify these lists to ensure the removal of individuals who should have never been added in the first place. If this bill had been law, I believe law enforcement would have been in a position to disrupt the Orlando attack.

### Providing Anti-Terrorism Tools

As a former Justice Department official in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, I know our military and intelligence personnel must have the tools to keep the American public safe and be capable of acting so they can detect, track, stop, remove, detain, and/or incarcerate terrorists. Simultaneously, as the Orlando perpetrator proved, we must be cognizant of homegrown extremism and radicalization. Terrorists are aggressively using technology and exploiting social media to spread their message beyond traditional borders and corrupt more individuals better positioned to launch attacks. We must monitor these interactions accordingly.

On the anti-terrorism front, Congress has already passed several

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Barbara Comstock  
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PRSRT STD CR—RTSORT

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
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Official Business

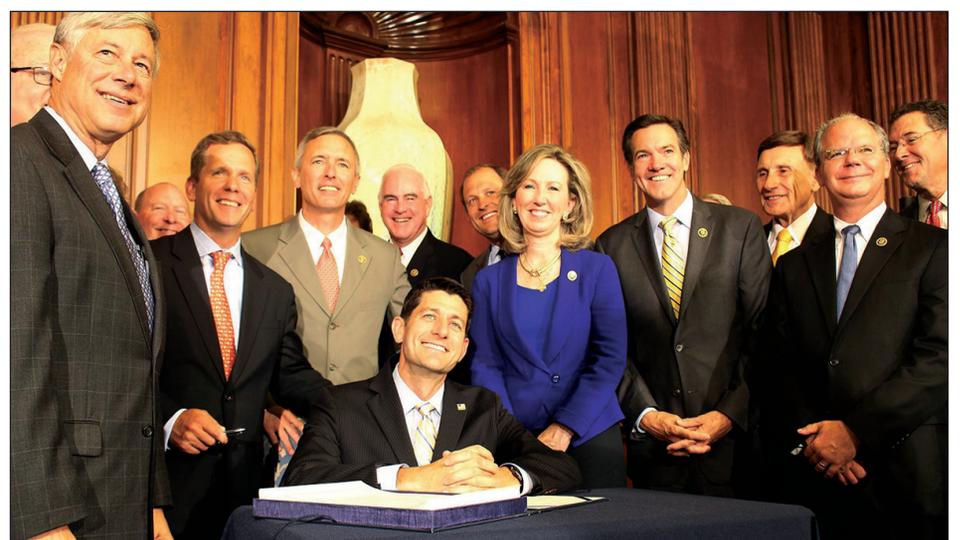
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## Landmark Opioid and Heroin Legislation Signed Into Law

The House and Senate came together in a bipartisan, bicameral fashion to pass the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act* (CARA), which takes head-on the growing opioid and heroin epidemic facing our communities. This public health crisis spans all socioeconomic backgrounds and age groups, both nationwide and right here in the Commonwealth.

I hear from constituents, doctors, law enforcement, and healthcare providers across the 10th District about individuals suffering from drug addiction, which often begins with recreational use of prescribed painkillers and then progresses. Here are some startling statistics about this crisis:

- From 2013 to 2014, Virginia has seen an almost 15 percent increase in the number of drug overdoses, according to the CDC.
- In 2014, the 728 deaths from opi-



Rep. Comstock with Speaker Paul Ryan and House and Senate colleagues at the signing of the *Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act*.

- oid and heroin use in the state were larger than the deaths from car crashes.
- In Loudoun County, there were no heroin-related deaths in 2011, but since 2012 there have been 41 investigated by the Loudoun County Sheriff's office as sus-

- pected heroin fatalities.
- According to the Northern Shenandoah Valley Substance Abuse Coalition, there were 21 drug overdose deaths in the Valley in 2013; 33 overdose deaths in 2014; 30 deaths in 2015; and, at

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## 10th Congressional District Transportation Update

### FAA Reauthorization Protects Dulles Airport

As part of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA), Dulles International Airport and Reagan National Airport have a unique relationship that is based on balance. Both airports serve an important purpose for our region, bringing strong economic activity to both areas. Reagan National Airport focuses on short haul flights and Dulles predominantly has domestic and international long haul flights. Unfortunately, some in Congress want to upset this important balance and put in exceptions to what is known as the Perimeter Rule that governs the short haul flights at Reagan National by giving the airport more long haul options to cities out west.

If more of these long haul flight options are available at Reagan National Airport, Dulles would be negatively affected and our local economy would suffer. That is why, being the only Member of Congress in the Virginia Delegation to sit on the House Transportation Committee, I was glad that we were able to beat back attempts from other Members of Congress to tamper with the Perimeter Rule. We will continue to fight for Dulles when the current authorization ends in September 2017. We must have a thriving Dulles Airport so our region's economy continues to grow. I have been working with MWAA President and CEO Jack Potter on solutions to make Dulles more vibrant so it becomes an even greater economic engine for our area.

In Congress, I am the only Virginia representative to serve on the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee, including its Subcommittees on Highways and Transit; Aviation; and Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management.

Late last year, Congress passed a bipartisan five-year transportation bill, H.R. 22, the *Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act*, or the FAST Act. One of my top priorities is getting our vast transportation network working for you and the FAST Act is now paying dividends for the Commonwealth.

The bipartisan FAST Act we passed provides state and local governments much-needed stability in funding that allows for savings in transportation budgeting and long term planning, all without raising taxes. The Speaker of the House appointed me to serve on the House-Senate Conference Committee for the FAST Act where the final bill was negotiated and approved. Some of the key initiatives I spearheaded in the final bill included:

**Traffic Congestion:** A number of the provisions authorize the Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Research and Technology to develop strategies to employ cutting-edge tools and

high technology to reduce traffic congestion.

**Metro Improvements:** Provisions focus on the Washington Metro Area Transit Agency (WMATA), or Metro, and its lack of efficiency, safety, and accountability.

**State Control of Interstate Access:** Under current law, Virginia and other states have authority to administer their own rules for managing certain aspects of traffic congestion on major thoroughfares. This authority was set to expire on September 30, 2017. I was able to get that authority maintained for an additional two years. States are best equipped to manage their own traffic congestion, not Washington.

I also advocated for reforms in the competitive grant programs, resulting in the consolidation and simplification of a number of grant programs into two new major grant programs, making them easily accessible by state and local governments. One of these new programs is known as the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program, also known as the FASTLANE Program, and was authorized to dispense over \$800 million in grant money.

This year, I have been steadfast in my efforts to save Arlington Memorial Bridge. Working with the T&I Committee, the Appropriations Committee, the National Park

Service, and my colleagues in the National Capital Region Delegation has paid off. In July, I joined the regional delegation to announce the Memorial Bridge received a \$90 million grant award through the aforementioned FASTLANE program, which I championed. The Memorial Bridge is a vital component of our transportation network in northern Virginia and carries 68,000 vehicles daily. Without these funds, the National Park Service projected it would need to close the bridge to vehicular traffic by 2021, causing a significant traffic congestion challenge for the entire region.

Additionally, another major transportation project that will have a direct impact on northern Virginia and is funded through the FAST Act is the Atlantic Gateway Project. The project was awarded \$165 million, which will improve I-395 and I-95 by expanding express lanes and will improve rail service by adding a third line from Franconia-Springfield to Occoquan, among other components.

Our region's transportation network is always changing. We must adapt and have a more efficient system while being mindful of taxpayer money. As your voice on the House Transportation Committee, I will continue to advocate for solutions to our region's transportation priorities.

### Comstock Launches 2016 10th Congressional District Young Women Leadership Program with 400 Participants



Rep. Comstock speaking at the kick-off for this year's 10th Congressional District Young Women Leadership Program at the U.S. Capitol.

# Metro: Safety, Transparency, And Accountability Essential

**O**ur Metrorail system used to rank among the best in the world and was affectionately referred to as “America’s Subway”. Now we have seen a sharp decline in Metro’s record of safety, security, reliability, and accountability. At the same time, Metro has more staff per track mile than the industry standard and far higher wages, including bus drivers with over \$100k in salaries and Controllers making over \$200k with expensive benefits and pensions. These runaway costs for an underperforming system are unsustainable.

As part of the FAST Act, I worked on a bipartisan basis to pass a number of provisions to improve Metro. One authorized and clarified the abilities of the Department of Transportation to assume oversight and responsibility of safety management of Metro in the event that the organization fails to keep its customers safe. Another provision transferred authority to appoint the Federal Director of Metro from the General Services Administration (GSA) to the Secretary of Transportation, who is much more likely to appoint a qualified representative to serve on a multi-state transit agency. These provisions are just a start in our efforts to provide much-needed, comprehensive reforms at Metro.

On March 16, following a series of safety incidents, the General Manager (GM) of Metro took the unprecedented step to shut down the entire Metrorail system for 29 hours for emergency safety inspections and repairs. For the safety of my constituents, I supported the GM’s actions. The following day, I sent 37 questions to Metro covering safety, security, process, accountability, and cost. Although it took Metro over three months to get me answers, what we found was shock-



**Rep. Comstock visiting with local emergency service personnel during WMATA's quarterly training exercise to better evaluate the response to possible emergencies.**

ing.

As of February of this year, Metro had almost 80,000 work orders still open on the system, with some of them dating back to 2002. The overwhelming majority of these work orders were related to track and infrastructure repairs. This massive backlog of repairs and work orders is clearly unacceptable—it is a symptom of years of mismanagement combined with a lack of a safety culture at Metro.

Metro’s General Manager is now taking more aggressive measures to improve agency operations. The SafeTrack Plan, which began on June 4, 2016, is designed to fit 3 years’ worth of deferred maintenance orders into a single year. The GM explained to our regional delegation that the system was failing with increasing rapidity, hence the bold nature of the plan. If Metro does not fold all this work into one year, it might never dig its way out of its maintenance backlog.

Metro’s woes do not stop with safety and track issues. The cost structure and financial solvency of Metro are in dire straits.

According to the most recently

available numbers, Metro is facing, at minimum, a \$150 million operational shortfall for their FY18 budget. This operational shortfall is driven almost exclusively by personnel and labor costs, which constitute over 75% of their budget for FY17.

High personnel and labor costs have made Metro one of the most expensive heavy rail systems in the nation. Compared to the average of the four most comparable transit systems, Metro’s operating expense per passenger mile—the cost to move a passenger one mile on the system—is 151% higher than the average.

Overtime costs can run into the tens and thousands in some cases, with one train controller making \$96,000 in overtime in one year. Since overtime is also used to calculate pensions, the system has perverse incentives to pump up lifetime pension costs which are also underfunded. A bus driver is paid an average of \$63,000 annually, not including the extensive benefits and potential for overtime pay. This base salary is 57% higher than the national average. Despite this plush

salary, Metro has claimed in recent years that it has been “unable” to fill many of their open positions, leaving some employees the ability to log extensive overtime hours and pay. With overtime pay, a Metro bus driver can easily earn over \$100,000 a year.

The labor agreement in place between Metro and its union, ATU Local 689, has made it nearly impossible to restructure the agency, better focus the workforce, and carry out Metro’s basic mission. By the GM’s own admission, Metro is experiencing severe issues with a growing workforce that is neither mission-focused nor properly assigned throughout the agency. “A growth in headcount, combined with fewer hours worked per employee, Metro is doing less with more. In nearly 10 years there have been no significant reductions in force, resulting in redundant positions among back-office staff,” he said.

Right now the labor agreement between Metro and ATU Local 689 is being renegotiated and the union is asking for an additional 11% raise over three years. We know that many of our small businesses are not seeing these kinds of increases and struggle every day to meet their challenges. It is not right to ask the taxpayers within the Washington Metropolitan Area to pick up the tab for Metro’s labor cost overruns, especially given the terrible performance.

The evidence speaks for itself. Metro needs fundamental, top-to-bottom change. A serious and effective safety culture must be installed so that Metro’s riders have a reliable, customer-focused mode of public transit. We must not tolerate this abuse of public trust and taxpayer money. We must instead hold the organization accountable so that it may again become worthy of its old moniker—“America’s Subway.”

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the time this is written, 13 drug overdose deaths in the Valley so far this year.

These statistics show the breadth of the crisis facing our community. CARA is the start of a broad, coordinated, and comprehensive antidote to the opioid and heroin crisis. This legislation is a multi-faceted response that focuses on prevention through community-based education, treatment options for those who suffer from addiction, and the development of law enforcement strategies that will stop traffickers and dealers before they are able to peddle these dangerous drugs. As a member of the Bipartisan Task Force to Combat the Heroin Epidemic, I was pleased that numerous bills I supported were incorporated into this final legislative package that was signed into law.

This past April, I invited Great Falls native Nick Yacoub to meet with Speaker of the House Paul Ryan to tell his story of his ongoing battle against addiction. Nick has

been drug-free for over eight years and his story is truly inspiring. As a leader within the recovery community, Nick helps those who are trying to find their way out of the darkness of addiction. With passage of this comprehensive bill, Nick and others within the recovery community will have more tools to battle addiction. Speaker Ryan invited Nick to be a part of the signing ceremony before the CARA Act went to the president's desk.

We have participated in forums in our District with local law enforcement—including Loudoun County Sheriff Mike Chapman as part of the Heroin Operations Team—and with local leaders including Fairfax Supervisor Pat Herrity. In Winchester, we have worked with Northern Shenandoah Valley Substance Abuse Coalition Executive Director Laura Cummings, Winchester Police Chief Kevin Sanzenbacher, and Commonwealth's Attorney Marc Abrams to get a better understanding of how to fight addiction within our community.

## House Passes Comstock's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Amendment

As part of the *FY17 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act*, I was able to get \$7 million transferred to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program. Created by Congress in 1988 with the passage of the *Anti-Drug Abuse Act*, HIDTA brings federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies together to better coordinate the fight against drug traffickers.

A vital component in our fight against addiction is stopping the flow of drugs. Heroin and pre-

scription opioids have taken a toll on our community and many others around the nation. Prince William, Fairfax, and Loudoun counties are covered under the Washington-Baltimore HIDTA Region drug fighting partnership. However, Clarke and Frederick counties and the City of Winchester are still in need of this critical designation. I will continue to fight for their designation so the Shenandoah Valley can have more resources in the fight against opioid and heroin addiction.

The community's engagement on opioid and heroin issues has been inspiring. Every forum in which we have participated has fostered important dialogue and has facilitated the sharing of ideas. However, hearing from families who have lost loved ones to this epidemic has been heartbreaking. There is one clear message I heard from these community leaders and fam-

ilies: "We cannot arrest our way out of this public health crisis." Conquering this challenge will require a cooperative effort from the ground-up. With enactment of CARA, our community will have the necessary tools to undertake this effort and we will be moving in the right direction.

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bills to address the multitude of security threats we face, including, but not limited to:

**H.R. 158, the Visa Waiver Program Improvement Act**, which we passed last year. The bill denies visa waiver status to citizens in any of our 38 partner countries who have traveled to terrorist-associated countries. It is estimated that 5,000 Europeans have traveled to fight with terrorist groups like ISIS and then traveled back to their home countries. This legislation enables the Secretary of Homeland Security to halt visa waiver status of a partner country that fails to share counterterrorism information.

**S. 1376, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016**, or NDAA, which passed through Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support. The NDAA is the annual defense bill which sets our national security policy objectives and authorizes spending on defense systems, troop pay, and benefits. This year's NDAA requires the president to develop a clear strategy to confront growing terrorist threats, including ISIS.

### Other Tools To Stop Violent Criminals

As a former delegate in the Virginia General Assembly, I also have a

record of working on a bipartisan basis to stop violent crime, including support for:

- Stricter penalties for "straw purchasers", who are individuals knowingly aiding dangerous criminals attempting to circumvent the law and acquire firearms;
- Making the prohibition on purchasing and transporting a firearm applicable to persons subject to preliminary protective orders where a petition alleging abuse or neglect has been filed; and
- Requiring the development of a model critical incident response training program for public school personnel and those providing services to schools and requiring the Virginia Center for School Safety to provide schools with a model policy for the establishment of threat assessment teams for each school, including procedures for the assessment of and intervention with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students.

### Better Enforcement

The Commonwealth is one of the top states in reporting thanks to reforms including those mentioned above which were implemented following the Virginia Tech tragedy,

but we must have better enforcement of our firearm laws nationwide. We need to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)—the system used to vet individuals interested in purchasing firearms—38 states submit less than 80% of their felony convictions into NICS, which has left more than 7 million convictions in the dark and undetectable through this system. Further, in 2010, roughly 80,000 people, who were already prohibited by law from purchasing a firearm, committed a felony offense by disregarding their prohibited status and attempting to purchase a firearm. Of those 80,000 or so individuals, only 44 were prosecuted. This is unacceptable—these are criminals who should be prosecuted.

### Addressing Mental Health

I also support legislation that addresses and clarifies the existing patchwork approaches of state laws governing mental health records and confronts the source of the violence, including:

**H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act**, of which I am a cosponsor. This bill takes a much-needed, comprehensive approach to mental health issues and, if enacted, will allow for more effi-

cient resource allocation, improved responsiveness, and reduced time loss for those navigating the current poorly connected systems. We passed this landmark bill in the House by an overwhelming vote of 422-2.

**H.R. 3722, the Mental Health and Safe Communities Act**, of which I am also a cosponsor, would improve responses to mental health crises by providing grants and training to local law enforcement and health professionals to better identify and treat the dangerously mentally ill and to improve responses to active shooter incidents. This bill would also improve the NICS system by incentivizing states to improve reporting of records that establish someone is prohibited from owning a firearm under our current legal framework.

Of course, those who perpetrated the attacks in Paris, Brussels, Turkey, San Bernardino, Orlando, and elsewhere were terrorists, not individuals simply in need of mental health treatment. But the tragedies in these cities and countries should serve as a call to action which brings the legislative and executive branches together to find bipartisan, commonsense, responsible, and constitutional measures to keep our citizens safe.