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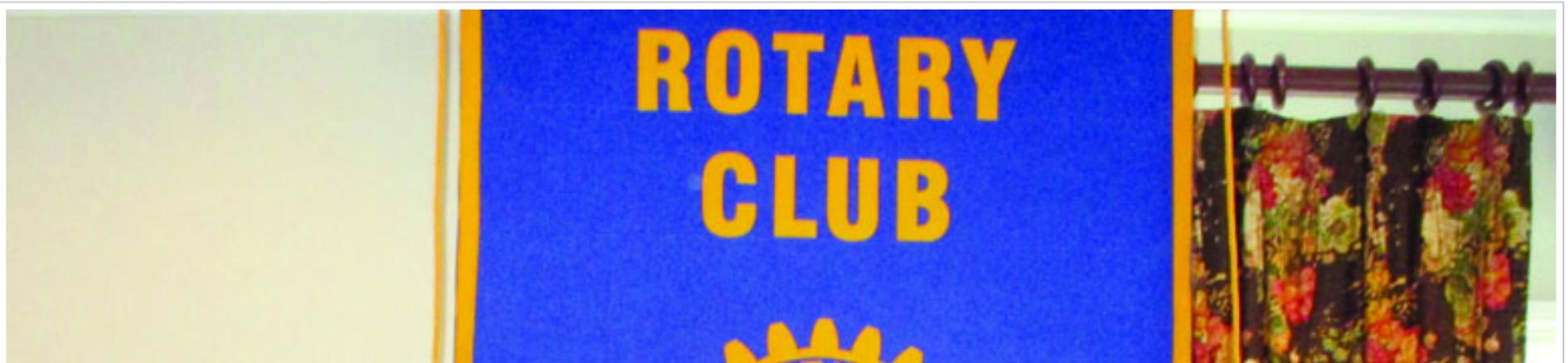
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Westmoreland Says U.S. Has Lost Stature On World Stage

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U.S. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, center, chats with Walt Thompson, president of Newnan Rotary Club after Friday's meeting. Matt Brass, right, introduced Westmoreland.

U.S. Rep. Lynn Westmoreland says the United States has lost stature overseas that will take years to rebuild.

The congressman spoke to the Newnan Rotary Club on Friday at Newnan Country Club. He touched on both domestic and foreign concerns, but said he is less concerned about domestic issues.

“I don’t worry about our domestic problems. We’re Americans, and we’re going to solve our domestic problems,” he said. “Always have, always will.”

America’s role internationally is more vexing. “It will take us decades to gain back the status we had in the world,” Westmoreland predicted.

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He said America’s targeting of Muammar Gaddafi, the dictator of Libya, was the beginning of a series of actions that have caused problems for the United States. Gaddafi, Westmoreland, said was a tyrant – “someone who put his people under a burden” – but also someone who had a mutual enemy of the United States in Al Qaeda.

“We went in and got involved in their civil war,” Westmoreland noted – giving night vision glasses, mortars, guns and other supplies to the rebels opposing Gaddafi.

“Now what do you have? You have a breeding ground for terrorists,” he said. He said terrorists trained in Libya are going to Syria.

He said U.S. effort toward normalizing relations with the new government in Libya led to “four Americans murdered at Benghazi.”

When the U.S. diplomatic mission there was attacked, the only flags flying in the city were the American flag and the Al Qaeda flag.

“All the international people had pulled out but us,” he said. “We wanted to make it look like we could maintain a normal relationship with that country,” Westmoreland added. “We knew from all the intelligence that it wouldn’t work.”

The congressman then turned his attention to Syria. When citizens there decided they had had enough of Bashar al-Assad, the country’s president, “we didn’t send them any arms.” The U.S. recognized no rebel group.

Now, Westmoreland said there are 126 different rebel groups fighting Assad in Syria. “They’re fighting each other,” he added.

The United States is providing supplies and equipment – as well as two weeks of training. “There is no accountability for the weapons. Now the CIA and others are thinking about adding some more weaponry to that. I don’t know what kind of vetting system goes on,” Westmoreland said.

“I don’t completely understand how that is helping the situation for us,” he said.

He said when Pres. Barack Obama drew a red line and then took no action when Assad stepped over that boundary, America lost credibility with other powers in the region. “We’re supposed to be the leader over there,” Westmoreland said.

That situation has empowered Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who soon was doing business with the Jordanians and the Saudis – and who has since taken over the Ukraine and Crimea.

“We have allowed him to get up off the mat and become another leader in the world,” he said. Westmoreland said he knows the United States must work in collaboration with other nations to deal with international issues. He said he would prefer, however, to see America in a coalition “that we’re leading, not one that we’re joining.”

He said a larger military force is needed to give American heft in its international dealings. “You cannot continue to cut the military as we have,” he said.

Under the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, the number of brigades has shrunk from 45 to 32 – with the possibility of further reductions to 22.

There are now less U.S. ships than there were during World War II. “The same thing with the wings of the Air Force,” he said. “What we’ve got is an administration that want to be a friend to everyone but not to be the leader. The world is always looking for someone to be the leader,” he stated.

With regard to domestic issues, Westmoreland expressed frustration that “we have not been able to serve our veterans any better than we have done.” He said there have been “two waiting lists” in the veteran health system.

Veterans were on the first list “until you could get on the waiting list where you could have your appointment in the right amount of time.”

Veterans “were on a waiting list to get on the waiting list,” Westmoreland emphasized. “This is something that’s just not right.”

Westmoreland said he hopes “somebody will get fired over this.” He explained, “We’ve got a habit in government today. If somebody does something wrong, we don’t fire you. We promote you or let your retire.”

He expressed concerns about the budget process. Although appropriations procedures have been streamlined, there still is potential for the House and Senate to take different routes that could lead to stalemates and the danger of government shutdowns.

“We could be right back in the same spot that we’ve been in before,” he said.

The Affordable Care Act has already had a major impact on health care in America. “We’re never going to know health care as we have known it,” he said. “It’s going to be different.”

Coalitions of different groups involved in health care are coming together and looking at options for the future. “This law doesn’t necessarily help them do that, but they know what American people want from health care, because we’ve got the best health care in the world,” he said.

He also talked about the decision to end extended unemployment payments. “The unemployment rate went down after we didn’t extend the unemployment benefits. Unemployment went down. The jobs went up. It’s kind of amazing how that works,” Westmoreland said.

He expressed both optimism and concern about the country’s financial standing. “The number of federal employees is coming down. We still have a lot more than we need,” he said. Attrition is helping to deal with that problem.

“We didn’t get where we are overnight. We’ve been going in debt for a long time,” Westmoreland said.

He also acknowledged the problem has grown under both Democratic and Republican administrations. He said the federal government deficit now stands at \$600 billion – down from \$1.3 trillion a few years ago.

“Our debt,” he added, “continues to grow.”
