

Today I had the honor to be with my good friend, PETER WELCH of Vermont, and actor Robert Duvall, on this sacred hallowed ground. We were there for several reasons, but the primary reason was to preserve this battlefield.

During the Battle of the Wilderness, Vermonters had especially high casualties. Of the 3,500 that went into battle, 1,234 were killed.

PETER WELCH of Vermont and myself had the privilege to go and see that location, that small area where they were protecting the crossroads. This was the highest percentage of casualties in Vermont history. Most of those that were killed were from the small community of Woodstock.

On the first day of battle, the Union troops were able to push the Southern troops away. On the second day of battle, a Texas brigade, led by General Longstreet, had arrived at the battle after marching all night, 26 miles, at about 6:30 in the morning.

General Robert E. Lee was excited to see the Texas brigade, and he said the Texans always moved them and, yes, they did, they moved the Union forces back a great distance. The general for the Texas Army said that "the eyes of General Lee are upon you," and Lee rode with Texas. About 60 percent of those Texans who went into battle that day were killed.

Madam Speaker, all of the southern States participated in this battle. Eighteen of the northern States participated in this battle, and there are stories like that from all States, this sacred ground, where the Battlefield of the Wilderness, took place.

But today we are faced with another battle, Madam Speaker, because the giant corporation Wal-Mart wants to build a Wal-Mart on that sacred ground. You see, during the battle, blood was spilled so much that one soldier said you can't tell whose blood it was, and that's exactly right, Madam Speaker. Every one of those troops that were killed that day, that fought that day and bled that day, whether North or South, were all Americans.

And that's why PETER WELCH and myself and Robert Duvall were there today to get the attention of Wal-Mart to not build on this sacred ground. Yes, they have the legal right to do so, but they should move down the street, down the road a bit and build the Wal-Mart that they want to build.

Because, you see, this ground is consecrated by the blood of Americans, and we don't want Wal-Mart to pour asphalt over the graves that are known only to God himself. So they should be a good corporate neighbor and build down the street.

You know, they need to put respect for history over love for money. They need to put dignity for the dead over lust for profit, because those that try to destroy history will be tried and convicted by history.

Wal-Mart has got more money than anybody. They can put their store anywhere they wish. So we are asking them

to be good patriots rather than those who seek the profit motive and go somewhere else.

PETER WELCH and I are good friends. We probably disagree on everything except this one thing, that this land is consecrated by the lives of Americans who stood for some principle and died for that principle.

He said it best today when numerous people were there. He said the land, the Battlefield of the Wilderness, is the cathedral of sacrifice.

I agree with my good friend from Vermont. It is the cathedral of sacrifice, and we want to remember and preserve our history. We owe the dead that right, and Wal-Mart needs to move away.

And that's just the way it is.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

RISING FORECLOSURES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, as unemployment in community after community rises to double digits, and foreclosures similarly rise, Wall Street is at it again, milking both ends of the foreclosure debacle.

As many of the banks who volunteered to do foreclosure moratoriums, along with Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, have ended those moratoriums, foreclosures are rising again and expected to continue to rise even with administration programs up and running. Between the first of this year and April 22, in my home county of Lucas, the major county I represent, 442 foreclosed properties have been sold.

Now, would you think that's good? Who do you think is buying those homes? The very same institutions that made the liars' loans and subprime loans in the first place, Deutsche Bank, followed by Citigroup, by Wells Fargo, by U.S. Bank, Fifth Third and JPMorgan Chase, HSBC, you know the names, or their subsidiaries.

So, they foreclose, they buy, then they sell, pulling profit each step of the way, while destroying neighborhood after neighborhood, community after community in their wake.

When are we going to stop letting Wall Street make money coming and going while people lose their homes and our communities are destroyed?

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Now, who do they sell to? That's interesting. All to absentee investors who don't care or don't even know where we reside. Absentee investors across our country and, in many cases, across the world.

Of the 442 properties sold—get ready for this—93 percent—93 percent—were sold to banks or to absentee investors. I don't call that community reinvestment. I call that community disemboweling, community disinvestment.

These buyers have no connection to Ohio or our community. They have no tie to our people. They merely seek to make more profit off the anguish of places such as where we reside, through the foreclosure process, as unemployment skyrockets. Communities do not have the tools to defend themselves from this predatory pillage.

Realtors from our district are telling us that the same banks purposely are slowing down short sales of properties, pushing off sellers, and leaving properties vacant. Why? To make more money again.

Federal policy should support Main Street families regaining equity and hope. Wall Street is rigging every transaction to laden their pockets—at the expense of the very taxpayers that supported them when they were crashing, and continue to support them as they stabilize. Business as usual for Wall Street—never doing for others, but profiting at everyone else's expense.

Foreclosures weaken communities. Absentee investors do the same. We see home prices fall, which leads to more foreclosures as communities weaken and mortgages go underwater. People in communities are drowning across this country. To jump in and save them will require creative, big picture-thinking that goes beyond the gains of these big banks or the silos of governmental programs and goes beyond the benefit of one institution over another.

We must let the FDIC and SEC deal with troubled banks and their ledgers and our financial system as they are designed to operate. Any Federal agency that deals with housing and foreclosures and jobs must join forces in designing funding mechanisms to radically transform the most hard-hit communities across our country. I would start with those that are now at double-digit in unemployment and foreclosures. Saving them will save more than just those communities. It will begin to breathe life back into our Nation's economy.

It's time Main Street was put ahead of Wall Street. And it's time that this Congress paid attention to what is happening coast-to-coast.

I will place in the RECORD material from the New York Times of this week.

[From the New York Times, May 4, 2009]

AS FORECLOSURES SURGE . . .

The Obama administration sat by last week as 12 Senate Democrats joined 39 Senate Republicans to block a vote on an amendment that would have allowed bankruptcy judges to modify troubled mortgages.

Senator Obama campaigned on the provision. And President Obama made its passage part of his anteforeclosure plan. It would have been a very useful prod to get lenders to rework bad loans rather than leaving the modification to a judge.

But when the time came to stand up to the banking lobbies and cajole yes votes from reluctant senators—the White House didn't. When the measure failed, there wasn't even a statement of regret.

Mr. Obama's plan to keep struggling Americans in their homes now relies on lenders to voluntarily rework bad loans. The plan provides ample incentives, including payments to servicers who successfully modify loans and, in some cases, payments to mortgage investors who agree to modifications. Whether that will be enough remains to be seen.

The administration estimates that its plan will prevent three million to four million foreclosures, but it will take several months before there is enough data to evaluate. In the past, however, voluntary modifications have failed to curb the rise in foreclosures. The number of foreclosure filings in March was very high, with estimates between 290,000 and 341,000.

Even if lenders do agree to modify loans, many Americans will still be in trouble. That's because nearly 14 million homeowners are "under water"—they owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth.

In a bankruptcy, such homeowners would likely have their loan principal reduced, lowering their payments and helping them to rebuild equity. In a typical voluntary loan modification, however, the monthly payment is reduced, but not the principal. That puts under-water borrowers at high risk of re-default, because there is no equity to fall back on if a financial setback leaves them unable to make mortgage payments.

The negative feedback loop—foreclosures beget falling home prices, which beget foreclosures, further weakening the banks—is well under way. We hope the president's plan can break the loop, but without bankruptcy reform it is going to be a lot harder.

In fact, last week we lost what one can say was a final hope for some Americans. With their mortgage completely underwater, credit card bills unpaid, home heating or cooling bills unpaid, healthcare bills unpaid and less food on the table . . . they turn to bankruptcy. This is the last chance and last hope for people who have tried everything else humanly possible to crawl out from under their debt. The decision is hard. Their hearts and souls demoralized, they turn to bankruptcy.

Currently, bankruptcy does not include dealing with one's primary residence. The House passed bill H.R. 1106 included "cramdown" provisions. Not ideal. Not what anyone wants to do, but a tool to help some of the most desperate Americans settle debts and begin again.

No such luck . . . the amendment in the Senate to achieve such a path was defeated. The New York Times editorial harkens this to a negative feedback loop. . . .

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, Sunday, May 3, was World Press Freedom Day. Three years ago, in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day, Congressman MIKE PENCE, Senator CHRIS DODD, Senator DICK LUGAR, and I established the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press.

Since then, this bipartisan, bicameral caucus has sought to highlight the importance of free expression around the world. The caucus is a forum where Members of Congress can come together to combat and condemn media censorship and the persecution of journalists worldwide. Our caucus works to send a strong message that Congress will defend democratic values and human rights wherever they are threatened.

We have hosted panel discussions with press freedom experts, journalists, and victims of press freedom crimes; written to leaders of countries which jail journalists, impose censorship, and allow harassment, attacks, and threats to occur with impunity. We have spoken out here on the House floor and in the media to call for reforms in countries that seek to censor freedom of speech and expression.

Just recently, Representative PENCE and I introduced the Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act, H.R. 1861. This bill is named in honor of former Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and murdered by terrorists in Pakistan just 4 months after the September 11 attacks.

This legislation will establish annual State Department reports on the status of press freedom in every country in the world and create a grant program aimed at broadening and strengthening the independence of journalists and media organizations.

Our government must promote freedom of the press by putting on center stage those countries in which journalists are killed, imprisoned, kidnapped, threatened, censored—and this will do just that.

A free and independent media provides the nourishment for democracies to thrive and grow. Citizens rely upon credible, accurate information from the media to make informed decisions and hold their leaders accountable. Information is power, which is precisely why many governments attempt to control the press to suppress opposition and preempt dissent.

Far too often, the reporters and editors who demand reform, accountability, and transparency find themselves at risk. The censorship, intimidation, imprisonment, and murder of these journalists are not only crimes against these individuals, but they also impact those who are denied access to their ideas and information.

In 2008, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that 41 journalists

were killed in connection with their work. Another 125 were falsely imprisoned for their reporting. Unfortunately, 2009 is shaping up to be a similarly dangerous year, having already seen 11 journalists murdered.

For Americans, this should spur us to consider the role that journalists play in our society and to ponder what our Nation would be like if this cornerstone of our liberty were to be curtailed. Many Americans take the concept of a free press for granted and don't realize that an unfettered press is vital to America's national security and to our democracy here at home.

But much of the world's population is not as fortunate as we are when it comes to access to independent news. Recent national news accounts have highlighted American journalists being detained on trumped-up charges in Iran and North Korea.

However, there are dozens of cases like these across the globe that don't get attention. That is why each year, as co-Chairs of the caucus, we host a Special Order hour to highlight countries whose abuses of press freedom are particularly egregious.

In 2007, we focused on Russia, profiling the 18 journalists murdered in Russia during the administration of Vladimir Putin. Last year, we focused on China and its incarceration of more journalists than any other country.

Later this month, we will host another Special Order hour where we will focus on growing press freedom abuses in Sri Lanka. Threats, attacks, imprisonment, and murders of journalists are becoming all too common in Sri Lanka.

This week is a particularly noteworthy week for press freedom in Sri Lanka. J.S. Tissainayagam, a contributor and editor for a number of print and online publications, will stand trial on Wednesday, and he faces a possible 20-year sentence if he is convicted. He is being prosecuted for allegedly inciting communal disharmony related to articles that he wrote as early as in 2006.

In March of 2008, J.S. was arrested under emergency regulations and held without habeas corpus for more than 5 months before being charged. His trial is set to resume on May 6, but it is our hope the Sri Lankan government will drop these baseless charges and release J.S. before the trial resumes.

So today, Madam Speaker, we recognize World Press Freedom Day and call on nations like Sri Lanka to stop the persecution of innocent journalists. We use this day as an occasion to pay tribute to journalists and to reflect upon their role in advancing fundamental human rights.

I want to thank all journalists around the world, especially those who work in harm's way, for doing all they do to foster democracy and promote freedom. Your work does not go unrecognized, and we appreciate your dedication to this noble profession.