

who bailed them out: Thank you very much; now we are going to raise your interest rates substantially.

So what I will be doing in the coming weeks is coming here to the floor and reading stories from Vermont and from all over this country. Let me start off with one that comes from Poultney, VT. This is what the gentleman says:

I owned and operated a summer business in excess of 43 years. My business credit card was with Avanta at 7.9 percent for years. Last year, my payment jumped about \$400 per month. I thought there was fraud involved. Upon checking, I found my interest had been raised from 7.9 to 28.8 percent. I always paid more than the minimum and always on time. When Avanta was contacted and asked why, I was told it's a floating interest. I asked to speak to a manager and was advised that's the way it was and they could do nothing to lower it. I got a line of credit loan from Heritage credit union at 1 percent over prime, paid them off, and shut down my business. After 43 years of business, it took usury to shut me down.

That is just one story.

Somebody writes from Virginia—the State of our Presiding Officer—and says:

Explain to me, do the banks/credit card companies feel that the only way to make money is to cheat us or manipulate us into taking part in an endless Ponzi scheme? How much profit is to be expected in an honest deal? Even 15 percent seems high to me.

This goes on, Mr. President. We have one from Barre, VT:

I only have one thing on my credit card every month. It is the Internet access charge of \$10.95. My credit card is a Visa from Capital One. I received a letter stating that the rates were almost double what I agreed to pay if a payment was late, but it also stated if I did not agree to their term, they would cancel my credit card. Let's not only do something about credit card fees, let's stop banks in their tracks with all fees they access on customer accounts they have.

From Castle Rock, CO, another individual writes:

I have excellent credit. Nearly 780 last time I checked. I had a "fixed" interest rate with Capital One at 4.9 percent since 2002. In 2007 the rate was raised to 7.9 percent. I received a letter in early April of this year that it will rise to 17.5 percent for no particular reason, except that it was a company decision. I am outraged! This is really unfair for everyone but I think especially unfair for those who really pay attention to maintaining good credit.

That person had a 780 credit number, which is very good.

Here is one from Bennington, VT:

I'd been on time every month and one day I got my statement and wow my interest rate had more than doubled. I called and they did put it back to the rate I had and said it would be good for only 9 months and then they would up it again and I would have to call again. This is hard for the families who aren't using their credit cards anymore and they are on a budget and factor in the credit card payment, and then all of a sudden one month it's gone up a lot and you didn't factor that in.

Wilder, VT:

I am tired of being the one who has to pay! The executives of these credit card companies mess up and the little people pay. The government messes up and the little people

pay. Now my oldest child is going off to college and I can't even get financial help except for loans. Yes, more interest. So now I have to pay more interest on my credit cards. When will I get help? I pay my bills, I pay my taxes. If I pay late I get a finance charge and it hurts my credit rating. When these big companies fall behind, they get my tax money, and I get to pay it back for them.

This is from Bridport, VT:

On my Bank of America cards I made purchases at 9.9 percent which was not a variable rate. I assumed I had that interest rate because I have never had a late payment and have never made just the minimum payment. This month I received notice that my interest rate is going to jump to 15.65 percent and be a variable rate. I do have steady income and I don't want to damage my credit rating by paying the balance off in a few months then cancel the card.

Here is another, from West Burke, VT:

My husband sustained severe brain trauma in 2000. We managed to not file bankruptcy and to pay off all credit cards. I now find that we were idiots to do this. Our credit is ruined, because we paid any credit card debt we owed.

Here is one from Little Rock, AR:

I am 67 years old and had the card since the year of the flood. I was on vacation and out of the country and did not make my card payment on time. I had always kept my account up. When I went to charge a flight on line it was denied. I called them and they replied that since I was a "late payer" I had to pay off my account every 30 days as it used to before they allowed extended payments for large purchases. I paid off the card that day and cut up the card.

From West Newberry, VT:

I send my payment by mail and sometimes the postal service is slow and the card company got payment one day late and has changed my interest rates from 16 percent to 29.9 percent, and now if I pay the minimal payment the charges are more than what I paid on the bill.

One day late, and their rate went from 16 percent to 29 percent.

As I mentioned, in 2 days we have gotten about 900 e-mails, significantly from Vermont but from all over the country. So I have introduced legislation which would cap interest rates on credit cards at 15 percent, with some exceptions going up to 18 percent. That legislation is cosponsored by Senators DURBIN, LEAHY, WHITEHOUSE, HARKIN, and LEVIN. The legislation is based on longstanding law which regulates credit unions, which under normal circumstances cannot charge more than 15 percent.

The American people are hurting. We are in a recession because of the greed of a small number of banks on Wall Street, and now these very same banks are hitting the middle class and working families of this country with outrageously high interest rates. Enough is enough. We need to establish a national usury rate, so I ask my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

#### ROXANA SABERI IMPRISONMENT

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, this is a photograph of Roxana Saberi. Yesterday, April 26, was her 32nd birthday. She was born and raised in Fargo, ND. Her father Reza Saberi is an Iranian citizen who moved here over 35 years ago. Her mother Akiko is Japanese.

This young woman is a 1994 honor graduate of Fargo North High School, active in music, soccer, dance, a member of the North High School Hall of Fame, and an outstanding athlete. In 1997, she was voted Miss North Dakota. That year, she was made one of the 10 finalists in the Miss America pageant, winning the Scholar Award. In 1999, she completed her master's degree in broadcast journalism at Northwestern. In 2000, she earned a master's degree in international relations from Cambridge University in England. I tell you all that about this young woman because she sits in a 10-foot by 10-foot prison cell in Evin Prison in Tehran, Iran.

I spoke to her father this weekend. Her father and mother are in Tehran.

Roxana was arrested in Tehran and put in prison, and she has been there 86 days. When she went to Iran, she did so because she was proud of her Iranian heritage. Even though she was born, raised, and educated here in the United States, she was interested in going to the country where her father had come from, and so she went to Iran. She is a woman who was trained in journalism. I met her when she practiced journalism in North Dakota. She has reported for National Public Radio, BBC, for FOX News, and others, from Tehran. She stayed in Iran after her credentials as a journalist were rescinded in 2006. She stayed to write a book about Iran and to complete work on her degree in Iranian studies and international relations.

As I said, as of yesterday she has spent 86 days in prison in Iran, in a 10 foot-by-10 foot cell with three cell mates. She was arrested January 31 and was convicted of spying just a week ago and given an 8-year sentence in prison. It is an absolutely preposterous miscarriage of justice. This young woman is not engaged in espionage and is not a spy. She is a young woman who went to Iran because she was proud of her cultural heritage. She was arrested and held in an Iranian prison without the capability of access to an attorney. Her parents didn't know where she was. She was held there incommunicado. She is a young woman caught in the grips of a judicial system and the politics in Iran from which she can't seem, at this point, to escape. She is an innocent woman sitting in a prison cell in Iran.

Roxana has been on a hunger strike for the past 7 days in protest of her sentence. Her father told me when I visited with him on Saturday that he was going to the prison today in Tehran to visit Roxana, and he tried to convince her to cease the hunger strike. She does not want to do that.

She has already lost 10 pounds. Her father said she looked very weak and said she intends to continue the hunger strike until she dies or is released from jail. The only nourishment she is taking is water with some sugar.

The entire world has protested this arrest and conviction and sentencing, which is a miscarriage of justice. As I said, she was held for 10 days without an ability to communicate with anyone. It took a month before the country of Iran admitted they were holding her. It was more than 5 weeks before she was allowed to see a lawyer.

The charges kept changing. First, the Iranian Government said the charge was that she purchased a bottle of wine, and the person who sold it to her told the Iranian Government, and therefore she was arrested. That was what she was told she was put in prison for. She had bought a bottle of wine.

Then she was accused of working as a journalist without a valid press license. That was the second accusation.

Then, weeks later, she was accused of being a spy. The court has not released any evidence against her. They held a ½-day trial—behind closed doors. There was no release of any evidence against her. According to her attorney, she was not allowed to speak in her own defense.

To us that is a completely foreign notion of what justice should be. Apparently, at least in some circles in Iran, they consider that some kind of perverted justice.

Let me say there is at least some hopeful signs. President Ahmadinejad sent a letter to Iran's prosecutor saying Roxana's rights must not be violated and asking him to ensure that she is allowed to offer a full defense on the appeal. Her attorney, as I understand it, is now set to offer the appeal. The Ayatollah Shahroudi, who is the head of Iran's judiciary, has requested a quick and fair appeal of Roxana's case. That also gives some of us hope.

Perhaps some of Iran's leaders understand that what is also on trial is the credibility of those who govern Iran.

This has been very difficult for our country because we do not have an embassy or ambassador in Iran. We must communicate through the Swiss Embassy, which is the protecting power for American citizens in Iran. So it is very hard for us to know what is going on there.

I want to say, again, this young woman is not a spy. It is preposterous for her to be charged with espionage. It is an unbelievable miscarriage of justice for her to be sitting in a 10-by-10 prison cell. Yet on her birthday she sat in that cell in Evin Prison in Tehran facing an 8-year sentence in a circumstance in which she was not even allowed to defend herself. The basic tenets of justice have somehow been denied to this young woman.

What I believe Iran should do is release her from prison and allow her to leave the country and return home with her parents to the U.S. I hope the

Iranian Government is listening—not just to us, not just to me, but to virtually everyone in the world who cares about fairness and justice and human rights. All of them have weighed in on Roxana's behalf saying: How on Earth can you do this? How do you justify this?

Iran leaders understand the spotlight of the world is on their country and on those who decided to arrest this young woman, a young woman so proud of her heritage that she was there wanting to write a book about her heritage. I hope they understand the injustice of what they have done and what the rest of the world sees of that injustice and what it means to Iran in the eyes of the rest of the world.

If they do, if they understand that, most surely they will decide to release her from prison, exonerate her, and allow her to go home. I hope they do that soon. They face great risks with the health of this young woman who is now on a hunger strike. President Ahmadinejad and the people who run the judicial system of Iran should pay close attention and do the right thing.

I have spoken to the Permanent Iranian Representative to the United Nations on numerous occasions about this case, and I intend to keep pushing. I hope today perhaps the Iranians will understand the unfairness of what they have done and finally, at long last, make it right.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. MERKLEY relating to the introduction of S. 901 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, what is the parliamentary situation?

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### FRAUD ENFORCEMENT AND RECOVERY ACT OF 2009

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will re-

sume consideration of S. 386, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 386) to improve enforcement of mortgage fraud, securities fraud, financial institution fraud, and other frauds related to federal assistance and relief programs, for the recovery of funds lost to these frauds, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 984, to increase funding for certain HUD programs to assist individuals to better withstand the current mortgage crisis.

Inhofe amendment No. 996 (to amendment No. 984), to amend title 4, United States Code, to declare English as the national language of the Government of the United States.

Vitter amendment No. 991, to authorize and remove impediments to the repayment of funds received under the Troubled Asset Relief Program.

Boxer modified amendment No. 1000, to authorize monies for the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program to audit and investigate recipients of non-recourse Federal loans under the Public Private Investment Program and the Term Asset Loan Facility.

Coburn amendment No. 982, to authorize the use of TARP funds to cover the costs of the bill.

Thune amendment No. 1002, to require the Secretary of the Treasury to use any amounts repaid by a financial institution that is a recipient of assistance under the Troubled Assets Relief Program for debt reduction.

DeMint amendment No. 994, to prohibit the use of Troubled Asset Relief Program funds for the purchase of common stock.

Coburn amendment No. 983, to require the Inspector General of the Federal Housing Finance Agency to investigate and report on the activities of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac that may have contributed to the current mortgage crisis.

Kohl amendment No. 990, to protect older Americans from misleading and fraudulent marketing practices, with the goal of increasing retirement security.

Ensign amendment No. 1004, to impose certain requirements on public-private investment fund programs.

Ensign amendment No. 1003 (to amendment No. 1000), to impose certain requirements on public-private investment fund programs.

Hatch amendment No. 1007, to prohibit the Department of Labor from expending Federal funds to withdraw a rule pertaining to the filing by labor organizations of an annual financial report required by the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I thank the distinguished Presiding Officer.

The bill, S. 386, is the bipartisan Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009, the Leahy-Grassley bill. When I mention my name and Senator GRASSLEY's name, we are only two of a large number of people on this bill. We have Senators KAUFMAN, KLOBUCHAR, SCHUMER, MURRAY, BAYH, SPECTER, SNOWE, HARKIN, LEVIN, DORGAN, WHITEHOUSE, ROCKEFELLER, SHAHEEN, STABENOW, SANDERS, BENNET of Colorado, DURBIN, MIKULSKI, GILLIBRAND, BEGICH, BURRIS, DODD, MENENDEZ, CARDIN, REID, and PRYOR as co-sponsors.