

Syrian opposition figures and others to advance a negotiated transition to a new Syrian Government that will represent all Syrians and prevent the trading in of one set of thugs for another. The Arab Spring cannot be allowed to fail because of brutal repression, the specter of religious fanaticism, a fear of the unknown, or the cynicism born of unmet expectations. The region's many millions must have the freedom to write a new chapter for themselves and their posterity.

In this, the younger Assad has taken a page from his father, who unleashed his troops in 1982 to suppress a revolt by the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hama, an offensive that may have cost as many as 20,000 civilian lives. Indeed, history may be repeating itself as Hama has become a focus of both anti-government activity on the one hand, and the use of extreme violence by the Assad government on the other.

For American policymakers, Syria presents a collection of overlapping and sometimes contradictory challenges. Like his father, President Assad has repeatedly tantalized the United States and the west with the possibility of a new opening, but he has never followed through. Syria's illegal and clandestine nuclear program, its alliance with Iran and its meddling in Lebanon, a policy that culminated in the 2005 murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, form a compelling case that the Syrian people and the world would be better off with a new leader in Damascus.

#### FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RELIGION UNDER ATTACK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, freedom of speech, the free exercise of religion, two of our most important, fundamental principles that this Nation was founded upon, have recently become under attack by none other than this Federal Government. The authoritarian behavior and attack on the First Amendment rights is an attack now on the veterans that have served our Nation.

Last week, while in Houston, Texas, I met with members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. They shared with me very descriptive and disturbing stories about the aggressive and hostile censorship of religion and speech that is occurring at none other than the veterans cemetery in Houston, the second largest cemetery for our veterans in the United States, next to Arlington, which is right down the street across from the Potomac River.

The director of the Houston National Cemetery, Arleen Ocasio, is accused of attacking the constitutional rights of our military who have fought and died for this country. The very rights that they fought and died for are being under attack by none other than this director. The thought that someone would have the audacity to censor religion and speech anywhere is despicable, but censoring the funeral services of the veterans who spent their

lives protecting the First Amendment is malicious and it's not forgivable.

Director Ocasio is an unelected bureaucrat, a nonveteran who is clearly out of touch with our veterans and the Constitution. And it's unbelievable that she would be put in charge of the sacred burial ground in Houston, Texas.

Here's what the accusations against her are, according to the Veterans of Foreign Wars who I met with. And these are the men who go to those funeral services and are the honor guard for America's war dead that are buried. And here's what they say that she has done. The chapel that is on the premises has been closed. The Bible has been removed. The cross has been taken out of the chapel. We don't know what the chapel's being used for. Some stay a storage place. Some say a meeting place. Some say it's not being used at all. This is what she is accused of doing.

She censors the prayers that are being given at the burial services of our veterans. She's banned the word "God," the words "Jesus Christ" from these funeral services. And it is the very utterance of the word "God" that's put this director in a tizzy, so much so that she wants to approve all the prayers that are given at these private veterans funerals that take place on these sacred grounds.

There are 60 burials a week of our veterans at Houston National Cemetery. And this action has got to cease, this unconstitutional action by the director. It's not the business of the Federal Government to be engaged in anti-religious activity, especially at what some consider to be a religious ceremony, the burial of our veterans. The philosophy behind such politics is anti-Christian, anti-religious, and anti-American.

Mr. Speaker, the First Amendment is first because it's the most important. It protects the freedom of speech, the freedom of press, the freedom of free exercise of religion, and the freedom to peaceably assemble. And that is under attack at this cemetery because the director wants to be in charge and make sure that none of these burials are a religious ceremony. And that's got to stop.

This cemetery, Mr. Speaker, does not belong to Director Ocasio. In fact, I don't think it belongs to the Federal Government. It belongs to the veterans who have served this Nation all over the world in all wars. It belongs to them, and it belongs to their families who bury them. And religious censorship has got to cease at this cemetery. Americans are irate about this government attack on religion. I have heard from numerous veterans and loved ones all over the country who are shocked that this government, our government, would allow such a thing to occur.

□ 1010

One man in particular stood out who called my office and he was in tears,

Mr. Speaker, because his father, a World War II veteran, was days away from being buried in Houston National Cemetery. And his father had heard about the censorship of religion and speech, and he doesn't want to be buried in that cemetery with other veterans any longer.

So no wonder that so many people are shocked by the actions of this director. After all, it reminds me of the old Soviet Union, the way they used to censor speech and prevent the free exercise of religion.

The First Amendment is sacred. Funerals are sacred; and when our veterans are buried, that soil becomes sacred. And this action has to stop, and if these actions are true, the director needs to be terminated.

The government's attack on the very freedoms that these people have lived and died for is a violation of the freedom of speech and the freedom to freely exercise religion promised to all Americans in the Constitution, and that must be upheld.

And that's just the way it is.

#### CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN PUERTO RICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Yesterday, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the National Institute for Latino Policy published this full-page ad in Roll Call, one of the key newspapers here on Capitol Hill.

These respected civil rights and policy organizations have investigated and denounced the civil and human rights crisis in Puerto Rico. They bought a full-page ad to alert Congress about the "serious concerns about civil and human rights abuses against the citizens of Puerto Rico by their government, including the infringement on the rights of free speech, peaceful assembly and freedom from police violence and abuse."

And they make an essential point: If these abuses were happening anywhere in the 50 States, they would not be tolerated. These abuses would be on the front page of every newspaper, as they are in Puerto Rico.

It's time for this Congress to start paying attention. Students and working people, journalists and environmentalists in Puerto Rico are paying attention because the freedoms we take for granted in America are being denied to them each day.

I would like today to remind you what has happened. On this floor I have condemned the use of heavily armed riot squads against peaceful student and labor protesters at the University of Puerto Rico and in the streets of San Juan. I have denounced the beatings of students by police armed with night sticks, the use of pepper spray on protesters and even journalists, the groping of female students.

I have stood up to defend the Puerto Rican Bar Association, a clear voice for justice that has been attacked by the ruling party and their legislature and their allies on the Federal bench.

I have spoken on the House floor and leaders have spoken on the island about the environmental emergency the ruling party has brought on to Puerto Rico. The government declared an energy emergency to avoid routine fact-finding and licensing procedures so that it could build a 100-mile long, \$500 million gas pipeline on a tropical island that is designed more to help wealthy insiders than the people of Puerto Rico.

While actions in Wisconsin and Ohio and other States that threaten workers' rights are discussed routinely in the U.S., the fact that the Governor of Puerto Rico has fired tens of thousands of public employees and canceled labor agreements, all contrary to contract promises, is largely unknown.

But Tea Partiers don't rejoice: he has also doubled the property taxes on everyone.

Even the courts are under attack on the island. This Governor has packed the Puerto Rican Supreme Court with activists of the ruling party. He created two new positions on the supreme court in order to add two new judges to a court that already had a majority of the ruling party. He did this, of course, despite the fact of having denounced Hugo Chavez when he believed he was doing the same thing in Venezuela.

Just 2 weeks ago, the ruling party yet again changed the law so they could fire the island's ombudswoman for the elderly, who had years left on her 10-year appointment, because of her independence and vocal disagreement with the ruling party.

And because I have spoken out against the ruling party of Puerto Rico, I have earned a resolution of censure from the ruling party's legislature. I have earned a full-page ad in Roll Call condemning me for using my right to speech.

Only the ruling party of Puerto Rico would respond to complaints about free speech and civil rights abuses by officially passing a resolution condemning someone for speaking. Should any of my colleagues not believe this absurdity, you just need to come to my office where I display proudly these documents. I invite you to come and see them.

I ask my colleagues today: please pay attention to what is happening in Puerto Rico. If it were happening in Illinois, New York, Texas or Wyoming, or any of the States of our Union, this Congress would have great concerns.

One meaningful first step would be to join me in urging the Department of Justice to complete the investigation that they have initiated and to police abuses in Puerto Rico that started in 2008 and promptly release the results. I would also ask my colleagues and their staffs to attend the congressional briefing organized by the ACLU next Tuesday, July 12, at 10 a.m.

And, finally, I ask my friends and colleagues to do what we do whenever we see regimes that refuse to treat people fairly: please speak out for the values that define us as Americans. Please join me in standing for liberty and justice for all.

#### THE VOTE TO INCREASE DEBT LIMIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, today the United States Government owes close to \$14.3 trillion. It's estimated by the Congressional Budget Office that by the year 2021, the government will spend 100 percent of every dollar raised in revenue on entitlements. And yet we are being asked to raise the debt limit to \$16.3 trillion. That's a \$2 trillion increase, or 14 percent increase. In 2010, our national GDP was \$14.6 trillion. Raising the debt to \$16.3 trillion means our debt ceiling will surpass our country's GDP.

And yet for the 81st time since 1940, we are being asked again to raise the debt ceiling. In 2002, our debt stood at \$6.2 trillion. Now, not even 10 years later, we are asked to raise it to \$16.2 trillion. That's a 250 percent increase, or an average of 16.7 percent increase per year. Obviously, continuing on this path next year, it is likely we will be asked in this Chamber to raise the debt ceiling to \$19 trillion. That's staggering.

In keeping with this 70-year tradition, we are certain to force our Nation's spiraling and out-of-control debt onto the backs of our country's children and grandchildren. Raising the debt ceiling today without reform will merely lead to a new call, a new call to raise the debt again tomorrow.

Is the United States disciplined enough to solve this debt problem through austerity and productivity? I think it is. Yet I believe we can, but only if we break this tradition of continued spending.

Now recently a constituent of mine wrote a simple letter to the editor of my hometown paper and this what is he said: "If you and your wife haven't made a budget for the last 2 years, and now you have maxed-out the \$14,300 credit limit on your Visa card, do you: A, expect Visa to raise your limit to \$16,700; B, print counterfeit money to cover your debts; C, borrow more money; or, D, sell the Cadillac."

Responsible Americans would sell the Cadillac. It's time for the Federal Government to do the same thing: reduce spending or sell unneeded assets.

We must begin to closely scrutinize our bills and eliminate wasteful and fraudulent programs, sunset some of them. As we negotiate the upcoming vote on the debt ceiling, we should ensure that any cut in spending exceeds any increase in the debt limit. Selling the Cadillac is meaningless when you continue to max out on your credit

card. The point here is to make a difference in our debt, not to merely provide a vehicle to continue Washington's spending addiction.

Moreover, any future spending must be restricted. We cannot sell the Cadillac this year only to buy a Mercedes Benz next year. Again, we must begin to live within our means.

I know that leadership is working tirelessly to ensure that a compromise can be reached and the Republicans' demands can be met, and it appears we are making progress.

□ 1020

But, the President has in one breath asked both parties to leave their rhetoric at the door, but then in the same next breath he accused Republicans of refusing to cut tax loopholes for the rich in order to curb the debt problem. But that alone won't do it. Beyond being contradictory and self-serving, these accusations demonstrate that Democrats continue to misunderstand the real problem. CBO has nailed it. They recently revealed that it is runaway spending, not a lack of revenue, that is driving our debt today. According to CBO's long-term budget forecast, even with a tax increase that raises revenues from its historic 18 percent of GDP to 23 percent of GDP, the national debt will continue to grow unless we have the spending reductions.

Everyone here in Congress understands how important this vote is, but surely after the CBO analysis, we must confront the fact that spending is growing relentlessly and needs to be placed under control. Therefore, to move the debt ceiling up another \$2 trillion, we need to see corresponding spending reductions regardless—regardless—without tax increases. Now is the time to do it. It can be done. And it must be done today.

#### WHAT DOES \$10 BILLION A MONTH BUY?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since 2005, I have spoken from this very spot 399 times. On nearly every occasion that House rules allow, I have stood to deliver a 5-minute special order speech highlighting the moral outrage of the United States' continued military engagements in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Libya. I speak of the need also for a new Smart Security to keep America safe.

Today will be my 399th speech. I look forward to reaching number 400 next week, and I will continue this drumbeat until my last day as a Member of Congress, which gives me approximately 18 months, 1½ years, time to bring our troops safely home.

During this week, the week that the House is debating defense appropriations, I thought it would be fitting to focus on war spending, on the staggering costs that taxpayers are being