

As we recognize Gabby, let's also take a moment to remember the individuals who lost their lives in this heinous event that occurred in Tucson last January.

In particular, I hope we can all keep a special place in our thoughts and prayers for Christina Taylor Green and her family.

Christina was a nine year old child, who had been recently elected to the student council at Mesa Verde Elementary School.

She was beginning to show an interest in civics, and went to the Congress on Your Corner event that day in order to get a chance to meet her Congresswoman.

Christina had great hopes and aspirations for her future. Sadly, all of that was taken away from her in the blink of an eye.

Let us stand together to honor the lives Christina and everyone else who lost their lives in this terrible tragedy.

We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones they leave behind.

Again—I want to thank Rep. Giffords for her outstanding service to her constituents in Arizona, and to the nation as a whole.

The best wishes and prayers of Barbara and I go out to Gabby, her husband Mark, and her family and friends, on continued happiness and a complete recovery.

REMARKS REGARDING STATEMENT BY RYAN C. CROCKER, THE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN

HON. DANA ROHRBACHER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 27, 2012

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Mr. Speaker, the January 24 statement by Ryan C. Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, contained two claims that were not worthy of a diplomat of his wide experience.

First, he misstated the rationale for why the United States has spent over 10 years, 1,800 lives, and half a trillion dollars in Afghanistan, claiming, "the United States is committed to supporting the efforts of the central government, to build a strong, secure, democratic, and unified Afghanistan. We have no other aim or goal." As much as we may care about the Afghan people, the defense of America is the only legitimate reason for the deployment of such a large combat force.

We went to Afghanistan in 2001 to avenge the slaughter of 3,000 Americans that was planned by terrorists hiding in that country. We did not go to Afghanistan to indulge in a nation-building social program. What we have done in Afghanistan must be justified on the grounds of whether it has made America more secure. Crocker seems to be moving away from that objective; perhaps because the current policy is failing to meet the security needs of our country. Yet, the current policy he does defend is failing to provide stable, honest government in Afghanistan.

Crocker claims in his second misstep, "Rumors that the United States has a plan to divide Afghanistan or change its form of government are, frankly speaking, lies that dishonor the sacrifice of more than 1,800 American service members who have died in the cause of a unified Afghanistan, governed by its Con-

stitution." While it is true that the U.S. has no plan, certainly a discussion on how to change the current corrupt and incompetent system in Kabul has been going on for a long time.

Questions like whether governors and mayors should be elected or appointed and what constitutes a sustainable Federal system are for the Afghans to decide by democratic methods which depend on free debate.

Ambassador Crocker seems to want to stifle the debate on how to reform and improve the Afghan structure so as to leave behind a more sustainable and legitimate government in Kabul when the U.S. and its allies withdraw in 2014. It is not a "lie" that such a debate is in progress, nor is the debate a "dishonor" to those who have died fighting enemies of the United States.

Indeed, it would be a dereliction of duty not to look for alternatives to the present failed policy. Many Afghans feel that the current governmental structure will not survive beyond 2014 because it has not created a system that is rooted in the people. It's over centralized form, remote from tribal and village society, does not command the allegiance of those who will have to fight to protect Afghanistan after 2014.

Crocker's attempt to insult and discredit those who engage in an honest dialogue is not what one would expect from a professional diplomat and trouble-shooter with his reputation. Though he has had a long and distinguished career in the State Department, he has never held elected office nor served in the Legislative branch. He, thus, does not fully appreciate the role and authority of members of Congress to engage in spirited debate and oversee how U.S. policy is conducted in foreign lands.

I ask that the full text of Ambassador Crocker's statement be printed in the RECORD at this point.

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES,
Kabul, Afghanistan, January 24, 2012.

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR CROCKER FROM
REMARKS DELIVERED AT THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT MEDIA INFORMATION CENTER

A free and independent media plays a vital role in any democracy by keeping the public well informed of key issues, as do government spokespersons who provide accurate information to those who report the news.

Afghanistan's media and the government spokespersons who interact with it—but do not control it—are important elements in our close bilateral relationship.

And it is a close, multi-dimensional relationship that is vitally important to both our countries. That is why we are negotiating a long-term Strategic Partnership that will affirm our mutual commitment far into the future. Afghanistan will not be left alone.

Simply put, the United States is committed to supporting the efforts of the central government, to build a strong, secure, democratic, and unified Afghanistan. We have no other aim or goal.

Rumors that the United States has a plan to divide Afghanistan or change its form of government are, frankly speaking, lies that dishonor the sacrifice of more than 1,800 American servicemembers who have died in the cause of a unified Afghanistan, governed by its Constitution.

It is for the same cause that American taxpayers have provided billions of dollars over the past decade, supporting the government and people of Afghanistan in rebuilding this country, supplying electricity, improving health, and giving access to education, as

well as our support for the Afghan Government Media Information Center. We will continue this important work with our Afghan partners through our long-term strategic partnership.

Let me also address another false and absurd rumor: that the United States is seeking a secret deal with the Taliban at the expense of the Afghan government and people.

As you know, Ambassador Grossman was just in Kabul. During his visit, we engaged in a comprehensive discussion on the way forward with President Karzai, his senior advisors, and with the leadership of the High Peace Council.

Afghanistan and the United States both support a peace process for Afghanistan. But only Afghans can decide the future of Afghanistan.

President Karzai, in his speech to Parliament, spoke in support of opening an office in Qatar for the Afghan Taliban. For a peace process to succeed, Afghans must talk to Afghans. The President also spoke of Afghan government contacts with representatives of Hizb-i Islami. This is another example of an Afghan-led process that we are pleased to support.

As Secretary Clinton said after she met the Qatari Foreign Minister earlier this month, nothing has been concluded on the opening of an office, and more work needs to be done.

As Ambassador Grossman said, that work includes first, direct contact between Qatar and Afghanistan on the subject of the opening of any office.

Secondly, for an office to open, we also need to have a clear statement by the Afghan Taliban against international terrorism and in support of a peace process to end the armed conflict in Afghanistan.

And for reconciliation to take place, we are in full agreement with the Government of Afghanistan that three conditions must be met by the Taliban and other armed insurgents: a complete break with al-Qaida; an end to violence; and respect for the Afghan constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.

SBA LOAN PAPERWORK
REDUCTION

HON. JANICE HAHN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 27, 2012

Ms. HAHN. Mr. Speaker, during my short time in Congress, I've met with over 50 small businesses in my district to listen to their concerns. Over and over they tell me that their biggest obstacle in working with the Small Business Administration is the arduous amounts of paperwork needed to access SBA loans. If we are going to get our economy back on track, we need to make sure our small business owners and entrepreneurs have access to capital.

That is why I am introducing the SBA Loan Paperwork Reduction Act, which will make permanent the SBA's pilot Small Loan Advantage Program which features streamlined paperwork, with a two-page application for borrowers and a faster approval time. Small business owners are having a hard enough time in this economy without having to spend their valuable time and resources wading through a mountain of paperwork.

By passing this bill, we will ensure that our entrepreneurs are given the chance to succeed and our small business owners can access the capital they need to grow and hire more workers.

HONORING ROBERT MECHLING

HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 27, 2012

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, throughout our history, at times appointed, this country has come face-to-face with evil. It's gone by different names, but it is always recognizable by its desire to blot out the light of freedom. Time and time again, America has seen her

sons and daughters respond to that threat with the might, devotion, and strength of military service. We've seen the freedom defended within our boundaries, but more than this, we've come to be known the world-over as defenders of freedom's cause at home and abroad.

One such son, Robert Mechling, took to the call of freedom and served as captain in the 8th Army Air Force in World War II. His dedication to the mission at hand and the promise of liberty for those bound by tyranny's grasp has earned him deserved admiration and dis-

tingtion. For his heroic deeds which were decisive in the liberation of France, especially his participation in the Normandy landings, Mechling will receive the National Order of the Legion of Honor.

I rise today to honor Robert Mechling as he receives the highest honor given by the President of the Republic of France and thank him for his courage. I ask my colleagues to join me in thanking Mechling and all who served in WWII for their constant vigilance against the foe.