

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am again on the floor today because our Nation has failed to heed the warning of George Washington, who told us to beware of foreign entanglements.

We have lost over 4,474 Americans in Iraq and 2,276 Americans in Afghanistan. In both of these wars combined, 46,720 of our servicemembers have been wounded. Furthermore, the American taxpayer is spending \$10.45 million every hour to pay for the cost of the war in Afghanistan since 2001. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that. We are spending \$10.45 million an hour just to pay for the money spent in Afghanistan since 2001. Despite these facts, we are now entering into a long-term agreement that, at best, is a failure—at best is a failure.

It is with great disappointment that I share an NBC article, entitled, “Endless Afghanistan? United States-Afghanistan Agreement Would Keep Troops in Place and Funds Flowing Perhaps Indefinitely”—perhaps until 2024. I would like to read a short paragraph and submit for the record a few additional excerpts.

While many Americans have been led to believe the war in Afghanistan will soon be over, a draft of a key United States-Afghan security deal obtained by NBC News shows the United States is prepared to maintain military outposts in Afghanistan for many years to come, and pay to support hundreds of thousands of Afghan security forces.

Mr. Speaker, George Washington was right. Afghanistan is an impossible situation. History has proven that it is impossible. The Bilateral Security Agreement will only serve to endanger American lives and squander taxpayers’ money. I implore my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in standing up for the American people in opposition to the signing of this agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the President has the constitutional right to enter into the agreement. We have no oversight on the agreement itself, but we can put a resolution on the floor and let the Congress debate and let the American people know that we realize what we are doing in Afghanistan, instead of continuing to pass budget bills to fund Karzai.

Mr. Speaker, I have got a little poster here of Karzai. The man is a corrupt leader. All he is doing is taking the taxpayers’ money and becoming richer and richer. Mr. Speaker, the funny and sad thing about this in the poster—it is a cartoon—there is a poor American soldier standing behind Karzai, who is at a money machine, and it says the thoughts of the soldier:

I would like to make a quick withdrawal from here.

To the American soldier, I am sorry to say, if we don’t do our job in Congress, you will be there until 2024.

The American people need to call their Members of Congress and say that we do not accept this agreement to keep our troops there until 2024. If you can’t stop it, at least have a debate on the floor of the House and pass a resolution to say this is what the American people want to see: no long-term agreement with Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank God for blessing our troops and blessing America.

EXCERPTS FOR THE RECORD FROM NBC NEWS ARTICLE “ENDLESS AFGHANISTAN? US-AFGHAN AGREEMENT WOULD KEEP TROOPS IN PLACE AND FUNDS FLOWING, PERHAPS INDEFINITELY”

While many Americans have been led to believe the war in Afghanistan will soon be over, a draft of a key U.S.-Afghan security deal obtained by NBC News shows the United States is prepared to maintain military outposts in Afghanistan for many years to come, and pay to support hundreds of thousands of Afghan security forces.

The wide-ranging document, still unsigned by the United States and Afghanistan, has the potential to commit thousands of American troops to Afghanistan and spend billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

The document outlines what appears to be the start of a new, open-ended military commitment in Afghanistan in the name of training and continuing to fight al-Qaeda. The war in Afghanistan doesn’t seem to be ending, but renewed under new, scaled-down U.S.-Afghan terms.

The deal, according to the text, would take effect on Jan. 1, 2015 and “shall remain in force until the end of 2024 and beyond.”

The document doesn’t specifically say how many U.S. and NATO troops would remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Afghan officials tell NBC News they hope it will be 10 to 15 thousand. U.S. officials tell NBC News the number is closer to seven to eight thousand, with an additional contribution from NATO.

Factoring in troop rotations, home leave, and breaks between deployments, the service of tens of thousands of American troops would be required to maintain a force of seven to eight thousand for a decade or longer. The anticipated costs would likely run into the billions quickly.

[T]he United States shall have an obligation to seek funds on a yearly basis to support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

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

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you another letter I received from a constituent about the Affordable Care Act. He writes:

About 9 months ago, my wife was forced to leave her job, in part because they wanted her to travel to Boston twice a week and the responsibilities to care for our daughter who has cerebral palsy made that impossible. Our health insurance was from her employment.

We went on to COBRA, which cost about \$1,400 per month. Waiting to have permanent insurance that did not have a termination date, we contacted Anthem Blue Cross for a quote for private insurance.

We were told that my wife was uninsurable for 10 years because she had been treated for depression a few years ago when our daugh-

ter was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and we were told she would require spinal cord surgery to possibly walk.

They then said, because of her condition, the cost for only my daughter and I was almost \$4,000 per month. The burden for the last 6 months was overwhelming. Insurance brokers informed us that only the Affordable Health Care Act could help us.

Yesterday my wife signed up for health insurance for all of us. Due to our income, we do not qualify for assistance and we were never looking for any. All we wanted was affordable insurance for my family. The policy we selected will end up costing about what our COBRA payment is, \$1,400, depending on how much deductible we end up using, which is all we ever wanted.

I know the only reason our family is safe is because of the President, who cares more about people like us than the CEO of Anthem Blue Cross or Aetna.

Mr. Speaker, I receive calls and letters like this all the time. It is why I worked so hard to pass the Affordable Care Act in the first place.

This is a transformative piece of legislation, a law that provides more security for the middle class and a better, healthy quality of life for the entire community. It empowers patients and doctors again and puts them, and not insurers, back at the center of care. It makes important, long-overdue reforms that most people just take as common sense.

But for 3 years now, this House Republican majority has been trying to roll the clock back and bring back the bad old days when insurance companies could discriminate against people with preexisting conditions, even children with preexisting conditions, once again. They want to see women pay more for the same coverage than men, be denied coverage because they survived breast cancer, were a victim of domestic violence, or had a child by cesarean section. They want to see small businesses lose tax credits and seniors’ health care and drug costs continue to rise at staggering rates.

But we are not going to go back. The Affordable Care Act is already making a profound difference for individuals and families in need. It is time to stop with the partisan political games and let it work for families who desperately need to have health care coverage and insurance that they can’t afford.

EURASIAN SITUATION

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

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to talk about some European issues, especially in eastern Europe.

First, I want to talk about the country of Belarus. Three years after the brutal and bloody crackdown on peaceful demonstrators after the December 10 presidential elections, nine political prisoners remain behind bars under deplorable conditions in Belarus. This includes Nikolai Statkevich, who ran against Lukashenko in 2010; Ales Bialiatski, the head of Viasna, a

human rights organization; and Mikalai Autukhovich, who sliced open his stomach in September to protest his poor treatment by prison guards. While the regime recently released three political activists—Zmitser Dashkevich, Aliaksandr Frantskevich, and Pavel Seviarynets—it continues to restrict their freedom of movement and activities.

The general human rights situation in Belarus also continues to deteriorate. Recent laws passed to regulate demonstrations and political information have greatly curtailed freedom of assembly, and independent journalists and political activists are under a constant threat of intimidation and arbitrary detention. In October, the regime made amendments to the Electoral Code designed to undermine the ability of opposition candidates to receive funding and compete in the 2014 local elections.

The EU voted in October to expand sanctions on the Lukashenko regime for an additional year citing the regime's failure to release or effectively rehabilitate political prisoners and its disregard for human rights or democratic principles in their decision making. The United States should continue to work with the European Union to remain consolidated, impose economic sanctions, and have a single plan of action regarding the promotion of dramatic processes in Belarus.

Tensions with Russia increased when the Lukashenko regime arrested Vladislav Baumgertner, a Russian citizen who is the head of a major Russian potash firm. The move was in retaliation for this firm dropping its joint venture with a local Belorussian potash firm, resulting in a steep drop in the commodity price and harming the Belarus economy. This began an ongoing "potash war" with Russia. Meanwhile, negotiations to put a Russian airbase in Belarus have proved controversial and allowed opposition parties an opening to criticize the regime and focus attention on national independence and sovereignty issues. The United States should continue to support Belorussian citizens as they fight to maintain their sovereignty.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the Eastern Partnership. On November 28 through 29, just coming up soon, the European Union will host the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. The goal of the event is to promote closer ties between the EU and its eastern neighbors and, in particular, to further the progress on association agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and the Ukraine. The governments of these countries have worked for years to meet conditions for signing the agreements, and the summit is viewed as an historic step in European integration for these countries.

Russia has responded to the Eastern Partnership initiative by applying intense pressure on these countries to abandon EU engagement and join a Russian-led Eurasian union instead.

Russia has started erecting barbed wire fences on Georgian territory, prompting a stern rebuke from the EU condemning the action and calling for their removal. In Moldova, Russia has resorted to its tactics of banning Moldova wine imports and threatening to cut off gas during the winter months. Russia has banned dairy products from Lithuania and certain chocolate products from the Ukraine and threatened both countries with disruption or price hikes on gas supplies. The EU has warned Russia to stop these actions, and the U.S. should join in the condemnation of Russia's aggressive behavior towards the sovereignty of nations on its border.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this time for talking about these emerging democracies in eastern Europe, the threat that still continues, and the importance of the United States Government being involved in promoting democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT SUCCESS STORIES

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

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, we have been in this huge debate around the Affordable Care Act for quite a while now. One of the things that I cannot ever forget is the health care nightmare stories that I listened to before we passed the Affordable Care Act. As I see so many of my Republican colleagues gleefully celebrate the difficulties with the Web site or cancellations and then think that that is going to somehow help them in an election, I can't think about any election. All I can think about are people like the people whom I want to share with you right now.

Let me tell you about Marty Olson. Marty built a small business creating marble sinks and countertops. He poured everything he had into his business, and it flourished. He became a job creator, in the language of some people. I call him a "small business person." I call his customers "job creators."

Just a few years ago, he employed more than half a dozen employees. Recently, things changed drastically for him. Over the course of the last year, his 9-year-old daughter, Abby, was diagnosed with leukemia. She beat the odds and was in remission for 6 months until her cancer symptoms returned. She is now awaiting a bone marrow transplant. Mr. Olson spent time with his ailing daughter, and his business began to decrease.

□ 1030

He is now the sole employee of the marble business. Three months ago, he suffered a detached artery and had heart surgery. He is still recuperating from his surgery and losing his insurance on January 1 due to a divorce. He began to search for affordable health

insurance, but most premium quotes were too much for him to afford. The implementation of the Affordable Care Act means he will not be denied insurance due to his preexisting heart condition. The health care exchange in Minnesota, mnsure.org, is allowing him to purchase a policy he can afford. Without the plans available on the Minnesota health care exchange, he likely would have to choose between health insurance or paying his other monthly bills.

When his business was growing, he often trained employees who increased his production, but sometimes lost that employee because he was unable to provide them with an adequate health care insurance plan. The small business exchange is there for him to use when his business grows again in the future.

Of course Marty is not by himself in this. Tracy Brock is another small business owner. She has presided over a small business for 21 years. She is able to earn enough to support herself and hire several part-time employees. However, her health insurance premiums have forced her to work six to seven days a week. Those high premiums, around \$650 a month, prevent her from taking time to enjoy life and get some well-deserved rest. Her insurance premiums were taking most of her marginal profits. The assets from her business disqualified her from receiving any assistance with her premiums.

Tracy had the misfortune of being a cancer patient. She also needs knee replacement surgery, and Ms. Brock's business has not been as profitable recently so she continues to work every day despite her health condition. She began researching mnsure.org, the health care exchange available in Minnesota, and she found health plans with better coverage at prices that she can afford. Some plans she found were only 50 percent of the cost of her current premium. The additional coverage will give her more options to treat her conditions, and the savings will allow her to work less and enjoy life more.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, we shouldn't look at difficulties in the implementation of the Affordable Care Act as a political opportunity. We should never take our eye off the fact that we have citizens who desperately need something way better than we had before we had the Affordable Care Act. I wish Republicans would say, You know what, it is there. It is passed. The Supreme Court has said it is constitutional, and we are going to do everything we can to make it work even if we would do it different, and we will offer constructive improvements, but we are not going to sit back and just try to wreck it with poison pill bills like the Upton bill last week, or with the 47 attempts to repeal it, or with the myriad of other tricks, sabotage, and devices that they have employed.

It is time to help Americans like Marty Olson, like Tracy Brock, and like millions of other people, including