

Sadly, this is a promise that has been broken time and time again. For the last 10 years, I have been working on an initiative to have the special immigrant visas to allow these trusted partners, whose lives are now at risk, to escape to safety and freedom in the United States.

Too often we have had a program mostly in name only. Visas were authorized, but through lack of attention, resources, commitment, focus, the paperwork languished. People have been in a bureaucratic hell, impossible conditions created, and to be met by despair and too often threats, injury, and, sadly, death of the people who trusted us. During the height of the government shutdown, we were nonetheless able to come together to bring the program back to life, or at least put it on life support.

I deeply appreciate the staff of Majority Leader CANTOR and Minority Whip HOYER. Their key staff members worked with a bipartisan coalition. Special thanks to ADAM KINZINGER and TULSI GABBARD, two new Members of Congress who served in theater in the Middle East, who know what the problems are and our commitment to those who helped us.

Because of this team we were able not only to keep it alive, we secured some real advances in the Defense Authorization Act. We are hearing noises from the administration and the many bureaucracies involved: the State Department, Homeland Security, FBI. There are lots of places for the system to break down, yet there appears to be some greater commitment but still not enough action.

Again, this morning, there is a reminder of the reality of our government having failed to deliver. For too many of us, it is a story in *The New York Times*. But for the Iraqis and the Afghans left behind, they don't need a story in a foreign newspaper, except the people who are featured in these stories miraculously often get their cases expedited. For the rest of these poor souls, they have a daily reminder of the threats, the assaults, of what it means to be left in the tender mercies of al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Next month, I will be introducing legislation for the next steps. I would strongly urge my colleagues to remember that brief moment when we came together during the shutdown to keep the program alive.

Please join me in cosponsoring the legislation because it is not enough just to keep the program alive. Let's come together to make the program work so those partners of America in Afghanistan and Iraq themselves can be kept alive.

THE MEDICAL EVALUATION PARITY FOR SERVICE MEMBERS ACT

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, despite the recent military drawdown, our Nation continues to rely upon qualified and well-trained volunteers joining the military in order to regenerate our Armed Forces. Now, some of these young men and women have prepared their entire lives for service, while others found the call to duty some years later. All have chosen to serve their country in uniform and do so with honor and bravery.

When joining the service, new recruits must undergo comprehensive medical and physical examinations in order to certify they are both fully fit and capable of performing the range of rigorous and demanding jobs our military must carry out. However, Mr. Speaker, despite comprehensive physical and medical evaluations, there is no similar examination for mental health competency; meaning, we thoroughly examine knees, backs, eyes, and even the heart, yet leave the most important part of the body—one's mind—off-limits.

Now, this is certainly cause for concern and what some view as a serious gap in recruitment evaluation, especially as the military continues to address issues of behavioral health, posttraumatic stress disease, traumatic brain injury, and suicide. According to a recent Army study, nearly one in five Army soldiers enter the service with a psychiatric disorder, and nearly half of all soldiers who tried suicide first attempted it before enlisting. Additionally, the Journal of the American Medical Association found that a large percentage of suicides in the military were individuals who had never been deployed in a combat role.

Mr. Speaker, as policymakers, we have a responsibility to address this challenge. And this week, Ohio Congressman TIM RYAN and I plan to call on our colleagues to do just that and to join as cosponsors of the Medical Evaluation Parity for Service Members, or MEPS, Act. This bipartisan bill will institute a preliminary mental health assessment at the time recruits are first joining the military.

Keeping individual privacy in mind, the MEPS Act will follow all HIPAA guidelines and cannot be used in consideration for promotion or assignments. Additionally, the Congressional Budget Office has found the MEPS Act to have no budgetary effect.

In addition, this legislation requires the National Institute of Mental Health, in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other experts, to report their recommendations on the assessment to ensure best practices are done. Now, this common-sense proposal seeks to bring mental health to parity with physical health and recruitment evaluations and will ensure that our incoming troops are both physically and mentally fit to serve.

Additionally, the bill has the support of the American Psychological Association, the Veterans of Foreign Wars,

the National Guard Association of the United States, the Reserve Officers Association, the Reserve Enlisted Association, and the Association of the U.S. Navy.

Mr. Speaker, the MEPS Act is not, alone, the magic silver bullet to solve all of the behavioral health issues the military faces, but it is an important step in better understanding the scope of the challenge that we face. Now, I encourage my fellow colleagues to join us in this effort to protect the safety and security of those in uniform by becoming a cosponsor of the Medical Evaluation Parity for Service Members Act. These brave men and women deserve as much.

THE AMERICAN WAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, this morning I want to take a few moments to share thoughts with my colleagues on a number of items that I believe we should be focused on.

Before I do that, I want to join my friends and colleagues from the great State of Washington to express my concern and my sympathy for the people of Darrington and Oso on Highway 530 that have experienced this terrible devastation of a mudslide. To the families of those who lost their loved ones, we mourn and pray for you; and to those who are still missing, we thank the first responders and pray for their accuracy in discerning and finding those that are alive.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, and as we have a hearing this morning on emergency preparedness, I am asking that all of the resources that the delegation from Washington request, and, as well, the Governor of that State, that all of us will embrace them, stand as Americans, unite behind them and provide the resources as we do for our fellow brothers and sisters in this country because it is the American way that we never leave a lonely person along the highway of despair. We always provide for them. And I want those people in Darrington and the city of Oso to know that we will not leave you along the highway of despair.

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I want to now challenge this Congress, the other body, as they proceed to move on what actions should be taken in Ukraine. We know that Americans are war-weary, but if we have principles of democracy, if we believe there is an international world order, we cannot sit idly by and not act. So I am grateful that the President has strongly denounced Russia's actions and has begun to move on strong sanctions. I would argue that there should be more.

We should ensure that the new Ukrainian Government that wants to cling to aspects of democracy and

wants to associate with a democratic Europe, that they be allowed to strengthen themselves. We cannot have a timidity on behalf of Europe, so busy worrying about their pocketbook that they will stamp on their principles. Some European countries are now wavering about sanctions. I would suggest to them that they are dangerously providing an opportunity for Russia to continue its aggressive and illegal acts.

You must have principles. You must provide the strength to sanction. One can travel through the years of history in the 20th century and be reminded of those who get one step of aggression and watch as they march across Europe. I am very glad that there will be no meeting of G8 in Sochi, and I would ask that we continue to isolate Russia. Russia violates the human rights of its own people. It does not even recognize the LGBT community, and they are persecuted. What more do we have to hear from Russia and its head of government to not know that they must suffer the consequences of their acts.

I stand with the people of Ukraine because I believe in democracy, I believe in peace and human dignity, and I believe America has those values that we can ensure through the world family that Russia understands that they are not part of the world order of democracy and the freedom of people.

I might also add, Mr. Speaker, as a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, all of us have watched, some with intenseness the Malaysian aircraft. With great disappointment and sadness, we are told, without all of the facts, not knowing what the recent announcements have been, that this aircraft, this airliner may be lost. But it opens our eyes to the crisis of airline security and technology.

I call upon the aviation industry to stop hiding behind costs and how much it costs and start ensuring that our pilots and our customers, our flying public are safe. Why do we have the capacity to dismantle the transponders? Why wasn't the emergency call already in place that automatically signals when an aircraft goes off its designated destination as relates to its flight pattern? Why does it have to be done manually? The mysterious turn. Homeland Security will be having a hearing on the false passport.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it is overdue for us to pass comprehensive immigration reform, and I will continue that discussion.

COERCIVE CONTRACEPTION MANDATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of issues here in Washington, and I find it so interesting when people come to our offices and ask: What is going on today?

As you will hear, whether it is talking about foreign affairs, the job issues, the budget, the issues that are of such concern to our constituents, there is always something that is on the front burner, and today is one of those days. The Supreme Court will hear yet another legal challenge to one of the many unconstitutional aspects of ObamaCare, and that is the HHS contraception mandate. Of course, this isn't the first time that the Affordable Care Act, the President's health care law, has been pulled into the Supreme Court, and it is probably not going to be the last, but today the hearing is on the contraception mandate.

No American should have to choose between feeding their family and abiding by their faith. I have to tell you, that is what we see happening right now. It is precisely what this coercive contraception mandate is doing to millions of hardworking people of faith, like the Hahns and the Greens, who simply want to run a business and practice their faith. These family businesses want to take care of their employees and provide them with quality health care coverage. All they ask is to not be forced to pay for the life-ending contraceptives that violate their religious convictions.

Now, ObamaCare's unreasonable mandate has placed them in a bind: violate the tenets of their faith or be fined, fined by the Federal Government, fined by ObamaCare, fined \$100 per employee per day. That is what the fine works out to be. Unbelievably, it would be cheaper to strip their employees of health care coverage altogether and pay a single \$2,000 fine per employee per year. That is what you find in the 20,000 pages of regulation, in the 2,700 pages of the President's health care law.

That is not what these family businesses want to do. They really want to do the right thing and take care of the hardworking men and women who are in their employment.

If these family businesses are forced to close or drop health care for their employees, it will be the employees and their families who are made to suffer.

This mandate is just another flawed part of a terribly flawed law, and Americans are growing tired of having to cope with it. Fifty-nine percent of the country opposes the contraception mandate because they know what the Greens and the Hahns know. This is a country founded on religious liberty, and that freedom of conscience is a cherished American tradition. The American people know that and they value that; they value that liberty and they value that tradition.

The Obama administration has already doled out special exemptions to 100 million health care plans from this mandate, and for every reason under the sun except religious liberty. In fact, the HHS mandate only explicitly contains a religious exemption for churches and their affiliates. The

Obama administration even expects hospitals and religious nonprofits to abide by the mandate without complaint, as if the very founding principles of these organizations aren't outright violated by paying for life-ending contraceptives.

Unless it is a religious institution, the Obama administration seems to think no organization, not even a charity, is allowed to exercise the right of conscience, unless it is granted a special waiver from the administration, of course. The administration: What the government gives, the government can delay, and the government can take away. That is their plan.

It is my hope the Court will act to uphold the protections inherent in the First Amendment, respect America's long-held tradition to right of conscience, and let these families operate their businesses in accordance with their religious beliefs and tenets.

END HUNGER NOW

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

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the House voted on the farm bill conference report, legislation that reauthorizes our Nation's agriculture policies as well as the preeminent antihunger program known as SNAP. I voted against the conference report both as a conferee and when it came before this House because it contained an \$8.6 billion cut to SNAP. Even worse, it was the second major cut to SNAP in less than 6 months.

I strongly believe in our Nation's antihunger programs. Unfortunately, there are about 49 million hungry people living in our great Nation. Technically known as food insecurity, the truth is that these are low-income people who don't know where their next meal will come from. America's antihunger programs, led by SNAP, provide food to people who otherwise would have difficulty finding it, if they were able to find access to food at all.

For years, I have talked about how SNAP works, and over the past year, I have led these End Hunger Now speeches about how SNAP and other antihunger programs are working to reduce hunger in our country. That is why these two SNAP cuts, the cut in November 2013 and the cut in the farm bill, were not just disappointing, but they were actually damaging. We saw real cuts to real people.

For example, look at Luis Marin, who was profiled in the New York Daily News:

Food stamp cuts have dealt a double blow to Luis Marin and his family. Marin's hours have been cut from 30 to 20 hours a week at Red Apple Deli Supermarket in uptown's Hamilton Heights, where his boss, Ramon Murphy, is losing business because of the food stamp cutbacks. And Marin, 56, his wife, and their two little girls—who subsist on his \$8-an-hour income—also saw their food stamps benefits drop to \$397 a month in November and have had to change their eating habits.