

Texas and the Bahamas over spring break, Pete went to Beirut to try to help people.

He saw the refugee crisis stemming from the Syrian civil war firsthand and decided to stay there.

I wish to read some of what he wrote to his family and friends at that time about the decision he made. These are Peter's words:

I do not know much, every day that I am here I have more questions and less answers, but what I do know is that I have a chance to do something here, to take a stand. To make a difference. Yesterday my life was laid out on a table in front of me. With only hours left before my scheduled flight back home to the United States, I watched people dying right in front of me. I had seen it before and I had walked away before . . .

I am staying in the region indefinitely. I am formally requesting that I be withdrawn from my courses for the remainder of the semester. I have had the conversation with my parents and it was the easiest one we ever had. They knew simply from the sound of my voice. I have never been freer, more alive, happier, or better received than in this place.

There is too much work to be done here. Too many people in need of immediate help . . .

This decision isn't one that everyone would make, most people wouldn't I guess, but those of you that really know me understand that this is what I was made to do. My whole life has led me to this point in time.

In May of 2012, Abdul-Rahman moved to Lebanon to work as a volunteer emergency medical technician, serving in a hospital in the region there.

By September 2012, Abdul-Rahman, still in his young twenties, formed his own nongovernmental organization to even better help those in need around him. It was called the Special Emergency Relief and Assistance, or SERA.

In the summer of 2013, Abdul-Rahman moved SERA's headquarters to Gaziantep, Turkey, where the organization provided first response assistance to refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war.

SERA provided food and medical supplies to the refugee camps on both sides of the border. SERA also provided primary trauma care and first-aid training to civilians in Syria so others could also provide that same care.

When fundraising was not going as well as needed, Abdul-Rahman donated his own money, giving not only his time and his talent, but everything he had financially to keep it going and assist those suffering around him. He was working on a project for SERA when he was detained on October 1, 2013.

When he was detained, he was traveling in the back of an ambulance on his way to Deir Ezzour in eastern Syria to help provide medical care. He was in the back of an ambulance when he was taken.

Peter showed incredible strength while in captivity—demonstrating his love for his parents while reflecting on the possibility that he might not make it home.

In a letter written while he was in captivity, and received by his parents in early 2014, Abdul-Rahman wrote:

It is still really hard to believe all of this is happening . . . as I am sure you know by now, things have been getting pretty intense. We have been held together, us foreigners . . . and now about half the people have gone home . . .

I hope that this all has a happy ending but it may very well be coming down to the wire here, if in fact that is the case then I figured it was time to say a few things that need saying before I have to go.

The first thing I want to say is thank you. Both to you and mom for everything you have both done for me as parents; for everything you have taught me, shown me, and experienced with me.

I cannot imagine the strength and commitment it has taken to raise a son like me but your love and patience are things I am so deeply grateful for.

Secondly, I want you to know about things here and what I've been through straight from me so you don't have to wonder, guess, or imagine (often this is worse than the reality). All in all I am alright. Physically I am pretty underweight but I'm not starved, & I have no physical injuries, I'm a tough kid and still young so that helps.

Mentally I am pretty sure this is the hardest thing a person can go through, the stress and fear are incredible but I am coping as best I can. I am not alone. I have friends, we laugh, we play chess, we play trivia to stay sharp, and we share stories and dreams of home and loved ones. I can be hard to deal with, you know me. My mind is quick and my patience thinner than most.

But all in all I am holding my own. I cried a lot in the first few months, but a little less now. I worry a lot about you and mom and my friends.

They tell us you have abandoned us and/or don't care but of course we know you are doing everything you can and more. Don't worry Dad, if I do go down, I won't go thinking anything but what I know to be true. That you and mom love me more than the moon & the stars.

I am obviously pretty scared to die but the hardest part is not knowing, wondering, hoping and wondering if I should even hope at all. I am very sad that all this has happened and for what all of you back home are going through.

If I do die, I figure at least you and I can seek refuge and comfort in knowing that I went out as a result of trying to alleviate suffering and helping those in need.

In terms of my faith, I pray everyday and I am not angry about my situation in that sense. I am in a dogmatically complicated situation here, but I am at peace with my belief.

I wish this paper would go on forever and never run out and I could just keep talking to you. Just know I'm with you. Every stream, every lake, every field and river. In the woods and hills, in all the places you showed me. I love you.

If you look at the pictures, you can see Peter and his mom in this picture and Peter and his dad off fishing in Indiana. This is the story of Abdul-Rahman Kassig. Nothing you have seen on TV over the past 3 or 4 days is the story of Abdul-Rahman Kassig. This is the story. Those are his parents and this is what he did—he devoted his life to others.

He was a young man who was taken from us in the most barbaric way, yet whose life stands for all that is good in our world.

Abdul-Rahman, we will miss you catching more fish than your dad Ed

when you went out fishing together and then laughing with him and rubbing it in that you caught more than he did. Best friends right there.

We will miss you giving your mom Paula a big hug and telling your parents how much you love them. Folks around the world and every American will miss you terribly, but we will never forget how kind you were to the sick and injured people you cared for and the sick and injured people you made well, and everyone whose hearts you filled with love and passion and laughter.

This was a man all Hoosiers and everyone else was so proud of, who touched more people and helped more folks in his 26 years than most of us do in a lifetime.

I will close with something that Paula Kassig said on Monday:

Our hearts are battered, but they will mend. The world is broken, but it will be healed in the end. And good will prevail . . .

Abdul-Rahman spent the last years of this life working for good, serving those in the greatest need in the most dangerous of situations because his fellow citizens of the world needed him. He truly believed good would prevail.

Let us keep the Kassigs and those who are still currently being held against their will and their families in our prayers and thoughts.

Abdul-Rahman, we have been humbled by your generosity and your love. May God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.

I yield back and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NEW REPUBLICAN MAJORITY AGENDA

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, today is our first full week back in session since the election 2 weeks ago. While we haven't had the change of control yet in the Chamber—it doesn't happen until next year—Republicans are setting out our priorities for the new Congress and looking forward to getting to work.

Two weeks ago the American people spoke. They sent a clear message to Washington that they are tired of the status quo, tired of gridlock, tired of obstruction. They are tired of Washington wasting their money. They want change, and on election day, they asked Republicans to make that happen.

Republicans are humbled by the trust the American people have placed in us, and we are not going to let them down. We look forward to setting a positive and a constructive agenda and getting the Senate working again for the American people.

Over the past several years, the Senate Democratic leadership has stifled debate, ignored the regular order of business, and wasted the Senate's time on partisan pieces of business that Democratic leaders knew would not pass. That means that very little time has been spent on American families' priorities.

Even many Democrats have grown frustrated with the highly partisan direction the Senate has taken under Democratic leadership. Republicans intend to chart a different course.

Starting in January, we will ensure that the Senate returns to the committee process and that the Senate floor once again becomes a forum for debate and amendments and votes. I am encouraged that this week a number of rank-and-file Democrats abandoned their leadership and joined Republicans to support legislation to approve the Keystone Pipeline and the more than 42,000 jobs it will create. Republicans hope we can continue to have that kind of collaboration in the new Congress.

Americans have had a rough time over the past several years, including a weak economy, few jobs, high prices on everything from health care to electricity, and the list goes on and on. Our first priority in the 114th Congress will be enacting policies that will help create jobs and increase economic opportunity for American families. A good place to start is the dozens of House-passed jobs bills that have been gathering dust on the Senate Democratic leader's desk. Many of these bills passed the House with bipartisan support, and it is high time they get a vote in the Senate so they can get on the President's desk.

We hope the President will work with us on priorities such as expanding trade to open new markets for American agriculture and manufacturing overseas.

I have to say I am a little concerned that the President has indicated his intention of continuing to operate on his own. The American people made it clear on election day that they have rejected his policies, and I hope the President will take that message to heart and rethink his plans to go it alone on important issues such as immigration.

Finally, Republicans will get to work on some of the big-ticket items that need to get done in Washington, including issues such as reforming our Tax Code to make it simpler and fairer and to make us more competitive in the global marketplace, eliminating the hundreds of inefficient regulations that are driving up prices for American families and killing jobs, and issues such as conducting oversight of the executive branch to ensure that the cycle of abuses such as the IRS scandal and the Veterans Affairs scandal stops now.

Republicans understand the opportunity we have been given and we don't intend to waste it. We are going to make Washington work again, we are

going to make government more efficient and effective and stop the waste of taxpayer dollars, and we are going to get our economy going again to put our Nation on a path to growth and shared prosperity.

Divided government has been historically a time when great things have been accomplished. We can go back to Social Security reform in 1983 when we had a Republican President working with a Democratic House or tax reform in 1986 when we had a Republican President working with a Democratic House or 1996 when we had a Democratic President working with a Republican Congress on welfare reform. There are lots of examples throughout our history where divided government has led to big accomplishments and big results for the American people.

I submit that we can do that again. The American people are counting on us. Republicans are ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work, and we invite Democrats and the President to join us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

PRESIDENT'S HEALTH CARE LAW

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, this past Saturday the open enrollment period for the Obama health care law opened in terms of the health care exchange. People who bought health insurance through healthcare.gov or through their State's exchange are finally allowed to see how much their insurance is going to cost next year. Things were pushed back beyond the election so people wouldn't be able to find out before the election what it was going to cost. So the Obama administration had all of this information for awhile, but they intentionally kept it secret until after election day. Now people get to see the prices, and many people across the country are absolutely in shock at the increased costs of the health care law.

Millions of Americans are learning their health insurance is going to cost them a lot more. As a matter of fact, when the exchanges opened November 15, on the front page of the *New York Times*: "Cost of Coverage Under Care Act Set to Increase." The article says:

The Obama administration on Friday unveiled data showing that many Americans with health insurance bought under the Affordable Care Act could face substantial price increases next year—in some cases as much as 20 percent.

Substantial price increases, 20 percent.

For some people it is going to be even higher than that.

The *Wall Street Journal* took a look at it and they had a large story with a picture on Friday and the headline is: "Consumers Still Confused Ahead of Insurance Sign-ups."

The article describes a man named Bob Sorey, who is a real estate salesperson in Mount Juliet, TN. He had a

plan through Blue Cross Blue Shield, and he says his premiums are going up nearly 25 percent next year. He told the newspaper, "I just can't absorb that."

President Obama promised the American people they would save \$2,500 per year per family under his health care law. NANCY PELOSI, the former Speaker of the House, went on "Meet the Press" at one point and said everyone's rates would go down—everyone, she said. What does the President have to say now? What will he tell those people whose rates have continued to go up? What does he say to this real estate broker in Tennessee who can't absorb a 20-percent increase?

In Anchorage, AK, a typical plan is going to cost 28 percent more next year. That is for the second cheapest silver plan, what they call the benchmark plan.

In Minneapolis rates are going up almost 19 percent, and that is just for the premiums. For many people their copays are going up and their deductibles are going up as well. In some parts of Georgia 70 percent of the plans sold on the exchange have deductibles of at least \$2,500. Is that affordable for people? Millions of Americans will be paying more in premiums as well as more out of their pocket—millions of people such as Bob Sorey, the real estate broker in Tennessee, who, as he said, just can't absorb the cost.

These skyrocketing premiums may explain why the President's health care law is more unpopular right now than ever before.

According to the latest Gallup poll, only 37 percent of Americans approve of the law. It was supposed to get more popular. That is what the Democrats on this floor told people across the country and told us. Instead, the opposite has happened. People see how much their costs have increased because of the law, and many people are learning that having coverage under the law is not the same as having care. There is a difference between coverage and care.

That is what USA Today found out. They had a front-page article last Friday with the headline: "Rural Hospitals in Critical Condition."

So not just the cost of coverage under the care act set to increase, but rural hospitals are in critical condition.

Obama critics say the law is speeding up the demise of rural facilities, of rural hospitals. That is the problem.

The article talks about a small hospital in Georgia that had to close in the spring of last year because of all the new burdens of the health care law. People in that town now have to travel many miles to get to another hospital in another town. One of those people was Bill Jones. He was a peanut and cotton farmer who lived about 9 miles away from the old hospital. Bill suffered a heart attack 1 month after the hospital had to close. The ambulance had to take him to another hospital in