

of the floor must be strictly enforced. Children of Members will not be permitted on the floor. The cooperation of all Members is requested.

The practice of reserving seats prior to the joint meeting by placard will not be allowed. Members may reserve their seats by physical presence only following the security sweep of the Chamber.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of Thursday, March 19, 2015, the House stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly, (at 10 o'clock and 6 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

JOINT MEETING TO HEAR AN ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MOHAMMAD ASHRAF GHANI, PRESIDENT OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

During the recess, the House was called to order by the Speaker at 10 o'clock and 56 minutes a.m.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms, Ms. Kathleen Joyce, announced the Vice President and Members of the U.S. Senate, who entered the Hall of the House of Representatives, the Vice President taking the chair at the right of the Speaker, and the Members of the Senate the seats reserved for them.

The SPEAKER. The joint meeting will come to order.

The Chair appoints as members of the committee on the part of the House to escort His Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, into the Chamber:

The gentleman from California (Mr. McCARTHY);

The gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. SCALISE);

The gentlewoman from Washington (Mrs. McMORRIS RODGERS);

The gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WALDEN);

The gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MESSER);

The gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX);

The gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. ROGERS);

The gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE);

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY);

The gentleman from California (Mr. NUNES);

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN);

The gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. GRANGER);

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI);

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER);

The gentleman from California (Mr. BECERRA);

The gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY);

The gentlewoman from Connecticut (Ms. DELAURO);

The gentlewoman from Maryland (Ms. EDWARDS);

The gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL);

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. ESHOO);

The gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE);

The gentlewoman from California (Mrs. SUSAN DAVIS);

The gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF); and

The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOULTON).

The VICE PRESIDENT. The President of the Senate, at the direction of that body, appoints the following Senators as members of the committee on the part of the Senate to escort His Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, into the House Chamber:

The Senator from Kentucky (Mr. McCONNELL);

The Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN);

The Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH);

The Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO);

The Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT);

The Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER);

The Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER);

The Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN);

The Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY);

The Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW);

The Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ); and

The Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY).

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Her Excellency Dr. Alia Hatoug Bouran, the Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seat reserved for her.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Cabinet of the President of the United States.

The Members of the Cabinet of the President of the United States entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seats reserved for them in front of the Speaker's rostrum.

At 11 o'clock and 4 minutes a.m., the Sergeant at Arms, the Honorable Paul D. Irving, announced His Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, escorted by the committee of Senators and Representatives, entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and stood at the Clerk's desk.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

The SPEAKER. Members of Congress, I have the high privilege and the distinct honor of presenting to you His

Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

President ASHRAF GHANI. In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate, Speaker BOEHNER; Vice President BIDEN; Senate Majority Leader McCONNELL; House Majority Leader McCARTHY; House minority leader, Ms. PELOSI; Senate minority leader, Mr. REID; ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, please allow me to thank you for your gracious invitation to address this unique forum of deliberative democracy.

Above all else, I would like to begin by thanking the people of the United States, whose generous support for my country has been of such immense value in advancing the cause of freedom.

More than 1 million brave Americans have served in Afghanistan. They have come to know our snowcapped mountains, our verdant valleys, our wind-swept deserts, our parched fields, our unharnessed, flowing rivers, and our plains of waving wheat.

But more important than knowing our geography, they have come to defend and to know our people. And in return, the people of Afghanistan recognize the bravery of your soldiers and the tremendous sacrifices that Americans have made to keep Afghanistan free.

We owe a profound debt to the 2,315 servicemen and -women killed and the more than 20,000 who have been wounded in service to your country and ours. We owe a profound debt to the soldiers who have lost limbs to buried bombs, to the brave veterans, and to the families who tragically lost their loved ones to the enemies' cowardly acts of terror.

We owe a profound debt to the many Americans who have come to build schools, repair wells, and cure the sick. And we must acknowledge with appreciation that at the end of the day, it is the ordinary Americans whose hard-earned taxes have over the years built the partnership that has led to our conversation today. I want to thank the American taxpayer and you, their representatives, for supporting us.

The service of American men and women—civilian or military—in our country has been made possible by the bipartisan support of the Congress of the United States. On behalf of our own parliament and people, I salute and thank you. It has always been a pleasure to receive and interact with Congressmen and -women during your visits to Afghanistan. Please do come again and again, and if you are reservists, please come in your proud uniforms. I had a unique opportunity that, when Senator GRAHAM was dressed as a colonel, I asked him to salute a three-star British general, and he complied. So thank you.

Veterans will always be welcome in Afghanistan. Our deepest hope is that the time will come when Americans visiting our country see the cultural

heritage and natural riches of the Bamiyan valley; the ancient Timurid architecture of Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif; the fishing streams of Badakshan and Takhar; the forests of Khost, Kunar, Nuristan, and Paktia; and the ancient architecture of Farah, Helmand, and Nimroz, not as soldiers, but as parents showing their children the beautiful country where they served in the war that defeated terror. On behalf of my entire country, when that day comes, you will be our most welcome and honored guests.

America's support to Afghanistan has been led by a succession of remarkable generals. I am proud to have known and worked with Dan McNeill, David McKiernan, Stanley McChrystal, David Petraeus, John Allen, Joseph Dunford, and John Campbell. Their commitment and dedication is inspirational. These generals lived in simple quarters. They worked tirelessly through the night. And their leadership of their troops has set an example that our generals are working hard to follow.

Your civilian leaders are no less inspirational. Ambassadors such as Ronald Neumann, Zal Khalilzad, Karl Eikenberry, Ryan Crocker, James Cunningham, and my good friend Michael McKinley give American diplomacy first-class leadership and strategic understanding. And I would be remiss not to mention the stimulating conversations with my friends from this Chamber, like JOHN McCAIN, LINDSEY GRAHAM, Carl Levin, and many of your visitors. But I must also acknowledge the deeply appreciated contributions of the aid workers and NGOs who are the day-to-day representatives of your country. I have met people from all 50 States of the Union, from Senators and Representatives to construction workers and computer operators. I want to thank all of them for introducing the best of America to the people of Afghanistan.

And finally, I would like to thank President Obama. He is an admirable and principled partner. His support for Afghanistan has always been conditional on our performance. I like and appreciate his clear and disciplined approach to American engagement. Thanks to his strict rigor, we were encouraged and supported to build up the Afghan Armed Forces into the self-reliant army that it is today. Because he stood firm on the deadline for the surge and the transition, the U.S. Army pulled off a logistical near miracle, first deploying and then withdrawing more than 100,000 soldiers without a hitch and timed to deadline. And it is thanks to his promise to America to end active combat that we saw a seamless handover of responsibility for all combat operations from your side to ours on December 31, 2014.

U.S. soldiers are no longer engaged in combat. But we are delighted to have them in the train, assess, and advice mission.

Tragedy brought our two countries together, but it is our shared interests

and values that will keep us together. September 11, 2001, was not a distant image that I watched on the emotionless screen of television. It was horrific, and it was personal. I was in my office at the World Bank when the first plane smashed into the World Trade Center and forever changed the lives of each and every one of us.

New York is a special place for me and my family. My wife and I are both graduates of Columbia University. I was another beneficiary of Americans' wonderful generosity that has built so many longstanding friendships through its unparalleled universities. I ate corned beef at Katz's, New York's greatest, greasiest, pickle-lined melting pot.

Close friends were working near the Trade Center. My children were born in New York City, and my daughter was living in New York when the Twin Towers fell. I visited Ground Zero that very week. Seeing firsthand the tragedy and devastation drove home the realization that after 9/11, the world would never be the same. I went home knowing that America would seek justice, and I began to write the plan for our national reconstruction.

Indeed, justice came swiftly. Al Qaeda terrorists were killed or driven underground. The Taliban, acknowledging their losses after the initial encounters, quickly vacated the cities, with their leadership moving to Pakistan and their rank and file returning to their villages.

There was considerable anxiety about how the Afghan people would respond to the American presence. The issue was put to rest by the welcome accorded to the American soldiers and civilians as partners. Even today, despite the thankfully rare if no less tragic "green on blue" incidents by Taliban infiltrators, the overwhelming majority of Afghans continue to see partnership with the United States as foundational to our future. There is no better proof of this than last October's overwhelming and immediate parliamentary approval of the bilateral security agreement and the status of forces agreement, both of which testify to our desire to continue the partnership.

Afghanistan has been the front line of the global battle against extremists. America, as a result, has been safe, but that safety has been ensured through the loss of American and Afghan lives in the fight against terror.

We have made great sacrifices—we Afghans—but then it is our patriotic duty to do so. You, on the other hand, had a choice; and when you came to a fork in the road, you chose to do the right thing.

Thank you.

Most recently, due to the refusal of our previous government to sign the bilateral security agreement and the status of forces agreement with NATO, we had lost momentum, and both partners had to operate under uncertainty, resulting in some 8 months of lost time

in the most critical moment of transition.

You could have used this opportunity to end the partnership and return home in frustration, but you did not. Thanks to the flexibility shown by President Obama and Congress, we have made up for the loss and have regained momentum without breaking, by even a day, the promise of President Obama to the American people that the U.S. combat role would end on December 31, 2014.

Thank you for staying with us.

I would like to talk a little about our partnership because it is evolving. We are starting to balance the focus on security with a new emphasis on the rule of law and justice, growth, and the pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

The framework for our future relationship is defined by our Strategic Partnership Agreement and the bilateral security agreement. On your side, you have reaffirmed your commitment to support Afghanistan. On our side, we will focus on self-reliance. To get there, we have initiated reforms that will create a self-sustaining Afghanistan.

I know the American people are asking the same question as the Afghan people: Will we have the resources to provide a sustained basis for our operation? The answer is: within this decade, we will.

As the current phase of our relationship draws to a close, our appreciation for the depth of America's contribution to our people cannot be measured in words alone, but it can be seen quite literally in the number of Afghans whose futures have been changed thanks to America and its allies.

On September 10, 2001—this will no longer shock you—there were no girls enrolled in school in Afghanistan. It was illegal to educate girls. Today, more than 3 million girls in primary schools across the country are learning to openly and actively participate in the future of a democratic Afghanistan.

Their parents thank you.

In 2002, when the allies built their first clinics, the average lifespan of the ordinary Afghan was 44 years. Today, it is over 60.

Their children thank you.

Today, the rate of maternal mortality in our poor country remains unacceptably high, but thanks to the immense effort you have made to build clinics and to train nurses, an Afghan woman is no longer more likely to die because she gives birth to a child than if she had somehow fought on the front line of combat.

Their husbands and their children thank you.

Our partnership with America and its allies has brought our country hope where we had none. We would, once again, like to thank you for that wonderful gift from your people to ours, the gift of hope; but, in Afghanistan, there is a saying that no gift can remain unreciprocated.

Today, I would like to return that gift of reborn hope by offering the

American people a partnership with a nation that is committed to the cause of freedom and that will join the fight against the growing threat of terrorism.

I will use my remarks today to tell America the history of how a future Afghanistan came to be. It is a story about how a poor country that relied on foreign help became a self-reliant nation where free trade and the rule of law let Afghan businesses create jobs and prosperity for its people. It is also a story about how a country that had been ravaged by conflict became a platform for peace and regional stability and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen, the story about Afghanistan's path to self-reliance has already started. It began with last year's election and the formation of our national unity government. Afghanistan's external image is of a traditional country that has been frozen in time; but my partner and the CEO of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, and I ran intense and passionate campaigns on the most modern of issues, such as the need to end corruption, taking the actions that will build transparency into government, and guaranteeing support for the impartial rule of law. Campaigns became forums for public debate.

In the final election, not only did more than 7 million Afghans turn out to the polls, but more than 38 percent of the votes were cast by women, many of whom had never previously had the chance to speak politically with their own voices.

There is no denying that the election was hard fought, but in the end, we chose the politics of unity over the politics of division. The national unity government brings together all parts of the country to make the government the arena where disputes are raised and resolved.

Dr. Abdullah and myself may not initially agree on every issue, but we both believe deeply that spirited debate will produce better outcomes than will confrontational stalemate. We not only work together, we like working well together.

The Afghanistan country, to world perception, is well suited to democracy. Like Americans, Afghans are individualists. None of us defers to anyone else. We have neither had caste nor class, so persuading each other is an art form.

Our key characteristics are our openness and hospitality. We believe in equality. Even in the most traditional parts of the country, our leadership must earn rather than inherit their positions. There is a strong public conscience. People are expected to act for the common good. We love debate.

Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to introduce you to Afghanistan. We are an old country with a proud heritage and a history of trade with our neighbors. We have had bills of exchange for at least 2,000 years, and our women could write 2,500 years ago. For

at least three millennia, we have been a hub for the caravans and trade networks that spread across Asia, bringing Chinese silks and Indian textiles to ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy.

The 19th century disrupted this world, as it did in so many other places. Afghanistan became an isolated buffer caught between two expanding empires. The emergence of the Soviet Union further isolated our country, culminating in the 1979 invasion and the subsequent war of resistance.

Today, however, the isolation is over. First, awareness is growing that Afghanistan is, quite literally, the heart of Asia. Asia cannot become a continental economy without us. Asia, in the next 25 years, will have its 1869 moment—the year that the East and West Coasts of the United States were joined through the transcontinental railway—but this completion of a new, interconnected Asia cannot happen without us. We are in the midst of 3½ billion people, and we should be able to export something and not just import.

Our fragmented geography can once again become the opportunity for integrating central, west, east, and south Asia into a network that supports stability and prosperity over a vast swath of the world's surface. Diplomatic efforts to advance integration can free up cross-border trade and support multicountry investments in energy, transport, and water; and this, again, is beginning. The first major project between central Asia and south Asia, called CASA 1000, for transmitting energy from Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan is already underway.

I truly believe that diplomatic efforts backed by the leaders of our countries will build the peace and prosperity for south and central Asia in the same way that the common market has done so for Europe and ASEAN has done for our neighboring region to the east. We envisage an Afghanistan that in 20 years has become a hub of trade and gas pipelines, power transmission lines, railways, modern telecom, and banking services; but American support for all of these is essential, and we thank you for that commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen, if one story of our future history is bright, there is another, darker cloud that is making its way towards our country. Afghanistan's security transition took place against the backdrop of the unexpected rise of religious extremism in the Middle East. The promise of the Arab Spring gave way to the emergence of Daesh terror and collapse of states, but the changed ecology of terror could have not formed without some states tolerating, financing, providing sanctuary, and using violent, nonstate actors as instruments of shortsighted policies.

It is critical that the world understand the terrible threat that the Daesh and its allied forces pose to the states of western and central Asia. Terrorist movements, whose goal is to destabilize every state in the region, are

looking for new bases of operation. We are the front line, but terrorists neither recognize boundaries nor require passports to spread their message of hate and discord. From the west, the Daesh is already sending advance guards to southern and western Afghanistan to test our vulnerabilities. To the south, Pakistan's counterinsurgency operations, in which more than 40,000 people have already died, are pushing the Taliban from South Waziristan toward Afghanistan's border region.

Criminalization of the economy is an indispensable part of this new ecology of terror. Control over the narcotics trade is providing the financing for these groups to find weapons and recruits, blurring the lines between criminal economics and criminal politics.

Each of these groups poses a clear and present danger to our neighbors, to the Arab-Islamic world, and to the world at large. Afghanistan is carrying forward everyone's fight by containing this threat. But extremism is becoming a system, one that, like a dangerous virus, is constantly mutating, becoming more lethal, very media savvy, well financed, and thriving on state weakness and an overall lack of regional coordination.

To date, Afghanistan's people have rejected the allure of violent movements. We are willing to speak truth to terror.

Military fighting may stem the advance of extremism, but it will not put an end to the anger and hatred being promulgated across Muslim majority countries by these groups. That hatred must be challenged and overcome from within the religion of Islam.

The heart of the issue remains who is entitled to speak for Islam. Leaders, intellectuals, and those many millions of Muslims who believe that Islam is a religion of tolerance and virtue must find their voice. Silence is not acceptable.

But silence is not what the world will hear from us. Afghanistan is joining a new consensus that is emerging in the Muslim world, a consensus that rejects intolerance, extremism, and war. Scholars such as Fredrick Starr have documented beautifully central Asia's long tradition of rationalism and scientific inquiry. During Islam's Golden Age, Muslim scholars synthesized and recorded all known knowledge of the medieval world, giving the world advances in algebra, astronomy, water resource management, printing, and positive science. This is the Islamic civilization that needs to reinvent itself.

The Islamic world must understand its own gloriously tolerant and inquisitive past. It must reengage with the world openly and without paranoia of encirclement.

We, the unity government of Afghanistan, know that Islam is a religion of peace. We are responding to extremist threats by building partnerships at the global, regional, Islamic, and national levels of governance.

Globally, Afghanistan abides by international conventions and the rule of law. We are staunch supporters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is firmly embedded in our Constitution, obliging the state to achieve these rights for our citizens. We are committed to supporting our independent human rights commission, and I am pleased that Dr. Sima Samar, a tireless champion of human rights, is a member of this delegation and is today sitting in the audience of this great Chamber. And our government will join the free trade system and harmonized investment rules that build prosperity and promote peace.

Regionally, we are engaging our neighbors across Asia to build trust and trade. Afghanistan will become a platform for cooperation in a vast region that extends from India to Azerbaijan and beyond. We have already made significant headway in making the vision of the Lapis Lazuli Corridor that will link us to Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Europe into a reality. Thank you, Members of Congress, for wearing Lapis Lazuli.

The Arab Islamic world, from Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Iran, is keenly aware of the new threats, and we hope they will soon agree on a regional framework for cooperation. The recent declaration of a Council of Ulema across the Muslim world may well be a historic turning point in building that alliance.

Condemnation of terror by this largest gathering of Muslim Ulema is an unprecedented step in acknowledgment of the shortcomings of Muslim majority country governments.

Properly supported, Afghanistan is uniquely positioned to block the spread of extremism. We have none of the historical inferiority complexes that fuel the resentment against Western domination. After all, we defeated most of the empires.

With the bitter exception of the aberrant Taliban regime, Afghan Islam has traditionally been inclusive and reflective, not violent and angry. And after 36 years of conflict, our people are well-vaccinated against the seduction of ideologically based conflicts.

Our people, our children, desperately want to be normal. Ordinary is what has escaped us—and we would really like to be leading ordinary lives: to go to school and come back, to shop without being blown up, to play volleyball without being attacked. So many children I have held in my arms who have been mutilated. That must not be permitted and cannot be permitted and will not be permitted.

For Afghanistan to oppose the violence of extremists, we must turn our sights to the struggle to end the conditions that give rise to extremism in the first place. Our effort begins with the frank recognition of our problems and the challenges that we must tackle with determination and commitment.

Nearly 40 years of conflict have produced a country where corruption per-

meates our government. Until we root out this cancer, our government will never generate the trust to win the hearts of our people or the trust of your taxpayers. We will eliminate corruption.

On our second day in office, we tackled the notorious case of Kabul Bank, which for years had lay in abeyance. I am pleased to report to you that all the court systems of Afghanistan, including the supreme court, has now made a decision against these thieves and has allowed us to collect from them. And we will collect and get the public purse refilled.

Ladies and gentlemen, ending corruption and impunity are the precursors of self-reliance, but the true test will be whether we can restore the fiscal basis of public expenditure. We must create an environment where private investment, sustainable natural resources, and critical market-linking infrastructure development provide our youth with jobs, help us balance the budget, and launch the virtuous cycle that will let freed markets build our nation's wealth.

Here, I am pleased to report that we are reversing decades of mismanagement. We have just reached an agreement with IMF. But, most significantly, we are determined to create the wealth that will not make us dependent.

During this decade, we can assure you that we will be able to pay both for our security and delivery of our services.

If economic growth is the first foundation block of self-reliance, the second foundation is with the education of Afghanistan's women.

No country in the modern world can be self-reliant with half of its population locked away, uneducated and unable to contribute its energy, creativity, and drive to national development.

We have a tradition of respecting women. And let us not forget the largest trader in Arabia was the wife of the Prophet. And the greater transmitter of knowledge—the authentic sayings of the Prophet—was his second wife.

Aberrant customs do not replace the fundamental sense of justice between men and women that societies that seek fairness are built upon.

Afghan culture traditionally had space for women as leaders, managers, and traders. The gender apartheid imposed by the Taliban came from people who had grown up outside of families, in refugee camps and religious boarding schools.

Our plan for restoring women's place in society is built of three pillars that rest on a foundation of respect for the human, religious, and constitutional rights of all of our citizens.

First—and I want to spend a little time on this theme—educating women is not solely a matter of rights, important though they are. It is a matter of national necessity.

I have said in the past that educating one Afghan young girl will change the

next five generations of a family. I would not be standing before you today as an educated man had my grandmother—in exile in India who had learned to read under the British—not taken it upon herself to make sure that I would match my youthful passion for hunting and riding horses with mastering the classics in Dari and Pashto and striving to excel in foreign languages.

Thank you, Grandmother.

Afghanistan's self-reliance demands men and women who can run a modern economy. Basic health and education must reach all Afghan girls. That is a promise. But beyond providing all Afghan girls with these basic rights, we will increase to parity the number of women graduating from high schools and colleges.

Even as I address you today, in Kabul designs are already being finished for an all-women's university that will provide safe, top-quality education for the next generation of Afghan women leaders.

Let me tell you the story of Khatera Afghan, a young woman from Kandahar. Her schooling began when she braved threats of disfigurement by people swearing that they would throw acid in her face before they would let a girl attend a school. She would not be dissuaded. Her uncle threatened to disown her when she applied to university. But she stared him down.

Khatera went to the American University of Afghanistan, where she not only topped her class but, aided by a Fulbright scholarship, went on to get a master's degree from the Ohio State University.

Today, Khatera's formerly angry uncle is so proud of her that he tells his grandchildren, both little boys and little girls, that they must be as brave as their Aunt Khatera.

Khatera, like thousands of Afghan women, thanks America for those opportunities—for the primary school teachers, for the university in Kabul, for the scholarship to Ohio—that changed her life and her children's future. And she is dedicated to create opportunities for millions of other Afghans.

The second pillar is that women must have the same access to economic opportunities as men. Women's full empowerment will come about, not through global conventions or government programs, but when they have jobs and own businesses.

The United States has been a steadfast supporter of the nationwide National Solidarity Program which, for 10 years, has given not thousands but millions of poor village women their first chance to control their own resources.

Our third and final foundational belief is that a mental and cultural revolution must take place over the treatment of women in and by our society. There is no point talking about how much we respect women's honor if we let rape go unpunished or allow harassment in our streets.

We have signed the global conventions to end violence and discrimination against women; we will implement them vigorously, but work is still needed to convince our people that the protection of women's rights is part and parcel of their own quest for social justice.

I personally, as the leader of Afghanistan, am committed to working with the ulema, activists, and thought leaders of our country to bring about this mental change. Both the CEO, Dr. Abdullah, and I will insist that the officials of our government set the national standard for workplace fairness.

Thanks to your help and support, the opportunities for women are indeed changing. I am sure that many of you have seen those stunning Skateistan videos of fathers proudly taking their shiny-eyed daughters to show off their newfound skills in the ancient art of skateboarding. They are but the tip of the changes that are underway and which must be protected and advanced.

I am meeting, frequently, women who are entertaining the idea—seriously—the idea of becoming the first woman President of Afghanistan, and we will support them.

I am pleased to state that we have fulfilled our promise to name four women to the Afghan Cabinet, raising the women's share to 20 percent—still too low, but at least fulfillment of our promise.

We are determined to name qualified women as ambassadors and to increase their number as deputy ministers, and we are working hard to attract and train a whole new cadre of women technocrats into our government. I promise you that, 5 years from now, our ministries will have a whole new look to them, with women in leading positions.

We are a country of young people. The absolute majority of people are under 30 years of age. Youth are invested in the future, not in repeating the past. Jobs and engagement with the world are their first priority.

Despite all of the assistance that Afghanistan has received over the years, 30 percent of the population still lives below the poverty line, lacking even basic services such as clean water or household electricity. This cannot continue.

We have articulated a citizen's charter that will guide the investments that are needed to reduce poverty across the nation and prepare the next generation for capitalizing on the new opportunities that a thriving economy can provide.

Ladies and gentlemen, so far, I have talked about how we will achieve self-reliance by ending corruption, balancing the budget, mobilizing the energies of our women and youth, and growing the economy. Let me now turn to the elephant that is lurking in the back of the room.

We must secure peace.

Afghans have shown that we know how to fight. Unfortunately, we have inherited that skill for 3 million years.

Since as far back as the invasion of Alexander and the more modern expulsion of the Soviet Union, Afghans have shown that we will protect our country against foreign attack, no matter how steep the price or how well armed the intruder.

I have no doubt that, provided that they continue to receive equipment and training, our Armed Forces will stand firm against any efforts by outside extremists to build a base inside our territory; but we must now show that we can also bring peace.

Our strategy is built around three initiatives. The first is to use our diplomacy to build a community of nations that is committed to stability in Asia. Dr. Abdullah and I have met with the leaders of Pakistan, India, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and China, among others. Their commitment for building mutual security across nations includes ending the financing and sanctuary for extremist groups.

The second initiative is to build up the ability of our Armed Forces to project the elected government across our entire national territory. Our partnership with the United States and ISAF, now transformed into the resolute support mission, has given Afghanistan a well-trained army that is bringing the fight to the enemy. We are no longer on the defensive, but have taken the offensive.

On December 31, 2014, all combat operations were handed over to Afghan National Security Forces. General John Campbell, the U.S. commander of the Resolute Support mission, has publicly testified in this very Chamber that the Afghan Army's professionalism and morale meet all of a military man's expectations.

Thanks to our army, we will negotiate with the Taliban from a position of strength, not weakness, so that the hard-fought gains in education, health, governance, media freedom, and women's rights are not lost.

The third initiative will be our push for national reconciliation. The Taliban need to choose not to be al Qaeda and be our friend; and, if they choose to be our friend, they will be welcome to be part of the fabric of our society.

Many believe themselves to be patriots rebelling against the corruption and criminality that they saw in their towns and villages. We can deal with legitimate grievances. Provided that combatants agree to respect the constitution and the rule of law as the outcomes of negotiations, we are confident that we can find a path for their return to society.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not here to tell you a story about an overnight transformation of my country. You are too wise for such stories. Twelve years of partnership provide evidence enough that the road ahead will be difficult.

We live in a rough neighborhood. We are a very poor country. Self-reliance

is our goal. We bear the scars of the fight against the Soviet Union and the forces of fundamentalism, scars that are as much in our minds as on the bodies of the Afghan farmers and American soldiers who have fought for freedom.

Although we may be poor, we are very proud. Our goal of self-reliance is no pipedream told to pacify partners who are tired of hearing the promises that we later fail to keep. We want your know-how, the business skills of your corporations, the innovation of your startups, and the commitment of your NGOs, but we don't want your charity.

We have no more interest in perpetuating a childish dependence than you have in being saddled with a poor family member who lacks the energy and drive to get out and find a job. We are not going to be the lazy Uncle Joe.

Afghanistan can and will be an enduring success. Your support, your understanding, and your commitment to our country will not have been in vain. Afghanistan will be the graveyard of al Qaeda and their foreign terrorist associates.

Never again will our country be a host to terrorists. Never again will we give extremists the sanctuary to plan their destructive plots. We are determined to become the Asian development roundabout and the platform for the peaceful cooperation of civilizations.

Together, our two countries will finish the job that began on that clear, terrible September morning almost 14 years ago. We have the will and we have the commitment that will anchor our country in the world community of peaceful, democratic nations.

Knowing our conditions, you—the American Congress—and the American people will decide how to ensure that our common goals and interests are written into the books that will be telling the history of our shared future.

Thank you again, and may God bless the partnership between America and Afghanistan.

(Applause, the Members rising.)

At 12 o'clock and 6 minutes p.m., His Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, accompanied by the committee of escort, retired from the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms escorted the invited guests from the Chamber in the following order:

The members of the President's Cabinet;

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.

JOINT MEETING DISSOLVED

The SPEAKER. The purpose of the joint meeting having been completed, the Chair declares the joint meeting of the two Houses now dissolved.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 7 minutes p.m.), the joint meeting of the two Houses was dissolved.