

After just a couple of weeks, he was apprehended, disappeared; and, after a few months later, it was revealed that he had been tried and convicted and sentenced to death.

A young man, an American, traveling under his own name in Iran, who had served in the United States Marine Corps, was sentenced to death simply for being an American in Iran that had served this country. He is an innocent man, and he continues to languish in Evin Prison.

I am here to make it clear that the Congress of the United States and the American people are watching the Iranian Government. If, in fact, Iran intends, as they purport to do, to try to take steps to join the international community, they cannot hold Americans like Amir Hekmati as political prisoners.

Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, from JOHN LEWIS to DARRELL ISSA, have joined in the effort to raise awareness around Amir Hekmati's case. It is important that we never let this case fade into the woodwork.

I think about Amir the same way that I would think about it if my own son were being held in a prison on the other side of the world, and I know that every other Member of Congress who has been engaged in this effort feels the same way. He is one of us; he is our son, and he needs to be reunited with his family.

As we now are considering, I think, a really important moment where there have been negotiations to try to deal with Iran's nuclear aspirations—and personally, I support this direction, I support the direction the administration has gone in creating a framework through negotiation to make for a more peaceful world. It is very difficult for many of us in Congress, especially those of us who represent those few Americans being held in an Iranian prison, to view this agreement other than through the lens of that experience.

If Iran truly intends to try to rejoin the global community, they can make a very clear demonstration of their seriousness by releasing Amir Hekmati and the other Americans that they hold. We all can play a role in making that happen. I encourage everybody out there—Members of Congress, people who want to become engaged—to get to social media. Use #freeamir or #freeamirnow.

We know that the Iranian Government does pay attention to what the American people think—the Iranian citizens certainly do—and we know that we have to keep the pressure on right now. It is, as I said, very difficult for many of us who support the direction that this administration has taken these negotiations and really hope that it bears fruit, really hope that it creates an agreement that makes the world—and particularly that region—safer.

We can only really accept Iran as a member of the global community not

just by entering into this agreement, but by them joining the world community by not being a nation that can take a young man who served his country, who grew up here, was the captain of his high school hockey team, simply wanted to go to see the country that his parents were born in, and to visit the grandmother that he had never met. To hold him as a political prisoner, as a chip in a geopolitical struggle, is beyond the pale; and it is something that can't be accepted.

Please, my friends, my colleagues, join me in continuing to raise your voices to make sure that not one day passes—especially during this period where we are considering this potentially historic agreement—not one day passes where Amir Hekmati, Jason Rezaian, Pastor Abedini, Mr. Levinson, that their cases, their names, are never forgotten.

A BALANCED BUDGET FOR A BETTER AMERICA

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, on September 22, 2011, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen referred to our national debt as “the single biggest threat to our national security.”

He was correct in his statement that the United States continues to suffer from overbearing debt and, unless immediate action is taken, future generations will face unsurmountable challenges.

No one wants a future where policymakers are forced to choose between discretionary programs, like roads and bridges or educating our children, when they continue to be crowded out by mandatory spending which accounts for more than two-thirds of our annual budget.

We need a strong social safety net. We need a strong national defense. We need an America where young learners can have access to a quality education and workers can receive the skills that they need to gain family-sustaining jobs and keep businesses thriving and competitive, both domestically and globally.

Unfortunately, aspirations for a more prosperous America are not going to be achieved until we begin to get out from underneath this burden of debt.

Mr. Speaker, since 2009, the Obama administration has added more than \$7 trillion to our national debt, and today, we owe more than \$18 trillion, an amount greater than the annual gross domestic product.

While bipartisan agreements have led to some successes since 2011, Congress must continue to put forth a blueprint that aims to reduce deficit spending and provide a path to long-term fiscal stability.

Recently, the House passed a strong budget resolution that aims to reduce

spending by \$5.5 trillion over 10 years to get a handle on erroneous regulations and mandates that impede job creation and promote true patient-centered healthcare solutions.

Mr. Speaker, the critics of this plan have unashamedly claimed that Republicans “want to end Medicare as we know it.” Well, those accusations could not be further from the truth. Unfortunately, these nearsighted individuals have focused more on partisan attacks rather than looking at the long-term challenges that we, as a country, face together.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the Medicare hospital trust fund will be insolvent by 2030, which is closer than we all would like to admit.

The House Republican proposal presents a plan to save, strengthen, and secure Medicare for today's seniors and tomorrow's retirees. It makes no changes for those in or near retirement, provides future seniors with premium support, and will result in actual savings for both beneficiaries and taxpayers.

The do-nothing alternative will only serve to break promises this country has made to our seniors and places us on a road to rationing, where beneficiaries will be burdened with arbitrary caps to medically necessary procedures and care.

Mr. Speaker, I am in no way claiming this blueprint is perfect, but please be assured that I was not elected to sit idle or squander an opportunity to ensure that our great country can continue to support promises that we have made.

Moving forward, as the House and Senate begin to conference and work out the details between each Chamber's respective budgets, I will remain committed to ensuring a strong national security, economic competitiveness, and an atmosphere that fosters positive growth throughout Pennsylvania and across our great country.

We have been given an opportunity to strengthen this great Nation. Let us work toward that end, rather than vilify those who look to provide us options. Our children and future generations of Americans deserve as much.

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APRIL 16—D.C. EMANCIPATION DAY: HONOR WITH THE VOTE AND WITH STATEHOOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, during the next 3 days, I will be coming to the floor, leading up to Thursday, April 16—D.C. Emancipation Day. That is the day that Abraham Lincoln emancipated the slaves in the District of Columbia before slaves nationwide were emancipated.

Now, no resident of the District of Columbia is a slave today as in 1863,

but at the same time, the residents of the District of Columbia are not as free as the other residents of our country—our fellow Americans. In the District of Columbia, we commemorate D.C. Emancipation Day, not only to honor our forebears but to demand equal treatment from our country for the citizens who live in the Nation's Capital.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens who live right here in the belly of freedom do not have the same rights as other Americans although they pay the same taxes and more taxes—I will argue tomorrow and show you the figures—than any other Americans. They endure undemocratic interference even with their local budget—a budget for which the Federal Government, for which the Congress, contributes not one penny—and yet that local budget comes before this body without the Member who represents the local citizens—the Member whose local budget is at issue cannot vote.

As astounding as those elements of statehood are, perhaps none is more dishonorable than the continued sacrifices of Americans who live in the Nation's Capital without having the same representation as other Americans. We are known, perhaps, in the Nation's Capital by “no taxation without representation.” If there is anything by which we could be better known, it is by those who have fought and died since the war that created the United States of America, itself. Who would believe what those figures show?

In World War I, more casualties than from three States. In World War II—now, this is one city of which we are speaking—more casualties than from four States. By the time we get to the Korean war, more casualties than from eight States of the Union. All of that is disproportionate, Mr. Speaker. Finally, when we get to the last great war of the 20th century, the Vietnam war, more casualties from the District of Columbia than from 10 States.

Thousands have died—all without a vote—and yet D.C. citizens have secured the vote everywhere they have fought for their country. They secured the vote for the people of Iraq. They secured the vote for the people of Afghanistan. They secured the vote for citizens throughout Europe and the Mideast. But here, to this day in 2015—more than 150 years after Lincoln freed the first slaves in the District of Columbia—the residents of the District of Columbia are still not free. They will not be free until they become citizens of the 51st State of the United States and until their war dead are honored as the war dead of other States are honored—by going to war on the vote of the people, including of their own Representative, coming back, and being able to vote themselves.

So, Mr. Speaker, on this first day of D.C. Emancipation Week, I ask that the D.C. war dead be honored and that those from the District of Columbia who serve our Nation today be honored with the vote and with statehood.

HONORING PREVENT CHILD ABUSE KENTUCKY

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

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month and to highlight the important work of Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky.

This organization is on the front lines to make sure that Kentucky's children are raised in a safe, loving home and are not abused, mistreated, or neglected. Their staff of eight train thousands of people annually. Their parent education groups, offered in every region of our Commonwealth, serve more than 10,000 people every year. Thousands of pinwheels will blanket the Commonwealth of Kentucky this month, all with the hopes of drawing awareness of child abuse and neglect in our communities, and there is much work to do.

According to the most recent national statistics on child abuse, an estimated 1,520 children died from abuse and neglect in the United States, and that was in 2013 alone. An estimated 679,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect, and those are unique instances. Children in the first year of their lives had the highest rate of victimization, that of 23.1 per 1,000 children in the national population of the same age. Just under 80 percent of reported child fatalities as a result of abuse and neglect were caused by one or more of the child victim's parents.

This is a personal cause for me. As the father of two girls and as the former president of the board of directors for Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky, I am incredibly proud of the great work that this group is doing for Kentucky children all year long. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in thanking Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky and similar organizations around the country as we recognize the critical work of these important groups and as we recognize the importance of National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE ASKING FOR A NEW TRADE MODEL

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, the American people are being kept in the dark by the Obama administration regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

So much secrecy forces us to ask an important question: Have any of our past free trade agreements really been net positive for our Nation and helped our workers? The answer is “no.”

Whether you look at the NAFTA accord with Mexico and Canada, where we are in huge deficit, if you look at the Korean agreement, if you look at basic trade with nations like Japan, which remains a closed market, every single agreement is all negative.

Since 1976, our country has lost 47.5 million jobs due to trade deficits resulting from free trade agreements. During that time, we have accumulated a trade deficit of more than \$9.5 trillion. What a drag that is on GDP. These growing trade deficits that outsource our wealth and weaken our economy devastate communities. Carrying a massive trade deficit has hindered economic growth and has limited our economic recovery by nearly 16 percent just in this past year alone. More and more people are slipping away from the middle class as a result, with inequality at the highest levels since the 1920s. Millions of Americans are losing faith in the possibility of upward mobility.

Let's ask ourselves: What have past trade deals brought Americans?

Just since NAFTA, Americans have lost in the manufacturing sector 5 million jobs, and that is just since the early 1990s—one of every four. More than 57,000 manufacturing facilities have closed—57,000. Washing machines that used to be made in Newton, Iowa—Maytag—now are imported from Monterrey, Mexico. Hoppy bicycles that used to be made in Celina, Ohio, are now imported from Asia. Ohio knows well the cost of fast-track trade agreements that ship out good jobs and “Made in the USA” brands.

Since NAFTA, our trade balance with Mexico and Canada has gone from a \$5 billion annual surplus, creating jobs here in 1993, to a deficit of \$177 billion today. That translates into three-quarters of a million more lost jobs—750,000 more lost jobs—just with Canada and Mexico.

The quality of life for Americans has been declining under these agreements. Middle class America is shrinking as businesses have closed production and have moved overseas. Three out of every five displaced U.S. manufacturing workers have been forced to take a pay cut in order to secure any kind of job, and one out of three workers experiences a pay cut of more than 20 percent. These are among the luckiest workers, as frequently laid off workers over the age of 40 can't even find replacement work.

This is not just a problem for America. Workers in other countries are caught too, as one worker described to me, “like a lobster in a cage, crawling over one another just to survive,” contributing to unspeakable poverty and waves of desperate immigration to the United States from countries south of our border and elsewhere.

Clearly, NAFTA was a failure for America's workers. If we look at the Korean trade deal, which they said would be the salvation, it has worked exactly in reverse. We have already lost 75,000 more jobs to imports coming into our country from Korea. The exports going out have been just a trickle. In fact, our exports to Korea have gone down by 7.5 percent. The Korean agreement was hailed as a wonderful opportunity for the American economy, something we just could not pass