

have low-income women, and they will be cut off from this funding and this treatment.

All this is at risk because of Republicans' objections to Planned Parenthood providing safe and legal access to abortions. This is less than 3 percent of what this organization does. In accordance with Federal law, no Federal funds go to cover abortion services.

Another faulty argument made by Republicans is that the Nation's community healthcare centers could absorb the work that Planned Parenthood currently does.

I love community health centers, and I appreciate the work that they do because they really do serve the underserved, but the idea that these facilities would be able to provide adequate services to nearly 3 million additional people who would suddenly be without care is simply unimaginable.

Community health centers rely on other sources for affordable care to alleviate the strains of residents' needs, sources like Planned Parenthood. This is not imagined. I have seen it in the State of Texas.

I have visited community healthcare centers in the district that I serve, and they are very overwhelmed as a result of the void for healthcare services purposely created by the Republican State legislature. One of the things you always hear Republicans hollering about is how much they want to save taxpayers money.

Let me tell you something. What happened in my State of Texas in 2012, Governor Rick Perry and the Republican State legislature banned Planned Parenthood from participating in the Medicaid Women's Health Program, a joint initiative that saved Texas millions of dollars in Medicaid prenatal and delivery costs through the prevention of unplanned pregnancies.

Today, 30,000 fewer women are receiving that care, Medicaid claims are down by 26 percent, and Texas taxpayers are now paying the full price to support the State's community health centers. Republicans wasted lots of money.

Where does that leave us today? I will tell you a lot of these antiabortion groups and their political allies have created this partisan debate by releasing a series of deceitfully edited "undercover" videos casting Planned Parenthood in a negative light.

Let me tell you that these videos are a sham; they are lies, and they do absolutely nothing to help increase access to the critical services that Planned Parenthood provides for women.

Documents and testimony submitted to the Energy and Commerce Committee during a wasteful and unnecessary investigation show that absolutely no evidence exists to substantiate claims that Planned Parenthood violated the law in any way. In fact, their fetal tissue donation program is not only compliant with Federal law, but goes well beyond the law's requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my Republican colleagues to cease their fruitless fight against birth control—because we know that this is really what this is all about—and Planned Parenthood and women's health and get to the job of governing.

We all want women to have access to the health care they need to stay healthy for their family because, let me tell you, in my family and in families around the country, that if mom is not healthy, the rest of the family is not healthy.

That is why I choose to put people before politics and stand with women, families, and all the people of Texas and America in my support of Planned Parenthood.

□ 1045

OUR STRATEGY AGAINST ISIS

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

Mr. JOLLY. Mr. Speaker, 1 year ago this month, the President of the United States addressed the Nation proposing his strategy for a war against ISIS. He struggled with what the mission was. Were we as a nation engaging to degrade ISIS, to defeat ISIS, to destroy ISIS? And then the question arose in this body, at what level do we engage? Do we consider an Authorization for Use of Military Force, something that is proper under our constitutional authority?

Yet 1 year later, we have not considered an Authorization for Use of Military Force. We have not had the debate over what is the role of this body and our current foreign policy and our current national security strategy against ISIS. The only portion that we were willing to touch was the request to arm and train Syrian rebels; and this body, I believe wrongfully, authorized and appropriated half a billion dollars—\$500 million—to train Syrian rebels. Yesterday, we heard from the top commander of our forces in the Middle East that there are either four or five individuals engaged as Syrian rebels confronting ISIS—\$500 million, five people.

The President's strategy against ISIS has failed. ISIS continues to grow geographically, continues to be enriched. Russia's hand is strengthened. Iran has increasing leverage every single day. Mr. Speaker, the architects of terror today are emboldened. But they are emboldened not only by the failure of this administration's policy; they are emboldened by the failure of this Congress to do our job.

Where are we in this debate? Where is this Congress on whether or not we are going to consider an Authorization for Use of Military Force? Where are we today on the \$500 million that has now trained five people? Do we stand behind that decision as a body? I hope we do not.

The bigger question we have to ask, and it is a hard question: Are we a na-

tion at war today with ISIS or are we not? If we are, are we willing as a nation to accept the human and economic consequences that come with conflict?

The frustration you hear in my voice is the frustration we hear in the voices of the American people across the Nation every single day. It is a frustration about what this body does not do. We should be having a debate over the Authorization for Use of Military Force. I don't know how that debate turns out.

Nobody wants to go into conflict. We don't get to choose the threats that come our way. We only choose our response, and 1 year later we have no response. All this is through the lens of an agenda that we continue to fail to do.

Let's give voice to the American people on issues like border security and immigration reform, on transportation, on a budget that finally balances. The frustration is not that we haven't achieved these things; it is that we haven't even engaged in a legislative fight to begin to advance the agenda that is right for the American people.

We are elected to be custodians of the public trust, and we fail that public trust every day we fail to consider the issues that are of most significance to the American people, to honor the constitutional responsibility we have under article I. We have spent the last 2 years cloaking ourselves in the article I authority of the Congress every time the President overreaches, and we have rightfully done so; but just as we cloak ourselves in the article I authority, we have to recognize article I brings responsibility.

We have failed to honor the responsibility that we have under article I. We have an obligation to have a very hard debate about whether or not we are a nation at war with ISIS and whether or not we are doing anything in the face of the President's failed policy to actually confront the audible threat of terror of a regime that wishes to bring harm and destroy the United States of America. This body has failed to engage in that debate.

Mr. Speaker, I ask with the utmost conviction of this Member but, frankly, the people who give me the honor to represent them in this House. Let's give voice to the American people. Let's give voice to the people that we represent here in this body, and let's finally have that debate.

WE CANNOT STAND IDLY BY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to denounce the unjust sentence of almost 14 years that was handed to human rights activist Leopoldo Lopez in Venezuela. Leopoldo is pictured here in this poster with his slogan, which says, "Wanting a better

Venezuela is not a crime." Liberate Leopoldo.

Sentenced along with Leopoldo as human rights activists were Cristian Holdack, Angel Gonzalez, and Demian Martin, three students whose charge sheets include public instigation, damages to property, and arson—all false charges. Their crimes were nothing more than standing up to the regime—the corrupt, illegitimate regime—of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela and demanding a better country that would have respect for human rights, that would have freedom of the press, and that would have free and fair elections and other universally recognized rights.

As this says, demanding a better Venezuela is not a crime, except it is in Venezuela. Democracy advocates are harassed; they are abused; they are imprisoned; they are beaten; and some are even killed—yes, killed. We cannot stand idly by while democracy and due process are trampled on in our own hemisphere.

Democracies like Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile should join the U.S. in advocating for democracy and stability for Venezuela, and freedom for the many political prisoners who are languishing in Maduro's gulags. I urge the Obama administration to immediately sanction the judge, prosecutors, and those who led this politically motivated kangaroo court against Leopoldo Lopez, against these students, and against so many.

The President can use the power granted to the executive branch when we passed here in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the United States Senate the Venezuelan sanctions legislation last year. The President must act. Mr. Speaker, let's hope that he does.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to denounce so many human rights violations that are occurring throughout the hemisphere, whether it is in Venezuela or my native homeland of Cuba. As the Pope prepares for his historic trip to Cuba this weekend, he should meet with those people, like the political prisoners who share common interests of peace and justice with the Catholic Church. The church stands for liberty; it defends the freedoms of oppressed people, the freedoms to pursue one's goals and dreams without having to live in fear.

The Castro regime stands for the complete opposite. It stands for oppression, for violence, for hatred, for injustice, and I would urge His Holiness to meet with those who truly defend the values for which the church stands; people like this young man, a graffiti artist, a young man who has only known Communist Cuba as his government. His name is El Sexto. It means the sixth one, in reference to some other charges.

El Sexto has been behind bars for nearly 9 months. He has been on a hunger strike to protest the brutal Castro regime. What did he do? This is what he did. He had a picture of two farm

animals, and he put the names of Fidel and Raul on them. For that, he has been imprisoned with no contact with the outside world.

In January, another young man, a Cuban rapper named El Dkano, was sentenced to a year in prison just because he used music to criticize the Castro regime, a regime which has not unclenched its fist against the Cuban people.

Yesterday, pro-democracy leader Jorge Luis Garcia Perez, also known as Antunez, and 10 of his activists of the organization National Civic Resistance Front announced that they have begun a fast in an attempt to get a meeting with His Holiness to raise the plight of the suffering Cuban people.

These are just a few of the prisoners, Mr. Speaker, who have received harsh sentences after President Obama signed and announced this ill-fated deal with the Castro regime on December 17.

Reports indicate that the Castro regime is planning on releasing more than 3,000 prisoners in advance of the Pope's visit to Cuba, and you will think, hey, that sounds like a good idea, but let's remember this: Many of those prisoners should have never been in jail in the first place. By the way, political prisoners like El Sexto, for doing an artwork, will not be included in that number. No political prisoners will be freed, but that is not anything new, Mr. Speaker.

In 1978, Fidel Castro released almost 3,800 political prisoners ahead of Jimmy Carter's visit; in 1998, Fidel Castro released 300 prisoners ahead of Pope John Paul's visit; in the year 2011, Raul Castro released nearly 3,100 ahead of Pope Benedict's visit; yet the Castro regime has detained an unprecedented number of Cubans this year. With all of these people being freed, this year, there has been an unprecedented number of arrests in Cuba of political activists.

We can be sure that before the Pope's visit, during the Pope's visit, and after the Pope's visit, more innocent Cubans will be detained—like El Sexto—by the regime and thrown into Castro's gulags. This tactic is nothing new, and it is not indicative of a change of policy by the evil, despotic, sadistic Castro regime. It is just a political propaganda farce.

Will the Pope see this cynical move for what it is? We shall soon see, Mr. Speaker.

INVESTIGATIONS INTO PLANNED PARENTHOOD

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

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I am here this morning to speak about the investigations into Planned Parenthood and to the sale of fetal tissues. We are beginning this process in our Committee on Energy and Commerce;

and we are approaching this in a thoughtful manner, beginning these investigations as we look at life rights and focus on the lives of these unborn children and the mothers who have gone through this process.

It is so interesting to me, as we have this discussion of fetal tissue sales and what all has transpired in the selling of these tissues, that we look to science. What science has shown us is that these are not blobs of tissue; these are babies.

This weekend, I had the opportunity to go to a baby shower, and a very excited grandmother showed me the sonogram, the picture of her unborn granddaughter already named and being celebrated. As we looked at it, we could distinguish these features of this child yet unborn, but this child fully formed and developing and sleeping in her mother's womb.

There was great excitement to celebrate this arrival, and we know that this is a fight worth having and a process worth ending as we look at the selling of these fetal organs and what has transpired.

Now, everyone is familiar with what happened with Kermit Gosnell in his house of horrors, and we know there was a conviction, but what we have learned is those convictions are very rare. We have moved now to the video footage that The Center for Medical Progress released, and we see that this is absolutely sickening, abhorrent.

□ 1100

These videos have raised a lot of suspicion about what has transpired in these Planned Parenthood affiliates and clinics and questions as to whether they have systematically and repeatedly broken laws.

Obtaining informed consent for fetal tissue donation, how was that approached? Killing infants born alive after an attempted induced abortion, who are the persons entitled to legal protection here?

As you look at a botched abortion and you have a child born alive, all of a sudden you have got two patients there that you are considering.

Dr. Deborah Nucatola, Senior Director of Medical Services for Planned Parenthood Federation of America, describes harvesting human tissues. In one of the videos, she talks about crushing this part or the other part of the baby in order to get a good specimen.

To listen to her callous description and her casual manner is sickening, but it also may violate some of the Federal laws which prohibit alteration of abortion procedures to obtain fetal tissue.

In another video, a technician says:

I'm sitting here and I'm looking at this fetus, and its heart is beating, and I don't know what to think. I don't know if that constitutes it's technically dead or it's alive.

Imagine that. This baby, if it had arrived in a hospital with a NICU and doctors surrounding it, there would