

on diversity in hiring. She made it very clear that she had our community's interests at heart when she said, "Yo hablo Español" in her beautiful British accent.

Most of the news coverage of this meeting was about when she used the term "illegals" to describe immigrants, which, in case you need a reminder, is not a good idea when you are meeting with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Well, forgive me for not noticing just how much progress NBC was making on diversity when some of the most visible people of color at NBC, like Alex Wagner, Melissa Harris-Perry, and Jose Diaz-Balart, are disappearing.

But let's be clear: this is not about quotas, window dressing, or checking the diversity box. Journalists of color bring a different texture and a different perspective on what issues matter and what should be discussed and debated on television.

The reality is that our Nation has become more diverse, and our television and our news media and our political institutions, including the Democratic and Republican Parties, have not kept up.

When NBC has a bad year when it comes to race, or when the Oscars have a couple of bad years when it comes to people of color, these are moments to talk about and confront the emotions and ideas we all have—we all have—about race and ethnicity.

It is a good time to think about what the phrase "e pluribus unum" really means in America today. This is a discussion we should all be having all of the time here in this body, on news programs, and in entertainment. It is a discussion I hope every family is having at their dinner table.

TAMMY BATEMAN'S STORY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. JENKINS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JENKINS of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, every West Virginian knows about the consequences of the war on coal. We see it everywhere we go: mines are closing; school districts are laying off employees; county commissions are forced to lay off deputy sheriffs; retailers are going out of business; mom-and-pop stores are struggling, barely able to hang on.

A pink slip doesn't mean just a loss of a job. It means a loss of a way of life; it means hard choices; and for some it means having to leave West Virginia entirely to find work elsewhere. The war on coal is killing West Virginia jobs.

Tammy Bateman and her family had to make a difficult decision. It changed the life of every member of her family, in particular that of her daughter. Tammy is a West Virginia coal voice. This is her family.

Here is what Tammy wrote to me:

"My husband worked for Cecil Walker Machinery for over 20 years at the

Logan branch in West Virginia. We have lived here for all of our lives.

"Due to the declining coal industry, we had to move to another State and move our daughter from the school that she loves.

"We have a lot of friends and family that have either had to pack up and move away also and some that have stayed and have been laid off and are suffering.

"This is all due to Obama's war on coal. You see, when coal is affected, so are small businesses, schools, and much more, especially people's livelihoods."

Mr. Speaker, the people of my district want to work. They want a paycheck to provide for their families. They want a better future for their children.

Thanks to the war on coal, thanks to the EPA's regulations putting coal mines out of business, West Virginians are suffering. This administration needs to put West Virginians back to work, not put West Virginians out of work.

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, today a bipartisan group of several dozen Members from both sides of the aisle led by ADAM KINZINGER and me were going to be sending a letter to Secretary Kerry, and I am pleased to say we don't have to send it.

The origin of the request dealt with our military operations in the Middle East, the brave Iraqi and Afghan men and women who provided sensitive and trusted services to United States military personnel. For over a decade, I have been working to try and protect them.

These Iraqis and Afghans who worked with Americans, whether as drivers or interpreters, were shoulder to shoulder with our troops, often in dangerous circumstances. In some instances, we have heard how their services literally made the difference as to whether our soldiers lived or died.

Now, thousands of our allies who helped us, face kidnapping, torture, and murder as a direct result of their assistance provided to the United States because members of the Taliban and the self-proclaimed Islamic State and other hostile elements on the ground see these individuals' service as an act of betrayal—and they have long memories.

To reward their faithful service and to fulfill our moral obligation, I have worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle and with Senators, starting with Senator MCCAIN and the late Senator Kennedy in 2007, to create a special immigrant visa program. Known as the SIV program, enables the safe relocation of these Afghans and Iraqis to the United States.

Since 2007, our bipartisan team in Congress, including a number of Members who have recently joined us who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and know these circumstances firsthand, has been working to reform and revise the program, sometimes fighting just to keep it alive.

In November of last year, the National Defense Authorization Act extended and expanded the Afghan SIV program to ensure the continued protection of these souls. However, the final version of the bill also lengthened the period of service from 1 to 2 years required for individuals "submitting a petition after September 30, 2015."

The State Department's initial announcement on the interpretation of the law would have made more than 3,000 of our Afghan allies who had already begun the cumbersome application process start over to demonstrate the 2 years of qualifying employment. That is why Representative KINZINGER and I prepared this bipartisan letter to call on the State Department to revisit the interpretation.

Thankfully, after review and consideration of the concerns from Members of Congress, the State Department agreed to apply the 2-year requirement only to new applicants. This is welcome news.

Every hour that is delayed to relocate these vital partners to safety, puts their lives at risk and lives of their families. I am glad we have put this behind us perhaps, but we cannot keep operating in this inefficient manner while our allies and their families face consistent threats.

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They deserve better. And we can do better.

It is shameful that we cannot better serve those who have put their lives on the line to help us. It seems that there is always another roadblock that occurs.

This should be a bipartisan issue that Members of Congress and the administration can work together on to save lives. It is not just saving the lives of the people who helped us.

It ensures the safety of our troops and other American personnel currently serving in harm's way. It will ensure the success of our future missions. No one in their right mind will cooperate with American forces under dire circumstances if we abandon them after their vital assistance.

I applaud the State Department's reinterpretation of this work requirement and look forward to working with my colleagues on the SIV program improvements this year. I hope we can do a better job to meet our responsibility to these souls who risked so much to help Americans.

REFORMING OUR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LANCE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANCE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of reforming our Nation's broken mental health care system.

Too often we are reminded that the country's mental health care system is not working nearly as well as should be the case. Many Americans hide behind the curtain of shame and insecurity while many others lack access, assistance, or even information on how they may receive treatment.

It is a vicious cycle, where the vulnerable who need the most care are instead left out of society, unemployable, and, in some cases, a danger to themselves and others.

Recent data suggests that fewer than one-third of Americans with diagnosable mental illness actually get treatment. Experts also estimate that more than half of those who suffer from severe mental disorders do not receive treatment in any given year.

At least 25 percent of returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan will experience some type of mental health condition. We owe our servicemen and -women and veterans this effort to get them the care they need and deserve.

I am proud to partner with Democratic Congresswoman DORIS MATSUI of California, with whom I serve on the Energy and Commerce Committee, in recently introducing a bill to significantly expand access and strengthen community mental health and behavioral health services across the country.

The Expand Excellence in Mental Health Care Act aims to expand mental health care planning grants in two dozen States, including New Jersey, through an initiative based on our 2014 Excellence in Mental Health Act that was signed into law by President Obama in 2014.

This measure is directly tackling one of the most significant mental health care challenges: access. The Expand Excellence in Mental Health Act will enable more States to experiment with the tools and practices to fix this broken system.

By expanding the law to include more States, we encourage greater collaboration and testing to find out what solutions work, how best to care for those who need treatment, and what we can do to keep the people of the United States safe.

The Excellence in Mental Health Care Act is one of the most significant works Congress has already passed into law on mental health care. We should expand it and keep the momentum going.

I am also proud to be working with Republican Congressman TIM MURPHY of Pennsylvania on this issue. Dr. MURPHY, who has a Ph.D. in psychology, has been using his expertise to lead a serious discussion in the House Energy and Commerce Committee on this critical issue.

His Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, which I am proud to cosponsor, takes a clinical approach to

supporting families and individuals undergoing sudden or long-term mental health crises. The bill views those who need care through the mental health lens, not just through the criminal justice system.

Our work on these bills is part of a larger conversation on improving mental health care in this country. These bills will help struggling families who seek the best care for their loved ones. It will help those who fear stigma to get the care they need and will give our servicemen and -women and veterans the care they deserve.

I urge support for these measures, and I welcome all good ideas to the table for reforming our mental health care system.

CELEBRATING GEORGE ZANDER'S LEGACY

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

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and celebrate the life of a magnificent human being, remarkable leader, and close personal friend, Mr. George Zander of Palm Springs, California.

Many in our community knew George as a strident advocate for equality. George was a gentle man with a burning passion to make our Nation a more perfect Union, particularly for our LGBT brothers and sisters.

In my years working in the Coachella Valley, I, like so many others in our community, knew George as a colleague, adviser, and, above all, a dear friend.

George left this world on December 10, 2015. Nonetheless, his vision, passion, and vigorous strength to fight for a more just Coachella Valley, a more just Nation, and, ultimately, a more just world, are what remain.

George's legacy is one of social justice. For over three decades, he was actively engaged in the communities that make up the desert of the Coachella Valley. He was a leader among us and steadfastly guided our community toward a more inclusive and welcoming place.

So today I would like to take a moment to memorialize the life of George Zander, whose legacy will live on for future generations, not just in the Coachella Valley, but in the history of our Nation.

As a young man, George heeded President Kennedy's call to service and joined the Peace Corps, where it became clear that he was a natural leader.

His leadership and advocacy for the LGBT community spanned decades and began in a time where it was far less politically or socially acceptable to do so, but that didn't stop him.

In Seattle, Washington, George was a member of the first openly gay and lesbian association, called the Dorian Group. This vanguard organization advocated for the advancement of the

rights of LGBT individuals at a difficult time in our Nation's history.

It took great courage, but George was never one to shy away from taking a stand. George had a passion for public service and a sincere faith that our representative government plays a role in improving lives.

He worked alongside his good friend, Seattle's mayor Ed Murray, was chair of the King County Democratic Party, and worked for the 1996 Clinton-Gore campaign. Later, moving to San Francisco, he worked side by side with Cleve Jones, another prominent LGBT rights activist.

From Washington to San Francisco, to our beautiful desert in the Coachella Valley, George made an enormous impact. After moving to the Valley, he worked in the office of the great Senator BOXER.

He was a member of the Palm Springs Police Advisory Board, the Palm Springs Police Department LGBT Outreach Committee, and vice chair of the Warm Sands Neighborhood Organization.

George was a contributor for the LGBT publication, *The Bottom Line*, cofounded the Desert-Stonewall Democrats, and later became the Palm Springs field officer manager for Equality California.

George played a key role in advocating for laws that protect the LGBT community locally and statewide, working tirelessly to defeat proposition 8. He also collaborated with other local LGBT groups, such as the Palm Springs Human Rights Campaign, the LGBT Center, Desert AIDS Project, and Trans Palm Springs.

Mr. Speaker, George was a true leader who was the victim of a hate crime weeks before his death. I condemn these acts. There should be no space for these types of actions toward any human being, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

For more than three decades, George spearheaded efforts advocating for human rights and equality for all in my district and across the Nation.

George was not only an extraordinary leader, activist, friend, and husband, but, overall, a gentle, loving, and caring human being.

In honor of George Zander, let us pay our respects and never forget his legacy. Let us continue fighting for a more just and tolerant world.

THE NEED TO STAND UP AGAINST ASSAD AND RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES

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

Mrs. BROOKS of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, last week a U.N. panel released a deeply troubling report on the grave and horrific atrocities taking place across Syria. The report was mandated by the U.N. Human Rights Commission to investigate and record all violations of international law since March 2011.