

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.

The report outlines in painstaking detail the mass human rights abuses that innocent civilians must endure from both the Russian-backed Syrian offensive and terrorist groups like ISIS.

Hospitals are deliberately targeted—33 in Aleppo alone—resulting in mass civilian casualties. In blatant disregard of core human rights law, starvation has systematically been used as a weapon of war.

Over 450,000 people are currently trapped in besieged towns and villages in Syria, and thousands are at risk of starving to death.

Schools and playgrounds and other public spaces are routinely shelled to inflict the maximum amount of terror on innocent civilians. The report tells of attacks on a girls school in Duma, where 19 civilians were killed. Even though there were no military objectives, government forces attacked the school twice, the second attack taking place during first aid evacuation efforts.

Last month Secretary Kerry helped negotiate a temporary, 2-week cease-fire with Russia that was supposed to end the fighting and allow for the delivery of aid to besieged towns.

Unfortunately, like the deal we struck with Russia on Assad's use of chemical weapons, this cease-fire merely locks in the gains achieved by the Assad regime and gives Russia outsized influence in shaping the future of the Middle East. Regardless, the terms of the agreement were almost immediately violated.

Any hope of a sustained peace was dashed this week with the almost-immediate and predictable breach of the cease-fire agreement.

On Sunday, the Syrian opposition released a letter documenting violations of the cease-fire agreement by the Assad regime, Russia, and Iranian-backed militia, which I will include in the RECORD.

FEBRUARY 28, 2016.

H.E. Mr. BAN KI-MOON,
*Secretary-General,
United Nations, New York.*

EXCELLENCY SECRETARY-GENERAL: I regret to inform you that hostilities committed by Russian, Iranian, the Syrian regime, and foreign militias and mercenaries allied to them have continued against the Syrian people despite the truce taking effect on the 27th February 2016.

Right from the onset of the truce, a large number of violations have been committed by the regime and its allies in several parts of Syria. The regime has continued to target populated areas using helicopter raids to deploy explosive barrels, resulting in a large number of fatalities and causing significant injuries, most of whom were innocent women and children. There were seven recorded incidents of such breach. Furthermore, there have been twenty-four recorded breaches involving artillery shelling and five incidents recording offensive ground operations. Recorded breaches of the truce were registered in twenty-six different areas held by the moderate opposition.

Moreover, today, Sunday 28th February, Russian fighter jets launched twenty-six air strikes against territory held by opposition

groups which have announced and entered into the truce. Disturbingly significant is the fact that cluster bombs as well as thermobaric weapons were deployed, adding to the number of innocent civilian fatalities and horrifying injuries.

In light of repeated breaches by the regime and its allies since the commencement of the truce, the growing number of fatalities, which currently stands at twenty-nine documented deaths, in addition to the dozens who have been injured as indiscriminate targeting of populated areas continues, we wish to clarify the following:

It is most unfortunate that the Russian Ministry of Defense presented an erroneous map riddled with false military information (<http://youtu.be/MaYvEidSzsSent>) and attributed this map to the United Nations for calculated political and military purposes, as purported areas of political influence and distribution of forces on Syrian territory. The sole purpose of that exercise was to exclude certain areas from the truce and to continue their systematic bombardment and forced displacement. Given the serious consequences of these violations on the Syrian people and on the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, we urge that you take the necessary measures to respond and counter false Russian allegations and put a stop to such practices.

We call on the United Nations and the Friends of Syria Group to be mandated to specify the territory covered by the truce to prevent hostilities in the designated inclusion zones, such a task must be assumed by an impartial and transparent party. We also note that the absence of clear separation lines will result in the targeting of civilian populated areas by the regime and its allies, and henceforth constitute yet another flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions jeopardizing the truce.

Although the Syrian opposition groups have demonstrated maximum levels of self-restraint and have thus far continued to adhere to their obligations to the truce, it seems likely that the regime and its allies' persistent crimes against the Syrian people will inevitably undermine international efforts for the continuation of the truce.

We have agreed to the temporary truce as a response to sincere international efforts aiming to ease the suffering of the Syrian people and to assist in the implementation of the humanitarian provisions of UNSCR 2254, in particular: articles 12, 13 and 14. Failure to achieve any significant progress in this regard will leave us no option but to examine alternative measures to ensure the protection of the Syrian people and bring an end to the crimes committed against them. It is therefore of critical importance for the Security Council to stand firm and unwavering in its resolve.

The persistent violations of the regime and the forces allied to it will undermine Security Council efforts for a political process, including the most recent, UNSCR 2268. It is abhorrent to pursue a political process through which the suffering of the Syrian people is used as a means to achieve political and military gains; under such circumstances, negotiations will be unfeasible.

Excellency Secretary-General, the gravity of the situation, and the consequent clear and direct threat to peace and security at a regional and international level, require the United Nations to intervene immediately, to stop the crimes committed against the Syrian people and to preserve the unity and integrity of Syria.

Yours respectfully,

DR. RIAD HIJAB,
*Coordinator General, The High
Negotiations Committee.*

Mrs. BROOKS of Indiana. These violations discussed in this letter are com-

prised of barrel and cluster bomb attacks and a number of ground incursions against opposition groups who had entered into the truce.

In the first 2 days alone, there were more than 29 documented deaths, mostly of women and children, and dozens of injuries. This is during the alleged cease-fire.

Some believe that this far-off conflict isn't affecting communities across America. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say they are wrong.

I routinely meet with Syrian Americans in Indiana who share stories of the devastation their loved ones are experiencing back in their homeland. Listening to them recount the struggles of their families reminds me that, if we are to adhere to our values as a Nation, we must defend the vulnerable and expand basic human liberty.

Standing idly by as bombs rain down on hospitals or as Assad uses starvation as a method of warfare is an abdication of what we stand for as a Nation, but that is exactly what we have done.

This President's insistence on diminishing American power abroad has empowered Putin to step into the leadership vacuum, has bolstered Assad in Syria, and has prolonged the conflict.

We must not succumb to difficulty. We must take a stand and start meaningfully engaging our allies and strengthen the moderate Syrian forces, like the Kurds on the ground, to fight to replace the Assad regime.

Both my constituents and the Nation's top military advisers know that doing so is the only way to bring any long-term stability to Syria.

□ 1030

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY'S ACCESS TO WATER

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

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about one of the most important issues facing the San Joaquin Valley, and that is the access to water.

California has received well-above-average rainfall during the months of December and January. But for the past several weeks, we have seen dry conditions, once again, come back.

For the last several weeks I have tried to speak on behalf of the need to make changes so that we can urge the Federal agencies to pump water at maximum levels that are allowed under the biological opinions, so that we could bring more water to the San Joaquin Valley and the farms located south of the delta.

It is welcome news that they are pumping at more robust levels, and it is my hope that we will continue to pump at maximum levels when allowable, especially because these El Nino conditions that we have had in December and January are now fading, sadly.