

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for over the last decade, I have been working with a bipartisan group to deal with helping some of the foreign nationals in Afghanistan who helped Americans' mission be able to escape the tender mercies of the Taliban and others with long memories. These are men and women who helped us as guides, as translators, people who provided on-base security, construction workers, and truck drivers—a vast array of people who helped us with our vital mission. As we have scaled down and moved on, it has left these people vulnerable. We have example after example where the Taliban and al Qaeda have threatened them, have attacked their families, held them for ransom, tortured them, and, in some cases, killed them.

We have implemented a Special Immigrant Visa program that has enabled over 8,500 people to get to safety to protect themselves and their families. I have witnessed some of these tearful reunions where a guide returned, was able to escape to the United States, and united with the person, the soldier, whose life he saved. This happens time after time.

Unfortunately, the process is hopelessly tangled. It is slow, and it is bureaucratic. We have over 10,000 people still in the pipeline. Every year we struggle to be able to have sufficient visas authorized to be able to help thousands more who are at risk.

We have the National Defense Authorization Act that is coming forward that would pose another problem to help those who put their faith in us. This version would leave out all individuals who worked with the State Department and the USAID—critical parts of our mission in Afghanistan. It would leave off all the on-base staff who worked in direct support of the Department of Defense, people who did construction, firefighters, on-base security, maintenance, and administrative support, people whose services were vital and whose service to the United States is well known and who are at risk.

We are hopeful that as this bill comes to the floor that the House will be able to work with us to modify these unnecessary restrictions, to give more time to process and allow more people to come to safety.

We have a moral obligation to protect people who put their lives on the line to support Americans in these troubled areas. I would hope that we would, once again, be able to make necessary adjustments to be able to try and help more come to safety.

I have been working with my good friend ADAM KINZINGER, who represents some of the newer Members of the House who actually served in theater,

who are committed to helping people whom they saw help us.

I would hope, as the process comes forward, we can consider amendments to be able to reduce some of these restrictions; and then I hope, as it works its way through the legislative process to the Senate that does not have anything in their version of the bill speaking to the Special Immigrant Visas, that we will be able to do our job to make sure that we are not having people at risk, their families threatened, and undermining the credibility of the United States.

Remember, around the world, foreign nationals help us with our missions; and if we send a message that we are not going to stick with them when the going gets tough, then they are going to be much less likely to help us wherever it is in these trouble spots. America will be more vulnerable as people who have already helped us are at risk. We can do better.

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

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

Mr. ZELDIN. Mr. Speaker, as a nation, supporting our veterans must always be one of our highest priorities. These brave men and women who willingly and selflessly put their lives on the line while defending our country deserve the highest quality of life and care once they return home.

According to the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency, there are 83,254 veterans who live in my home county of Suffolk. With the highest population of veterans by county in New York State and one of the highest populations in the country, there is a significant need for increased care options for our veterans in Suffolk.

There are so many options of quality care for veterans, but too often their choices are limited. Quality care can also come at great expense.

In an effort to expand access to care for our veterans, I recently introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress, H.R. 2460, which would ensure that 70 percent or more service-connected disabled veterans are able to receive adult day health care, a daily program for disabled veterans who need extra assistance and special attention in their day-to-day lives. It comes at no cost to the veterans and their families because the program is defined as a reimbursable treatment option through the Department of Veterans Affairs. This legislation has strong bipartisan support in Congress, with over 45 cosponsors, including the entire Long Island congressional delegation. My bill would greatly expand this great option of care for veterans on Long Island and across the country.

Just last month, on April 20, 2016, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee hosted a hearing of the Subcommittee on Health regarding my bill, and on April 29, 2016, the Health Sub-

committee held a markup and favorably forwarded my bill to the full committee for final consideration before being sent to the House floor for a vote.

Working with my colleagues in the House and various veterans service organizations, I will continue pushing to get this bill passed out of committee in earnest to allow this bill to come to the House floor this year.

While serving in the New York State Senate, I secured the funding necessary to create the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Program, a peer-to-peer support program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. PFC Dwyer, from Mount Sinai, New York, received nationwide recognition for a photograph that went viral showing him cradling a wounded Iraqi boy while his unit was fighting its way up to the capital city of Baghdad. Sadly, after returning home and struggling with PTSD, PFC Dwyer died in 2008. Created in his honor, the Dwyer Program was initially launched in the counties of Suffolk, Jefferson, Saratoga, and Rensselaer. Since 2013, the program has expanded to over a dozen counties across New York.

Earlier this year, I introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress, H.R. 4513, that will expand the Dwyer Program on a national level so that every veteran in the U.S. eventually has access to a peer-to-peer support group. This bill has strong bipartisan support, including the entire Long Island congressional delegation. I will continue working together with them and others in the fight to expand the Dwyer Program.

Additionally, on the east end of Long Island, working closely with the Peconic Bay Medical Center and VA, I secured an east end healthcare facility for veterans and their families at Peconic Bay's Manorville campus.

After so bravely serving our country, this facility provides an important new option for veterans, increasing access to care for those who live on Long Island's east end, while still allowing them to continue receiving other services and ongoing treatment at the VA hospital in Northport.

□ 1015

There is so much more that Congress can do to improve the quality of life for our veterans. I will continue working to ensure that my bills that previously passed the House are signed into law, including H.R. 1569, to protect the benefits of deceased veterans, and H.R. 1187, which would eliminate the loan limit that the VA can guarantee for a veteran.

Congress also must continue to reform the VA wherever it underserves a veteran. A recent series of USA Today articles reported that VA supervisors in multiple States instructed employees to falsify wait times. They must be held accountable. This is a slap in the face to our vets.

Just last year the House took a step forward by passing the VA Accountability Act of 2015, H.R. 1994, legislation that I cosponsored that would make important reforms to the VA system, which will provide the necessary resources and the flexibility the VA needs to hold poor-performing employees accountable.

While I believe that the VA has 99 percent of employees generally caring about the work they do and want to help veterans, we must always ensure that the other 1 percent of those who are not acting in the best interest of veterans are held accountable. Our veterans deserve only the highest quality of care at our VA facilities.

Fighting for our veterans who fought for us always has been and will always be one of my top priorities. I will continue my work in Congress to improve our veterans' quality of care in any way that I can.

RECOGNIZING KEY WEST FIRE DEPARTMENT

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

Mr. CURBELO of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Key West Fire Department on their Class 1 Insurance Service Office rating, the highest achievable rating that a fire department can attain.

They are 1 out of fewer than 200 departments in the Nation to receive this score, which is based off of a multitude of factors, including training, response time, and how well they are equipped.

This rating also helps by providing residents with the lowest fire insurance rates possible, something I am sure that all Key West residents appreciate.

I commend Fire Chief David Fraga and the entire Key West Fire Department on their diligent work and their devotion to keeping everyone in Key West safe. We are very fortunate to have a strong team of firefighters protecting us.

RECOGNIZING FLORIDA KEYS MARATHON AIRPORT

Mr. CURBELO of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the Florida Keys Marathon Airport for officially becoming an international airport on April 20, 2016.

For 8 years the staff has worked to attain this clarification. It comes as no surprise to me that they were able to achieve this feat. I commend the Florida Keys Marathon Airport on receiving this well-deserved designation. This airport will provide additional travel options for the families living in our community and the millions of tourists who visit south Florida every year.

Congratulations to Mayor Senmartin, Vice Mayor Kelly, council members Zieg, Coldiron, and Bartus, and city manager Chuck Lindsey and, also, former Mayor Ramsey and former city manager Mike Puto, all who worked very hard to make this a reality.

RECOGNIZING OFFICER MARIO GUTIERREZ

Mr. CURBELO of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Miami-Dade Police Department's own Officer Mario Gutierrez, who received the Medal of Valor, the highest decoration of honor given to public safety officers in the United States.

In 2013, Officer Gutierrez was on a routine call when he noticed an individual exhibiting strange behavior at a gas station near Miami International Airport. As Officer Gutierrez approached, the man attempted to light a gas pump on fire. In an attempt to disarm the assailant, who was holding a knife, Gutierrez received several stab wounds that nearly cost him his life.

Had the assailant been successful in causing a mass fire, many lives may have been lost on that day. Officer Gutierrez went above and beyond the call of duty to protect the members of our community. We thank him for his service, his selflessness, and his bravery in the face of danger.

Officer Gutierrez, thank you. You are a true hero.

RECOGNIZING MR. BRIAN REEDY

Mr. CURBELO of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mr. Brian Reedy, a seventh grade visual arts teacher from Zelda Glazer Middle School in my south Florida congressional district.

In 2014, Mr. Reedy became the visual arts instructor at Zelda Glazer and, in only 2 years, has propelled the program to national recognition. Mr. Reedy has received numerous accolades for his work at Zelda Glazer, with his fellow teachers referring to the work of his students as magnet quality. His classroom, however, does not require an application to enter like many art magnet programs in south Florida. Any student can register.

Students have had their art pieces showcased from local shows in Miami all the way to the New York Scholastic Art Awards. What is even more impressive is that Mr. Reedy works with a wide range of talents, including those just getting started to people who have been painting for many years.

As a former Miami-Dade County School Board member, I always appreciate and support teachers who encourage our youth to explore their passions in life, and Mr. Reedy does just that. It is an honor to recognize Mr. Reedy for his great work at Zelda Glazer. I look forward to both his and his students' future successes.

HONORING NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

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

Mr. STEWART. Mr. Speaker, along with many of my colleagues, I rise today to honor National Police Week.

One of the favorite things that I get to do as a Member of Congress is to ride with police officers as they go about their duties, and from St. George

to Salt Lake City I have had the opportunity to do this.

Sadly, many in our society, particularly among the press, have become highly critical of law enforcement officers. Now, I recognize that not all law enforcement officers are perfect. People make mistakes. We all do. But we can't let the mistakes of a few tarnish the name of such a noble and a brave profession.

Such criticism of police efforts doesn't come without a cost. It forces the officers to pull back, to become overly cautious, and to view every encounter that they may have through the prism of a lens of a media event.

What is the result of this? We now know that crime rates have been rising across the country. Interestingly and sadly, they are rising in some of the poorest communities, the communities that most need the help of an effective police force.

Now more than ever we need brave men and women who are willing to serve and to protect. As I have said, I have had the chance to go on several ride-alongs with several police departments. Again and again I have been impressed with their hard work, their professionalism, and their willingness to put themselves at risk to protect other people.

There is a great example of this. I am reminded of the heroic actions of Officer Hone, a police officer who in the last year saved two young girls in Salt Lake City. A disturbed man who had recently been released from prison and was on drugs broke into the home of two sisters, both of them college students. He began to viciously attack them. He took a knife and attempted to take their lives.

Fortunately, Officer Hone was in the area, heard the screams of these young girls, and just seconds before the intruder expected to take the life of one of them, this heroic officer quickly diffused the situation, literally saving her life.

Bree, the sister who was saved, said of this officer, "He was so professional and calm. Right when we made eye contact, I knew I was safe. It's a miracle that he had so much composure. He was our angel."

This is just one example of the thousands of courageous police officers we have in America. I am proud to live in a country where professionals are ready to put their lives at risk in order to serve and to protect members of their community.

Let us honor these police officers, their courage, their selflessness, and their dedication. Let us honor them not just this week, but, frankly, all year round for the sacrifices they make for us.

HONORING SALLY CLARK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS) for 5 minutes.