

Few enjoyed la dolce vita of Caracas more than Wilmer Ruperti, a businessman who earned Mr. Chávez's loyalty in 2002 when he helped break an oil strike. Mr. Ruperti was a familiar sight in Caracas, riding in an armored Jaguar accompanied by two North Korean bodyguards. The magnate cemented his friendship with Mr. Chávez by buying a pair of Simón Bolívar's pistols for \$1.7 million in a New York auction and presenting them to the Venezuelan leader.

Last year, Mr. Ruperti paid the multi-million-dollar legal fees for the criminal defense of Mr. Maduro's nephews. At the same time, Mr. Ruperti's firm won a \$138 million contract from the state oil company. Mr. Ruperti said it was his patriotic duty to pay the nephews' legal fees as a way of relieving the pressures on Mr. Maduro. He denied any link between the payment of the fees and the state oil-firm contract.

Corruption helps the government maintain political control. And no tool has been more effective than exchange controls, initially adopted by Mr. Chávez in 2002 during a national strike to control capital flight. Fifteen years later, they have reshaped Venezuela's economy and given the government enormous power to pick who gets dollars from the country's oil wealth—often at absurdly low rates.

For instance, firms and others who import food get dollars at the official rate of 10 bolívars. But they can turn around and sell those dollars on the black market for 8,300 bolívars.

Venezuela's army recently got the rights to set up its own mining and oil companies, and the armed forces are in charge of most critical imports. In 2016, 18 generals and admirals were tasked with importing key foods and sanitary items. One brigadier general was put in command of acquiring black beans; another was charged with acquiring toilet paper, feminine napkins and diapers. Logically, an admiral was placed in charge of acquiring fish.

No one knows how much money has been lost. Mr. Giordani estimated that a third of the \$59 billion that the government handed out to companies to bring imports into the country in 2012 might have ended up in fraudulent schemes.

"It's a terrible economic model, but it's great for politics and power," says Asdrúbal Oliveros, a prominent Venezuelan economist.

The opposition and the regional governments don't know how to turn the tide. An Organization of American States resolution this week urging Venezuela to return to democracy was supported by every major country in the hemisphere but blocked by Venezuelan allies like Nicaragua and a handful of statelets like St. Kitts and Nevis.

Many in Venezuela hope that parts of the army haven't been tempted by money and will want to honor the country's democratic past. Ibsen Martínez, who helped write some of the country's most beloved soap operas, says that hope is likely in vain.

"The army is now a criminal organization," he said in an interview from Bogotá, where he now lives in exile. "But in every culture, there are mythical creatures. In Venezuela, it is the idea of an institutional military man, who will come out like Captain America to resolve everything." That instinct, he added, led to Mr. Chávez in the first place.

His revolution's mournful impact can be seen everywhere. Venezuela's national baseball league now plays to empty stadiums and is considering suspending this year's season. The Teresa Carreño theater, an architectural masterpiece in Caracas, used to produce some of the region's best operas and dramas; it now mostly hosts government rallies. In the nearby Caracas Museum of Contem-

porary Art, water drips into buckets near paintings by Picasso and Mondrian. The museum is so empty that a thief replaced a Matisse portrait with a fake without anyone noticing for several years.

Alberto Barrera, the author of a biography of Mr. Chávez who now lives in Mexico City, thinks that the time is fast approaching when he and the opposition may need to say goodbye to their hopes. "I wonder when I will wake up and realize, 'They beat us.' That it's all over and the county I knew is gone," he said.

Mr. FASO. Mr. Speaker, it is vitally important that we stand up on this Fourth of July, not just for democracy here in the United States, but for democracy in other parts of the world as people are struggling.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues, and Happy Fourth of July to all of our countrymen around the United States of America.

TRUMPCARE IS A DEVASTATING BILL

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, as we go home to commemorate the birth of this Nation, to wish all well, we would hope we would be able to go home by feeling comfortable that the administration was taking care of the American people.

We have come to find out that the EPA is reversing a decision of the Obama administration to allow a pesticide by the name of—trade name Lorsban, that is chlorophyll-based, to be utilized on fruits and vegetables.

I understand the needs of farmers, but there are documented studies that indicate that it may have a significant impact on the brain function of little children as young as 7 years old.

Where is the care of the Nation by this administration?

And then, they are planning a healthcare bill that will see this young lady lose her healthcare.

In my district, 89,000 people will lose their insurance when they cut \$854 billion out of Medicaid; 16,000 will be children.

Where will the hospitals survive if they are closed in rural and urban America, and where will the seniors be when their nursing home puts them out because the Medicaid that has been for working seniors but now retired in nursing homes who rely on Medicaid?

The TrumpCare bill in the Senate is a devastating bill. We need to have an administration that takes care of the American people.

RECOGNIZING THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UTICA OBSERVER-DISPATCH

(Ms. TENNEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. TENNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 200th anniver-

sary of the Utica Observer-Dispatch. Founded in 1817, the Utica OD was one of only 421 papers in the country, and the fifth newspaper founded in New York State.

For the past 200 years, the Utica OD has kept our region informed through quality reporting on important issues impacting our local community.

As an unwavering member of the fourth estate, the Utica Observer-Dispatch had a leading role in exposing the inner workings of our once organized crime-influenced city. For this dedicated service on this very issue, and its campaign for justice against corruption, the Utica Observer-Dispatch was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1959.

I commend the Utica OD for its 200 years of steadfast reporting, and I encourage the Observer-Dispatch and its committed members of the fourth estate to continue with its stated mission, to keep our citizens informed through impartial investigative reporting.

Also, on a personal note, when I was a teenager, I actually delivered the Utica Observer-Dispatch, and it was an honor to do it and a small way for me to start off my earning a living.

So I just want to thank the Utica OD and congratulate them again on 200 years.

THERE IS NO HEART IN THE SENATE HEALTHCARE BILL

(Mr. LOWENTHAL asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Mr. Speaker, the Senate version was supposed to be the one, according to the President, with heart. There is no heart in this bill.

Sixty percent of my constituents live in Los Angeles County which, in total, has about 5 percent—one county in the country has about 5 percent—of this country's Medicaid recipients. The proposed Senate bill cuts to Medicaid would put more than a quarter of those currently receiving Medicaid assistance in L.A. County, nearly 900,000 people, at risk for losing health insurance.

This is not a healthcare bill. This is a tax cut for the wealthy, dressed up to look like serious legislation. The rich get richer, while everyone else is left to get poorer and sicker.

This is not who we are as Americans.

A BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION

(Mrs. MURPHY of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. MURPHY of Florida. Mr. Speaker, today, I will become the first House Democrat in Congress to introduce a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. My bill will prohibit the Federal Government from spending more than it receives except in the case of war or recession.

Democrats and Republicans may not always agree on the best way to balance the budget, but we all care about our country and our children, and both are at risk unless we rein in our unsustainable deficits and debt.

In 45 of the last 50 years, the Federal Government spent more than it received. The Federal debt has ballooned to over \$14 trillion. That is 77 percent of GDP, a figure that is expected to reach 150 percent in 30 years if we do not change course.

Just as every family is expected to balance their budget, so, too, should the Federal Government. This is about taking responsibility and making tough decisions, exactly what our constituents elected us to do.

A balanced budget amendment will compel Congress to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, when it comes to being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. I hope my colleagues on both sides of aisle will support this bill.

ISSUES OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor and privilege to address you here on the floor of the United States House of Representatives and have an opportunity, in this great deliberative body, to bring up the subject matters of my choice, and the purpose is to inform you and the American people.

Before I go into the topics that I am prepared to speak of, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS).

MEANINGFUL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 115TH CONGRESS

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for kindly yielding and allowing me to take a few minutes to have a little bit of reflection with the American people as we head into the Fourth of July weekend.

Mr. Speaker, despite widespread cynicism from Washington elites and those in the media, the 115th Congress and President Trump have taken meaningful action over the past 6 months to improve the lives of hardworking Americans.

According to a recent analysis, this Congress has been the most productive in the modern era. By June 8, we had passed 158 bills, compared to the 60 bills by the 103rd Congress under Bill Clinton, 67 bills by the 107th Congress under President Bush, and 131 bills by the 111th Congress under President Obama.

President Trump has signed 39 bills into law, including 14 bills passed under the Congressional Review Act, stopping harmful regulations handed down by the previous administration. According to one analysis, repealing these rules could save the economy millions of hours of paperwork, nearly \$4 billion in regulatory costs to the

Federal agencies, and an astounding \$35 billion in regulatory costs for the private sector.

We sent to the President, and he signed, legislation to bring accountability to the Veterans Administration. And the House has acted to stop ObamaCare's job and freedom-crushing mandates, and acted to put a critical safety net program on a sustainable path.

The House also voted to repeal and replace Washington's Financial Control Law, Dodd-Frank, to get capital flowing to our small businesses and to improve choices for consumers.

The past 6 months have been a strong start, and I look forward to the House continuing its work to advance important goals of strengthening our economy and creating jobs.

CELEBRATING OUR NATION'S BIRTHDAY

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, every year at this time, our Nation celebrates our birthday. It is the perfect time to reflect on the founding of our country and the principles that made our Nation exceptional.

□ 1800

At the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, President Kennedy, in his inaugural address, reflected on our founding principles.

JFK said: "And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the State, but from the hand of God."

President Kennedy understood the words of our Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

A little more than 100 years before President Kennedy's inauguration, our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, defended the Declaration and taught all those around him, as well as future generations, how to revere and embrace unwaveringly the sacred and transcendent truths expressed in this monumental document.

Lincoln said in 1858: "Now, my countrymen, if you have been taught doctrines conflicting with the great landmarks of the Declaration of Independence, if you have listened to suggestions which would take away from its grandeur, and mutilate the fair symmetry of its proportions; if you have been inclined to believe that all men are not created equal in those inalienable rights enumerated by our chart of liberty, let me entreat you to come back. Think nothing of me, take no thought for the political fate of any man whomsoever, but come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence. You may do anything with me you choose, if you will but heed these sacred principles."

Today, Mr. Speaker, let us recommit to the principles set forth in our Dec-

laration, that all are endowed by your Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And let those who have admired the leaders of our country who have reasserted these principles, from Lincoln to Kennedy, join together and continue to fight for the protection of these God-given rights, especially the first right, "the right to life."

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak. I thank the gentleman from Iowa for having extended to me this opportunity to share these thoughts with the American people.

Mr. KING of Iowa. I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania for his presentation in bringing this topic together in a way that he has. And in his method of addressing the Declaration of Independence on the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, I would expound on that as well.

Life is the most paramount. It is a priority right, and our Founding Fathers knew what they were doing. They set up life as the first priority, liberty as the second priority, and the third priority was the pursuit of happiness.

Mr. Speaker, I will start from the bottom because, of the three, I think it deserves the most explanation. That pursuit of happiness is often viewed as maybe a fun tailgate party or a bliss of some kind or maybe a barbecue outdoors with the family, the things that we love. That is the enjoyment of our life.

The pursuit of happiness, as it was understood by our Founding Fathers, came from the Greek word "eudaimonia." And that is spelled, E-U-D-A-I-M-O-N-I-A. And under the Greek word "eudaimonia," it means developing the whole human being. And it is not just the mental well-being, but it is developing the intellectual human being, the physical human being, the knowledge base that is there, and the spirit within us, and our theology and our souls—the whole package of what we are as human beings, developing that to the maximum, these God-given gifts, developing them for his glorification, and that is the concept of the pursuit of happiness that our Founding Fathers understood.

So the principle is that we have a right to pursue happiness, developing our whole human being, which includes the human enjoyment that we think of when we say pursuit of happiness.

But no one in their pursuit of happiness can trample on someone else's liberty because liberties are God-given. And the liberties that we have cannot be subordinate to the pursuit of happiness, but they are subordinate to the life of others because life is the most sacred.

Human life is sacred in all of its forms. It is the number one paramount right. So the protection of human life is the principle and is the highest priority in the Declaration of Independence.