

This mandate is so significant that just the county government taxpayers in New York State pay more in State-mandated Medicaid costs than local taxpayers in the 49 other States combined.

People are fleeing upstate New York because of high property taxes, and New York's Medicaid mandate is one of the reasons for that exodus.

The second initiative which I advanced was to preempt the absolute liability standard for gravity-related construction site accidents on federally funded projects. Again, New York stands alone among the 50 States in this absolute liability standard.

The fact is, this standard doesn't protect workers and adds approximately 7 percent to the cost of every building project in our State. With multi-billion-dollar projects like Gateway needing Federal support, it is critical that we use the preemption power to finally end this waste of taxpayer dollars and use those savings to rebuild and repair more infrastructure.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I must comment on the state of our political discourse in the United States. We all need to renew our efforts to conduct our debates on public issues in a civil and respectful fashion.

There is no doubt that the fragmented media and a general decline of standards has coarsened our public debate. There is plenty of blame to go around for this situation.

I encourage all those who hold elected office to recognize that we hold a sacred trust from the American people. We should uphold this responsibility in an honorable and dignified fashion and renew our efforts to improve the quality of public debate in the United States.

In doing so, we will renew our commitment to make a more perfect union. Moreover, we will give honor to those who have sacrificed to win and maintain these freedoms which we cherish.

The Constitution is forever our guide, and we should always remain true to it. We must also continue to promote individual liberty, the rule of law, and the dignity of all of our citizens. These are the characteristics of America that make ours a truly great Nation.

May God continue to bless the United States of America.

#### CAESAR SYRIA CIVILIAN PROTECTION ACT

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

Mr. KINZINGER. Mr. Speaker, we have got a lot of really important issues we talk about every day out here. I want to talk about something that is happening a few thousand miles away but affects us all. I want to talk about what is going on in Syria.

Mr. Speaker, I remember back, I think, in 2011 being in Israel and stand-

ing in the Golan Heights and looking over towards Syria, and our guide at the time made the comment that there is a little disturbance over there. There was some concern about where that was going to lead, and we all know what has happened since.

There is a lot of attention focused on Yemen right now, but in Syria there are 500,000 Syrian civilians who have been killed by a brutal dictator, Bashar al-Assad, 50,000 of which are children. Some of those children, in spectacular displays, were murdered by the use of chemical weapons, and I give great credit to our President and this administration for responding, as an America that believes in morals and strength should, by bombing and destroying some of the facilities that did that and holding to our red line.

But the war hasn't stopped, and the egregious nature of the war continues. I actually believe that the nature of that war is creating another generation of terrorists, people who feel that they don't have hope, people who feel that they don't have opportunity. And when hope and opportunity don't exist, people turn to extremes, and this is one case.

I want to talk specifically, though, about a really sad situation, a lady from Chicago, an American citizen, Layla Shweikani, who was murdered by the Assad regime. She was Chicago born and, a few years ago, basically made the decision that she had a passion for the people of Syria and decided to go and be an aide worker in Eastern Ghouta.

Two years ago she disappeared. We know that she was put into Assad's prison camps and tortured for 10 months—an American, by the way—before being transferred to a military court.

Unfortunately, a few weeks ago our worst fears were confirmed: Miss Layla was actually tortured to death and executed on December 28, 2016, the first American we know who was tortured and killed by Bashar al-Assad.

We know there are other Americans in captivity, and we know this is something that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, there are some in our Government, in this Chamber and in the other Chamber, that express sympathy to Bashar al-Assad and believe the antiquated theory that oppression of civilians is the only way to prevent terrorism.

I would argue that, in an age of information, in an age of knowledge, oppression only leads to more terrorists. Oppression leads to hopelessness, to a lack of opportunity, and to turning to the only option they know at that time, which may be ISIS or al-Qaida, because they don't see any other opportunity or hope.

Mr. Speaker, these people in our Government who express sympathy, while I believe that is something they have to answer with their creator ultimately someday, I am curious now what the response of everybody is when we find

out that an American woman was tortured and killed in the prison camps of Assad.

We have a bill called the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. Caesar was a brave hero from Syria who took tens of thousands of pictures of torture victims of Assad, smuggled them to the United States, brought them in front of my committee in Foreign Affairs, and showed some of these pictures.

There was an act that would sanction many members of the regime that was passed unanimously out of Foreign Affairs, passed out of the House, largely supported in the Senate, and is being held up by a junior Senator from Kentucky.

I call on the other side of this blessed Capitol to pass the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act. I call on the administration—as they said they support this—to sign this, put this on the Resolute desk.

We talk a lot about the importance of women and equality, and I couldn't agree more; but in that debate, I think it is important to remember that, in Syria, an American civilian woman was tortured to death.

We look in places like Afghanistan and know the oppression of women that occurred there. We know that America stands for something greater, and it is not just through the use of the military but through what we believe and what we stand for and the light that we shine.

Mr. Speaker, this is a terrible situation, Miss Layla's death, but let us learn from it and let us go forward, and let the people of Syria be free.

#### ONE DAY AT A TIME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, once again I rise, and still I rise, a proud American, always proud to have the preeminent privilege of standing in the well of the Congress of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today reflecting upon the words, the lyrics, if you will, of a song that many of us have heard. The lyrics, as I paraphrase them, are:

One day at a time, one day at a time, sweet Jesus. One day at a time. Just help me to make, just help me to take, one day at a time.

Many of us who are sons of the segregated South survived, to a certain extent, understanding the lyrics of "One Day At a Time," knowing that, if you just take one day at a time, it can become a lifetime.

Sons of the segregated South learned early that they had to compromise.

I saw something on television yesterday that caused me to reflect on all of these things, Mr. Speaker, when I saw a President who was born into plenty, not poverty, a President who was born with a pat hand, a President who was born into a life unlike that of the sons of the segregated South who were African American, who understand how to

negotiate and what negotiation is all about—of necessity they do. Not all, but generally speaking they do.

I saw a President yesterday, Mr. Speaker, who proclaims himself to be a great negotiator. Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was revealed to many of us that what he sees as negotiation is dictation, a President who sees compromise as capitulation for the other side, who has always walked into his opportunities, if you will, knowing that the other side would have to give in or he would muscle his way over them.

□ 1045

Well, I am proud to say that two Members of the Congress of the United States of America, the House and the Senate—it is what the Congress consists of—two Members stood their ground. Speaker PELOSI—and I say Speaker PELOSI because once you are a Speaker, you are always a Speaker—and Minority Leader SCHUMER did not allow themselves to be dictated to. They understand that compromise is the methodology by which we can realize significant change.

I am proud of the two of them, and I am proud to say to you that, as a son of the segregated South, I saw hope when I saw them take a stand for the American people, take a stand for justice, take a stand for the great ideals that we all stand upon.

One day at a time, Mr. President, one day at a time, and we will have dealt with all of the great issues of our time.

But I am proud to know that you will find, Mr. President, that negotiation is more than your being a dictator, that you are going to have to compromise if you want to realize some of the great things that we have to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time, and I thank the creator of all of creation for giving me this one more day, and I pray that I will do better today than I did yesterday because I still see life as one day at a time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President of the United States.

#### HONORING SERGEANT DYLAN ELCHIN

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

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Air Force Staff Sergeant Dylan James Elchin, who gave his life for our country on November 27, 2018, while serving in Afghanistan.

Dylan was born in 1993 and raised in western Pennsylvania, graduating from Hopewell High School in 2012. Military service was already calling him at a young age as he read of special operations when he was 14 years old. He enlisted upon graduating from high school.

The commanding officer of Dylan's 26th Special Tactics Squadron said

Dylan “had an unusual drive to succeed and contribute to the team. He displayed maturity and stoicism beyond his years and was always level-headed, no matter the situation.”

Dylan leaves behind a grieving fiancée and family, and we as a nation, more than 300 million strong, must now stand behind them and all who have fallen for our country.

May Dylan rest in the peace of God, and may his fiancée and family know his tender mercies.

#### HONORING ARMY SERGEANT JASON MCCLARY

Mr. ROTHFUS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Army Sergeant Jason Mitchell McClary, a western Pennsylvania native who gave the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the line of duty.

Sergeant McClary grew up in Export, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Lillie, graduated from Kiski Area High School in 2013. A true patriot as a student, Jason dreamed of serving his country.

In January 2014, he achieved his dream and enlisted in the Army. Jason went on to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning two Purple Hearts and three Army Commendation Medals, including one for valor and one for combat.

Tragically, this courageous soldier was taken from us too soon. On November 27, 2018, Jason was injured from an IED explosion and died 5 days later, leaving behind two little sons, a heartbroken wife, and a grieving community of family and friends.

Jason is fondly remembered as a loving father, devoted husband, and hard-working soldier.

May the good Lord welcome home this son of western Pennsylvania with open arms, and may He bless Jason's family with peace and consolation.

#### RECOGNIZING CONGRESSMAN GREGG HARPER

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize my colleague and friend Chairman GREGG HARPER for his service to Mississippi's Third Congressional District in the House of Representatives.

GREGG and I were elected to Congress in the same year, 2008, and we were friends from the start. And while he will retire at the end of this year, his contributions will be long remembered.

At the beginning of the 115th Congress, GREGG was selected by the Speaker of the House to serve as chairman of the House Administration Committee. He has had vast oversight and administrative responsibilities in the House and other institutions.

Perhaps most notably, GREGG worked to completely overhaul House policies and implement mandatory sexual harassment training for everyone from Members to interns. He worked to change the culture on the Hill, and he

said: “It has to be understood that taxpayers are not going to be responsible for someone's bad behavior.” And that is GREGG HARPER, a man of high character, always working to do the right thing.

GREGG has also dedicated much of his congressional life to that of advocating for those with intellectual disabilities. Mr. Speaker, 8 years ago, he founded the Congressional Internship Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities.

This program partners with George Mason University's LIFE Program to connect students with disabilities to congressional offices for a semester-long internship. Students get to help office staff with administrative tasks, special projects, and they truly become part of the team.

When GREGG started the program, just 5 congressional offices participated. Today, there are nearly 200 House and Senate offices that host student interns.

GREGG, whose son, Livingston, has special needs, designed this program to not only give students exposure to Capitol Hill offices, but also to give Members and staffers the experience of working with individuals who are living with various types of disabilities.

My office continues to participate in this program, and we have hosted many students from George Mason University. It has been a wonderful experience for me and my staff, and I encourage all my colleagues to join the program next Congress.

Mr. Speaker, it will be bittersweet for me to say good-bye to my friend GREGG HARPER, but he has left his mark on this institution, and his contributions will be remembered for generations to come.

GREGG will return to Mississippi to spend more time with his wife, Sidney, their children, and his first grandbaby, a little boy named Lee. Chairman HARPER is being promoted to Grandpa HARPER, and I know that that will be his greatest role yet. I wish him the best in his next chapter of life.

#### PERMANENTLY FUNDING SUPPORT FOR 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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

Mr. ZELDIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our 9/11 first responders and their families, urging all Members of Congress to support passage of the Never Forget the Heroes Act, H.R. 7062, which would permanently fund the 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund and extend its authorization to 2090.

Regardless of party affiliation and regardless of which district or State you come from, it is imperative that right out of the gate of the next Congress, starting next month, that this legislation is immediately passed and sent to the President to become law.