

on the floor and this will not take long. The first is Diana Banda. This is her photo. Diana was brought to the United States in 1993 at the age of 3. She grew up in Oregon and dreamed of being a first responder. She volunteered with the American Red Cross at her community emergency response team. During her senior year in high school, Diana was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Thankfully, after a long struggle, she is cancer free. After her recovery, Diana is more determined than ever to pursue her dream. She is enrolled in a firefighting and paramedic program at the community college in Salem, OR. These students qualify for no Federal assistance. When they go to college, they pay for it out of their pockets. They sacrifice more than many students because they are determined to get an education.

Diana sent me a letter. This is what she said about her dreams for the future:

Although I love Mexico because it is the place I was born, I could not pack my things and move back to a place I know nothing about, a place I only know through old baby pictures and family stories.

Diana says:

America is my home. This is the place I love where everyone and everything I know is. I know nothing outside the United States. Whatever punishment I must pay, I am willing to do. All I ask for is a chance. Better yet I beg for a chance to prove that I am not a criminal, that I have much to offer this beautiful place.

Should we deport Diana Banda, a cancer survivor, a future paramedic, back to Mexico, a country she left behind when she was just a toddler? Should we accept her invitation to punish her? For what? For being part of the family who brought her here at the age of 3? It was not her decision; it was her parents' decision. Rightly or wrongly, she is in the United States. When you look at this photo and realize she could be part of our future, we realize what the DREAM Act is all about.

Let me introduce you to another dreamer. This is Monji Dolon. Monji's parents brought him here from Bangladesh in 1991 at the age of 5. As he grew up in his new home, Monji immersed himself in the study of computers and technology.

Monji wrote me a letter and said as follows:

For as long as I can remember, I have had an intense passion for technology. In middle school, that passion led to spending many nights constructing remote-controlled model and Van de Graaff generators. In high school, I fell in love with computers and the Internet, spending my senior year creating an online newspaper for my school.

Monji did not know about his immigration status until he started applying for college. He asked his parents what he should say in terms of his immigration status. That is when Monji learned he was undocumented. In 2008, Monji graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an outstanding school. Again, let me put in

the record, these students who graduate from college do it facing sacrifices many students don't. They get no Federal assistance, none. Monji's prospects are limited, even though he graduated from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, an outstanding school, and he is being courted by the technology industry. They want to hire this bright young man. He has even been offered a job as a lead engineer for a startup company in Silicon Valley. Monji's prospects are constricted because of his immigration status. The DREAM Act would give him a chance to pursue his dreams and contribute his talent to the only country he has ever called home. Here is what he told me:

I've turned down several great job offers from reputable companies because of my status. The DREAM Act would let me take my passion for technology to the next level by allowing me to move to Silicon Valley and pursue my dream as an Internet entrepreneur.

When you look at some of the most amazing technology in America today, you will find that many times it is the product of immigrants who came to this country and created companies that employ thousands of people. I do not know if Monji will be one of those persons. I think he deserves a chance. Would America be better off if we sent him back to Bangladesh, a country he has not been to in 20 years? Of course not.

There is so much discussion about America's economic future in the 21st century. Every year, with all these H-1B visas, we bring in talented people from overseas while at the same time our laws banish these talented people I just talked about back to countries they have never known as they have grown up. We could use people with Monji's talents in America. We can use them in technology, as we can use Diana's talents in the field of medicine.

I first introduced this bill 10 years ago. Since then I have met so many immigrant students who would qualify. As are Diana Banda and Monji Dolon, they are America's heart. They are willing to serve our country, even risk their lives for our country, if we would just give them a chance.

I urge my colleagues in this political town, this partisan town, on this issue: Let's put it aside. Let's support basic justice and fairness. Let's give these kids a chance. I am willing to stake my reputation as a Senator on the fact that America will be a better place when the DREAM Act becomes law.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, first of all, I didn't come to the floor for this purpose, but I would be remiss if I didn't thank the distinguished Senator from Illinois, the Democratic whip, for his incredible commitment and passion to this issue. I have seen him just about every session take time out of every day to both dramatize and put a human face on this opportunity to turn

some of America's greatest prospects into opportunity and prosperity for this entire country. I am thrilled he has adopted various of my lines, and I am honored by it.

It is true; these young people came to this country through no choice of their own. The only country they have ever known is the United States of America. They put their hands on their hearts and pledge allegiance to the United States, and the only National Anthem they have ever learned to sing or believe in is "The Star-Spangled Banner."

We have a tremendous opportunity. I wish to thank the distinguished Senator for his incredible commitment to this issue. I appreciate it very much.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to speak about something that I very passionately believe in, and that is my view in support of a significant and sustained reduction of American combat forces in Afghanistan beginning this July.

In short, I believe the time has come to move from a strategy of counterinsurgency to one of counterterrorism—a strategy that would rely on our specialized military forces to continue to engage those who present a real and continued threat to the national security of the United States and one that would allow us to bring home a majority of troops serving in Afghanistan.

After September 11, almost a decade ago, we were clearly justified in intervening in Afghanistan to defeat al-Qaida and bring bin Laden to justice for the atrocities they committed against Americans on our own soil. I supported President Bush at that time in that effort. I have a standard that if I am willing to send my son and daughter to fight for America on behalf of the Nation's national security interests, I will vote to send anyone else's sons and daughters. Not so in Iraq where I did not believe it was in the national security interests of the United States; and if I won't send my son and daughter, I won't vote to send anyone else's sons or daughters. But in Afghanistan nearly a decade ago, that is where the perpetrators of September 11 were, and it was the right engagement. Our original goals have largely been met in that respect.

Today, even according to the Director of the CIA, fewer than 100 members of al-Qaida remain in Afghanistan. Since September 11, we are painfully aware that the world is a different place, and we will always have to be vigilant. But the current threat simply does not justify the presence of 100,000 American troops on the ground. Bin Laden is dead, having hidden for years in Pakistan in plain view of the ISI, Pakistan's intelligence force, and the Pakistani military.

Clearly, the issue at hand is about terrorism not insurgency. Terrorism is a borderless issue represented by the

unimpeded movement of the Taliban into Pakistan and a safe haven in Abbottabad for al-Qaida's leader. In finding bin Laden and bringing him to justice, we have struck a serious blow to al-Qaida's network that permits us to now reconsider our mission and the wisdom of pursuing a broad and open-ended strategy of nation building in Afghanistan because, make no mistake about it, what we are doing in Afghanistan is nation building.

This is interesting. I have heard speeches on the Senate floor and in my previous service in the House by many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle about how we should not be nation building, as though that is not a vital national interest. Well, that is exactly what we are doing. The costs of our current strategy are too high in lives lost, in futures unraveled by injury, and in taxpayer dollars spent.

Mr. President, 1,500 brave men and women have lost their lives in Afghanistan. Almost 12,000 have been wounded in action, at a cost—a continuing cost—of \$10 billion a month—a month. Nonmilitary contributions to Afghan reconstruction and development from 2002 to 2010 have reached \$19 billion—a number which is expected to surge as we transition to a civilian mission. But at the same time, reports from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which I sit, and from the bipartisan Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan place our billions of dollars in investment at risk of falling into disrepair because of inadequate planning to pay for the ongoing operations and maintenance; not to mention that from my own perspective, \$19 billion later, I don't know what we have achieved in Afghanistan.

In my mind not only are the costs and lives and treasure far too high, but there is a growing consensus that absent a very long and sustained commitment involving many troops on the ground, we can't win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people or, for that matter, even President Karzai who, in my view, has not proven to be a good partner. Karzai most recently suggested that the U.S. and NATO forces risk becoming an occupying force that would be, in his words, ousted from the country—all of these lives later of American troops lost. To do what? To have a counterinsurgency effort. Which is what? Fighting insurgents to give the Afghan Government the opportunity to sustain itself, to defend itself, to govern itself, and we are an occupying force? We are an occupying force?

We have to ask, even if we are willing to make the enormous economic commitment required to build a democracy and to fund the necessary security elements at the cost of tens of billions of dollars per year, what is the likelihood of our success?

The Afghan Government is corrupt. Our working relationship with President Karzai continues to be challenged. Today I believe he made some other

comments—either today or yesterday—again, that malign the very Nation that is there defending them with the sons and daughters of America, with the National Treasury of America—in a country that, by the way, has \$1 trillion of precious deposits of various minerals that, if properly pursued, would be able to fund the Afghan Nation for years to come.

When they gave out their first contract, who did they give it to? Not the Nation that has defended them but the Chinese who have done nothing to stand up for the Afghan people.

So I look at a government that is corrupt, our working relationship with Karzai crumbling, our focus on building security forces challenged because its membership largely excludes Pashtuns in the south, which is the base for the Taliban. I am not certain there is any amount of money or a plan that can work under those circumstances. It seems to me for every Taliban fighter we kill, buy off, or convert another one will take his place, and more and more will stand up to fight an enemy that is perceived as infidels. I am not certain a counterinsurgency strategy is anything but counterproductive.

It is clear to me the present course is unsustainable, creates dependency, breeds corruption, and ignores the fact that at some point Afghanistan will have to stand on its own—on its trillions of dollars in mineral deposits—and build its own future. We are spending \$10 billion a month on a counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan that does not have a clear path to a definable victory. I am not certain a counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan does anything but feed and grow the insurgency.

In short, I am not certain a counterinsurgency strategy is a winnable strategy. Therefore, it is my belief we need a tailored counterterrorism strategy to achieve and protect our national security interests and meet our broader fiduciary responsibilities. Since 2001 we have invested over \$50 billion to help stand up a central government in Kabul and fund reconstruction projects across Afghanistan. So \$26 billion has gone to standing up the Afghan security forces, including an additional \$11 billion this year. To date, the Afghan National Army now stands at 164,000 men, and the Afghan National Police Force at 126,000. So combined, the Afghan National Security Forces now stand at 290,000 men strong.

We can't forever be the overprotective parent. The time has come to allow Afghans to secure their own future, to draw on the 290,000 men who have committed to securing their country's future, and to allow them the opportunity to defend their Nation and their people.

The fact is, Afghanistan is a rugged, multifaceted country with a long history of complex tribal relationships. It faces almost unprecedented challenges in building a vibrant, independent, and,

hopefully, democratic nation from the rubble of more than a quarter century of war. We can guide a process to provide necessary, achievable, and sustainable assistance to bolster their efforts—and we should—but it is up to the Afghan people to stand up to a government and a security force and to develop their own counterinsurgency effort.

Our primary goal—the goal that was crystal clear on September 12, 2001—was to address the imminent terrorist threat to America and America's interests. The phrase was “to drain the swamp and address the new threats we face.”

The Taliban is a threat, but they are not the threat we rallied to address. Any counterterrorism strategy we employ now can necessarily deal with any Taliban issues that would be a threat to American security. But the primary threat to America and to American interests is posed by al-Qaida. It is a threat that is stateless, borderless. The notion that if we deploy enough forces in Afghanistan we will somehow lessen that threat, in my view, is farcical and falls on the conventional Washington wisdom that more is better.

In my view, better is better—a mission better focused on the threats, with specialized troops better trained to better locate and better destroy terrorist hideouts; a mission with resources better spent on projects that are necessary, achievable, and sustainable. In short, we need a better, not a bigger, mission.

In my view, we must accelerate the transfer of nation building and nation protecting to the Afghan people and their government. We must remain ever vigilant and ever prepared to protect our national security interests and eliminate any new terrorist threats that emerge. We should continue to identify areas where our advice and assistance can strengthen the Afghan Government and the institutions of democracy. But our mission should be one of counterterrorism, not counterinsurgency.

We need to concentrate our resources on the real threats in the region—threats to U.S. citizens and U.S. interests and threats that could destabilize Pakistan and place nuclear materials at risk, which would be a very real and present threat to national security and the security of the region—a threat we cannot abide.

We entered Afghanistan to address a threat vital to the national security of our country. By reforming our mission, targeting our unique military resources, and refining our assistance mission to focus on sustainable and achievable outcomes, we can achieve that goal with fewer troops and less money.

For those reasons, last week I joined with my distinguished colleague Senator MERKLEY of Oregon and many other Members in urging the President to begin a sizable and sustained reduction in U.S. combat forces from Afghanistan this summer. It is time to

bring our men and women home. It is my belief this is the best and most responsible policy for America—a policy that seeks to protect our national security while meeting our fiduciary responsibilities, and serving the interests of the service men and women and their families who have sacrificed so much on behalf of a grateful Nation. It is time. It is time.

With that, I yield the floor.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this year, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. I am pleased that today, June 20, the international community is celebrating World Refugee Day, an important opportunity to recognize the continuing plight of the millions of refugees around the world who deserve our protection.

It is also a moment to celebrate the accomplishments of refugees who have been resettled and are building new lives in the countries that welcomed them.

The theme of World Refugee Day 2011 is “Real People, Real Needs.” This theme reminds us that each individual refugee has a story to tell. Every refugee has experienced persecution, causing him or her to flee a home, a community, and a nation, because the circumstances are so dire that flight is the only option. Conflicts around the world are displacing persons, such that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees now counts over 43 million persons who have been forced from their homes, which include refugees, internally displaced, and stateless persons. For many of the world’s 15.4 million refugees, resettlement is the only hope they have of rebuilding a stable life and home.

The United States has long been committed to resettling refugees, but our resettlement program was strengthened by the enactment of the 1980 Refugee Act. Over the past 30 years, more than 2.6 million refugees and asylum seekers have found safety in the United States. And since 1989, almost 5,600 refugees have been resettled in my home State of Vermont. We are fortunate to have the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, with its decades of experience and award-winning volunteer program, leading this effort. Over the last 5 years, many of these new Vermonters have come from Bhutan, Burma, and the Congo. Their culture is enriching my historically Anglo Saxon and French Canadian State.

Throughout this challenging time, I have remained proud of the role that our Nation plays in protecting refugees abroad and in helping many resettle in the United States. In a time of tight budgets, I was pleased to be able to protect funding for refugee assistance and resettlement programs in the fiscal year 2011 appropriations continuing resolution, when many other programs were cut.

The United States is a leader in international refugee protection. I am proud of that commitment and will work to ensure our government maintains this strong financial and political support. There is more that we can do, however.

I regret that the United States is not in full compliance with its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Changes to the law and a handful of court opinions issued in recent years have eroded protections for some of the most vulnerable asylum seekers.

Last week, I reintroduced the Refugee Protection Act, S. 1202, to restore the legal foundation of the United States for protection of refugees and asylum seekers. The Refugee Protection Act will correct serious shortcomings in current law, such as the overly broad definition of material support for terrorist groups.

The Refugee Protection Act does not diminish the rigor of security and background checks of incoming refugees, but it recognizes that the current law sweeps in a large number of persons who were victims of persecution at the hands of terrorist organizations, not supporters of those terrorist groups.

The Refugee Protection Act also repeals the 1-year filing deadline for asylum seekers in the United States. This deadline was unnecessary when it was added to the law in 1996 and remains unnecessary now.

Under court decisions interpreting our law, certain groups of asylum seekers can face improperly high barriers to protection. For example, the Board of Immigration Appeals has required seekers who base a claim on persecution of their social group to show that the group is “socially visible.” This requirement is not a part of the statute or implementing regulations. Moreover, it is unnecessarily onerous for certain groups who take great pains to conceal their membership in the social group. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered individuals from certain countries may have to hide their identity to avoid physical attacks or extreme social isolation. Women from certain cultures must conceal that they have not been forcibly circumcised or face the threat that tribal leaders will subject them to this violent and dangerous practice.

Our law grants asylum to those who have experienced persecution or have a well-founded fear of future persecution. Therefore, courts should not require these individuals to risk serious harm by exposing their membership in the persecuted social group in the home nation. Social visibility may be a factor in some cases, but must not be a baseline requirement to prevail on an asylum claim.

I thank Senators LEVIN, AKAKA, and DURBIN for their support of the Refugee Protection Act of 2011. I also thank Representative ZOE LOFGREN for introducing a companion bill, H.R. 2185, in the House of Representatives.

I hope that on World Refugee Day others will join us in helping to reform our domestic laws to help the victims of persecution worldwide.

LUKAS ROBERT CORWIN

Mr. LUGAR. Mr. President, as we discuss and debate the future of medical care for all citizens in our Nation, it is appropriate to take a few moments to salute heroes who make a truly life saving difference.

June 3, 2011, was a very special day for me and my wife Charlene. We received the joyous news that a great-grandson, Lukas Robert Corwin, had been born in Riley Hospital for Children, Indianapolis, IN. I was privileged to visit Lukas early in the morning on the next day and to congratulate his proud parents, Jonathan and Christie Corwin.

At that time, we had been informed that Lukas would require heart surgery in a few weeks and would probably remain in the hospital until the date of surgery. Suddenly, just 2 weeks after his birth, it was apparent that Lukas could barely breathe and that his heart rate had dropped into the 40s. His evening nurse performed oral care. Dr. Turrentine determined that the surgery must occur immediately and we prayed as Jonathan and Christie accompanied Lukas to the surgical area with the support of Ariana, Christie’s favorite nurse, Chrissy, Lukas’ evening nurse, Andrew, a medical student, Abby, another nurse, and Dr. Turrentine.

These remarkable medical heroes for the next few hours performed miraculous procedures that brought the ordeal of Lukas to a very successful conclusion. I salute all of the life saving procedures and the gifted persons who were able to use them so well in truly saving the life of a beautiful little boy. Our prayers are now with Lukas, his parents, grandparents, and the dedicated teams of life saving persons at Riley Hospital.

TRIBUTE TO GERRY COUNIHAN

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to Gerry Counihan, an extraordinary man and a wonderful example for us all.

Gerry is a familiar face and a friend to the Members of this body.

Each of us who have made the trip into this historic Capitol Building and boarded the elevator to cast a vote on this floor has been warmly welcomed or helped in some way by Gerry.

Gerry’s life has had its share of challenges.

He was born with a learning disability, but with his trademark determination and optimism he beat the odds and graduated from Franciscan University in 1988.

Gerry first came to work here on Capitol Hill in 1991, and he returned in 1997 to take a job as a tour guide.

His enthusiasm and his love of American history made him an outstanding guide and a dedicated public servant.