

honor of Virginia State Trooper Jay Ferland, a devoted public servant, who along with Trooper Philip Battel saved a family of three from a house fire in Saltville, Virginia.

When I first learned of their bravery, news reports failed to mention Trooper Ferland's involvement. On January 2, I spoke of this incident and only mentioned Trooper Battel. However, both men are deserving of our recognition.

To recap, in the early hours of Friday, December 28, 2012, Trooper Ferland and Trooper Battel were in search of a stolen car that had been involved in an earlier police chase when they noticed off in the distance an orange hue. They decided to investigate. When they reached the area in question, much to their surprise, Troopers Ferland and Battel saw a home engulfed in flames. They banged on the door, but when there was no answer, they made the selfless decision to enter the home and investigate.

Their actions in the house awoke its three residents who had no idea that their home was burning down around them, leading to their ultimate escape from the burning house and from the fire. Because of their bravery, the family was saved, and all are in good health. Their lives were saved, and the lives of two of their pets were also saved. The heroic actions of Trooper Ferland and Trooper Battel in service to the community are to be commended, and I am honored to be here today to pay tribute to them.

Please join me in thanking Trooper Jay Ferland and Trooper Philip Battel for all they have done for the people of southwest Virginia. The Virginia State Police, as my experience has shown over the years, always respond in fine fashion and rise to the occasion. Trooper Ferland and Trooper Battel are among just two of the many law enforcement officers to note in the long and proud history of the Virginia State Police.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Virginia State Police, Trooper Ferland, Trooper Battel, and the good work and heroism of all the officers in the Virginia State Police.

#### PARITY FOR PUERTO RICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will reintroduce two bills: the first to extend the SSI program to Puerto Rico, and the second to provide fair treatment to Puerto Rico under TANF.

SSI provides assistance to blind, disabled, and elderly individuals with low incomes. Congress has chosen not to extend the program to Puerto Rico, which instead receives a limited block grant. The average SSI payment to residents of the States is \$500 a month, while the average payment to residents of Puerto Rico is just \$70.

The TANF program provides payments to needy families with children. The territories are not eligible for certain TANF grants. Moreover, Federal law imposes a cap on the aggregate funding that a territory can receive under a combination of safety net programs, including TANF. My legislation would eliminate this cap, which has not been increased since 1996, and make the territories eligible for TANF grants they do not currently receive. Equality under TANF would mean at least \$40 million in additional funding for Puerto Rico each year.

Those who seek evidence of how Puerto Rico is harmed by its territory status need look no further than the treatment it receives under SSI and TANF. I will fight to secure parity under these two programs. But as long as Puerto Rico remains a territory, it will be an uphill battle.

Mr. Speaker, Puerto Rico recently held a referendum on its political status. Under the current status, the 3.7 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico cannot vote for the leaders who make their national laws and are treated unequally under those laws, as the examples of SSI and TANF well illustrate.

The ballot had two questions. On the first question, voters were asked if they wanted Puerto Rico to remain a territory. Of 1.8 million voters, 54 percent said they do not want the current status to continue, while 46 percent say they do.

On the second question, voters were asked to express their preference among the alternatives to the current status. Of the 1.4 million people who chose an option, 61 percent voted for statehood, 33 percent for free association, and 5.5 percent for independence.

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The 834,000 votes for statehood on the second question exceeded the 828,000 for the current status on the first question. For the first time ever, more people in Puerto Rico want to be a state than to continue as a territory.

True to form, defenders of the status quo have tried to distort the results of this referendum, making claims that are intellectually dishonest and divorced from the facts. These critics ignore the results of the first question and argue that, because close to 500,000 people left the second question blank, statehood did not prevail in the referendum.

Let me be clear so there is no confusion. A majority of voters in Puerto Rico soundly rejected the current status. Among the three alternatives, statehood won a decisive victory, and statehood obtained a greater number of votes than any other status option, including the current status.

Mr. Speaker, at yesterday's inauguration, President Obama invoked the 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.

President Obama then emphasized, while these truths may be self-evident, they have never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth.

To uphold this Nation's core principles and values, the President and Congress must respond to the democratic expression of their fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, who have withdrawn their consent to a political status that makes them second-class citizens and who have made clear that they aspire to have full democratic rights and full equality under the law. None of my stateside colleagues in Congress would accept territory status for their own constituents, so they must recognize and they must respect that the American citizens I represent no longer accept it either.

#### THE DEBT CEILING

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

Mr. BROOKS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen testified before the House Armed Services Committee that America "is maintaining nearly historic fiscal deficits and national debt. Indeed, I believe that our debt is the greatest threat to our national security. If we as a country do not address our fiscal imbalances in the near term, our national power will erode, and the costs to our ability to maintain and sustain influence could be great."

Admiral Mullen is right: debt caused sequestration. Debt and sequestration will slash our uniformed personnel to their lowest levels since before World War II; will reduce our Navy to the smallest number of operational vessels since World War I; and will cut our Air Force to the smallest number of operational aircraft in its history. In sum, debt is putting America's national security at risk.

Last week, on January 17, the Comptroller General of the United States delivered to President Obama a Government Accountability Office report on America's financial health. I have reviewed many government audits and financial statements during my three decades in public office. I have never seen warnings as stark as those given by the GAO to President Obama. Some lowlights of the GAO report are striking and deserve emphasis.

In fiscal year 2012, the Federal National Mortgage Association and Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, commonly known as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, reported about \$85 billion in net valuation losses. The Federal Government's Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation's liabilities exceeded its assets by about \$34 billion. The Postal Service "finished the year with