

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 bolivars. But they can turn around and sell those dollars on the black market for 8,300 bolivars.

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 anniversary

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.