

debate about our future role in Afghanistan. I firmly believe that there are respectful differences of opinion on this war, and that support for a war is not a litmus test for one's support for America. However, I'm grateful that this House has overwhelmingly rejected running from America's vital interests and the people of Afghanistan.

Our debate today presented a stark choice to Members, quite literally, to stay or to go in Afghanistan. It is one in which there is no middle ground, no hedging, no fudging. In the most unequivocal terms I can muster, I resolutely oppose our retreat from Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, more times than I can count in the past few years, we have been reminded that the war in Afghanistan was the good war, that it was the war of necessity over the war of choice. I stand here today to remind my colleagues of their many statements in that regard. We did not seek this war. Our enemy sought us out. We did not march into Afghanistan for profit or pleasure or plunder. We went to ensure that Afghani soil is never again used to wage war or terrorize civilians.

We did not ask for this war; but now that it's come, we cannot loosen the amount of responsibility that we have taken up. To be certain, our goals in Afghanistan are difficult. Continuing to forge a partnership with the Afghans will take military might, diplomatic finesse, and our hard-earned taxpayers to succeed.

□ 2015

However, these are costs that we must bear and should bear. The President and our military leadership understand the seriousness of our task. Time and again in speeches and testimony and interviews they have repeated that Afghanistan is the epicenter of Islamic extremism, and that defeating al Qaeda in central Asia is essential to securing peace both in the region and here at home.

Our partners in bringing peace to Afghanistan are the Afghan people themselves. It is their homes that have been destroyed and their children who have perished in 30 years of war. Yet these beaten and downtrodden people have stood next to our soldiers to fight for their future and their country because we told them that we will help them bring order to the chaos of their homeland.

Many of my colleagues have discussed the costs of war, and they are right to consider what we have paid in blood and treasure to fight this fight. However, they have failed to weigh what giving up would cost us. Practically speaking, to retreat today means the Afghan central government will fail. When it fails, the Taliban will return to reclaim what was theirs and again plunge the country into the despotism of blind religious zealotry. The Taliban will welcome home radical Islamic jihadists back to their soil to again plan their acts of murder

and destruction. They will also expand their fight to the tribal areas of Pakistan, which has the potential to destabilize a nuclear power, and inflame the simmering tension between Pakistan and India, another nuclear power.

While it is relatively easy to estimate what we have spent so far and what we will spend in the coming years in Afghanistan, it is impossible to know the value of the calamities that have been prevented because we remain. There is no value that can be put on the growth of a civil society, no cost that can be put on stabilizing Pakistan, and no price that can be put on the recent rapprochement of Pakistan and India. Failure in these developments will hurt our national security, yet a retreat will make them more likely.

I believe, as we all do, that Americans want peace above all else. None of us desires our friends and families to be deployed overseas, battling among the rocks and caves of the foreign countryside. However, peace will not come until our enemies end their drive for our destruction. Until that day, talk of leaving Afghanistan means only that our enemies will bring the fight back to us.

There can be no peace in Afghanistan without a cessation of hostilities. Whether we leave today, tomorrow, or at the end of this year, this war does not end simply because we choose not to be engaged in it. The Taliban will return. With their return, they will expand their efforts to destabilize our ally Pakistan, and again provide sanctuary for radical Islamic jihadists who will continue to try to murder Americans in the name of their faith.

Mr. Speaker, I hope and pray fervently for a day when our Armed Forces do come home. However, until our enemies lay down their arms and give up their fight to destroy our civilization, our military must remain out there on the wall, doing their duty to uphold America's democracy and our safety.

That we have spent so much time today discussing abandoning our allies deeply saddens me. Halfway around the world I know that our Afghan partners were watching what was said and trying to divine our intent by holding this debate. It is my firm hope that they see today's vote for what it is, the unqualified, overwhelming voice of the House of Representatives announcing that we will not abandon our friends in their deepest hour of need.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GONZALEZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GONZALEZ addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CUELLAR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CUELLAR addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### HONORING CHARLIE WILSON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life and honor the accomplishments of Congressman Charlie Wilson who passed away on February 10, 2010.

Charlie Wilson was a remarkable Congressman, and in his time in the U.S. House of Representatives, he worked diligently for his constituents in East Texas. During his tenure in the House, he gained a seat on the House Appropriations Committee and through his position on the Subcommittee on Defense, he helped to fund the Afghan Mujahideen during the Soviet War in Afghanistan. Additionally, his support for progressive politics led him to be an advocate for the Equal Rights Amendment, a minimum wage bill, and Medicaid.

All of these actions have garnered Congressman Wilson a place in the history books, but it was his personality that earned him a place in the hearts of so many people across Texas. When everything was said and done, we all knew that his deepest concern was for the people of his district in East Texas, and as a fellow Texas Democrat, I am privileged to have served with him. His love for life will reverberate through the halls of Congress for years to come, and he will be truly missed by his fellow Texans, and especially me.

Mr. Speaker, Texas has lost a great leader and legislator with the passing of Congressman Wilson, and I ask my fellow colleagues to join me today in honoring his memory.

#### ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. CHU) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOCCIERI) is recognized for the remainder of the hour.

Mr. BOCCIERI. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for the confusion this evening.

Tonight I am joined by several of my colleagues from around the country who want to talk to you about the economy and how we are working hard here in Congress to set the record straight, but also, more importantly, to put our people back to work.

If you remember when we took office, Mr. Speaker, we were suffering from one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression. In fact, many have called this the Great Recession. And ironically, of all commercials, there is a contemporary insurance commercial out on the airwaves today that says, "How will we remember the time and our experience? Will we remember this time as the great recession or the recession that made us great?" I think