

STORY OF ARMENIAN GENOCIDE
SURVIVOR: VERGINE DJIHANIAN
KALEBDJIAN

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 2010

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, I rise today to memorialize and record a courageous story of survival of the Armenian Genocide. The Armenian Genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, resulted in the death of 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children. As the U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau documented at the time, it was a campaign of "race extermination."

The campaign to annihilate the Armenian people failed, as illustrated by the proud Armenian nation and prosperous diaspora. It is difficult if not impossible to find an Armenian family not touched by the genocide, and while there are some survivors still with us, it is imperative that we record their stories. Through the Armenian Genocide Congressional Record Project, I hope to document the harrowing stories of the survivors in an effort to preserve their accounts and to help educate the Members of Congress now and in the future of the necessity of recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

Below is one of those stories:

Nora Hovsepian, the granddaughter of Vergine Djihanian, a Genocide survivor, expressed a story on her grandmother's behalf:

"Vergine Djihanian was an Armenian girl who lived with her parents and eight brothers and sisters in the city of Erzinga, Turkey.

"In the summer of 1915, Vergine witnessed her father and uncle being beaten and axed to death in front of her eyes by Turkish gendarmes. Her mother and aunt frantically gathered up all of their children, took them to the nearby banks of the Euphrates River, said their prayers, and holding hands together at the river's edge, threw themselves into the raging waters, choosing to die by their own hands rather than falling victim to the barbarity of the Turkish soldiers surrounding them.

"All of them drowned, except 9-year-old Vergine, who clung to the branch of a weeping willow tree overhanging the river, instinctively wanting to survive. Vergine was too young to understand why her family was dying around her. She was too young to understand the fear of being raped or enslaved by Turkish soldiers, but she was old enough to know that if she could just hold on a little longer to the hanging branch, then maybe she could be saved. She hung on for what seemed an eternity. However, she felt hopeful again when a compassionate Kurdish family came to the river's edge, saw her desperation, and rescued her. She was the only one who survived the ordeal, saving her from an agonizing death.

"She worked as a maid in the house of her rescuers for a few years. Then American missionaries had come to the region trying to find lost souls. Vergine was taken to an American orphanage, and at the age of 14, she was reunited with her two older brothers who had been in America for several years and who were frantically trying to find any surviving members of their large family.

"Vergine came to New York on a ship through Ellis Island in 1921 and built her life

there. She met and married Missak Kalebldjian, another survivor of the Armenian massacres, in Adana in 1909, and she never told her only son or anyone else about the unspeakable horrors she had witnessed.

"Vergine Djihanian Kalebldjian was my grandmother. She told me her story when I was 10 years old, sitting me down with a serious and sad look, preparing me for what I was about to hear. As I listened, I could not even fathom what she had gone through at the same age, and until now, and for the rest of my life, I will never forget her story.

"Nearly 60 years after her nightmare, the memory remained fresh within my grandmother's mind. She wept uncontrollably as she told me the story of her family's fate. I tried to comfort her, telling her I did not want her to cry, but she wanted to get it out, as it had been festering inside her for all those years. She could not bring herself to tell my father, her only son, about her childhood as he was growing up, because she wanted to spare him the pain she had endured. She wanted to give him a better life and happy memories.

"My grandmother said that she had to pass down the legacy of what happened to her and her family to my generation, so that we could tell the world and seek justice for the unspeakable crime against our people.

"I will forever cherish her words and her memory."

RESPONSIBLE ESTATE TAX ACT

HON. LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 2010

Ms. LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the "Responsible Estate Tax Act." This bill would provide a progressive rate structure for the Estate Tax rising from a rate of 45 percent for individual estates worth \$3.5 million or more to a rate of 65 percent for estates over \$500 million.

This year for the first time since 1916, the heirs to multi-million and billion dollar fortunes are able to receive their entire inheritance free of federal taxes, costing at least \$14.8 billion, that's billion with a "B," in lost revenue in 2010 alone. If we do not act before the end of the year, the Estate Tax will return next year at a rate of 55 percent for individual estates worth more than \$1 million. Most members of this body agree that neither of those structures is ideal and this legislation is an effort to find common ground on an issue that has been a source of much controversy in recent decades.

The Estate Tax was originally instituted to ensure that the very wealthiest families, those who have benefited from the greatness of the American economy, contribute back to that system so that others have a chance to succeed as well. The Responsible Estate Tax Act fits this mission by exempting over 99.7 percent of Americans from paying any estate tax whatsoever, while ensuring that the wealthiest Americans in our country pay their fair share.

At a time when unemployment benefits, Medicaid assistance and small business incentives are being delayed in this body because of their cost, it is unconscionable to let \$15 billion go tax free to the wealthiest handful

of Americans. In this nation, we agree that everyone should earn his or her wealth, status, and privilege. We don't believe in an aristocracy which hoards wealth and leaves the rest of us to fight over crumbs. This proposal maintains our consensus and ensures America remains the land of opportunity.

This bill is a companion to Senate legislation authored by Senators SANDERS, HARKIN, and WHITEHOUSE and I want to commend them for their hard work and leadership on this issue.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation.

INTRODUCTION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NATIONAL DISASTER INSURANCE PROTECTION ACT

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 15, 2010

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the District of Columbia National Disaster Insurance Protection Act. This bill amends federal law to exempt from federal income taxation catastrophic insurance reserves and the investment income derived from such reserves if held by insurance companies in the District of Columbia. Under current federal law, these funds are subject to federal income taxation, which has led property and casualty insurers to hold billions of dollars in reserves, either directly or indirectly through reinsurance, in foreign jurisdictions, such as the Cayman Islands and Bermuda, where they are not subject to U.S. income taxation.

This bill serves important national purposes. This bill will help protect individuals and businesses with property and casualty insurance across the country, as well as U.S. taxpayers. Today, if a catastrophe occurred in the U.S. but foreign insurance companies did not pay the claims, U.S. taxpayers likely would be on the hook for the claims. In fact, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Government had to establish a federal backstop for losses related to terrorist attacks, the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act, which is still in place today. As the recent financial crisis showed, the U.S. Government has a strong interest in preventing systemic financial risks. Transparency, for example, is a major feature of the pending Wall Street reform bill, but there is little transparency in the catastrophic insurance market, posing a risk to the U.S. economy and taxpayers. Instead, individuals and businesses must rely on small foreign jurisdictions to preserve and protect catastrophic insurance reserves.

I chair the subcommittee that has primary jurisdiction over disasters. Since 9/11, we have plugged all of the most obvious holes in U.S. security. There is no reason to leave the funds necessary to recover from disasters offshore. By locating these funds in the nation's capital, the most protected and secure city in the U.S., Congress would be shoring up an existing but overlooked security vulnerability.