

to the political transformation of Burma.”

Jineth Bedoya Lima is from Colombia and at age 38 is an investigative journalist. While on assignment, she was repeatedly raped and left in a Dumpster. She was left in this Dumpster by her attackers and told that they were sending a message to the Colombian press. Since that horrific attack, she has spoken out against sexual violence and has become a role model for women in Colombia. She was given this award for “her unflinching courage, determination, and perseverance fighting for justice” all around the globe.

Hana Elhebshi is a 27-year-old architect from Libya who contributed to the proper documentation of the violence during the revolution in her country. She also is an advocate for women’s rights in her country and received this award for “courageous advancement of the cause of freedom of expression and promotion of women’s rights during times of conflict and transition in Libya.”

Aneesa Ahmed is from Maldives and founded Hope for Women. She advocates for ending gender-based violence in Maldives and has served as the Deputy Minister of Women’s Affairs. She received this award for “courageous advocacy of women’s rights and protection from domestic violence.”

Shad Begum is 33 and is from Pakistan. She is a courageous human rights activist. She provides political training, microcredit information and more to women in her country. There have been numerous attempts to end her life, but she remains committed to advancing women’s rights and even won a local office in her country. She received this award for “fearlessly championing Pakistani women’s political and economic rights.”

Samar Badawi is from Saudi Arabia and at 31 monitors human rights in her country. She is the first woman in Saudi Arabia to file a lawsuit against the government demanding that women have a right to vote. She won this award for “demonstrating significant courage in her activism while becoming a champion in the struggle for women’s suffrage and legal rights in Saudi Arabia.”

Hawa Abdallah Mohammed Salih is from Sudan and is a human rights activist. Forced to flee Darfur, she lived in an internally displaced persons camp and has since spoken out against human rights abuses in these very camps and has advocated for women’s rights in her country. She has been persecuted by the Government of Sudan and forced to flee her country. She received this award for “giving a voice to the women and children of Darfur.”

Safak Pavey is a member of the Parliament in Turkey and is the first disabled woman elected to Parliament in her country. She is working to empower the disabled, women, and minorities in Turkey. She received this award for “her personal dignity and courage.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to just simply say that these women act as a role model for all women across the country, across the world; and we must stand up for women’s rights.

SMART SECURITY: A STRATEGY THAT INVESTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, last weekend, the United States Government and Afghanistan reached a strategic agreement to define the terms of the relationship between our two countries in the near-term future.

First of all, this agreement affirms that our combat troops will not leave Afghanistan until 2014, which is far too slow a timetable. Don’t we have enough evidence right here after 10-plus years that we’re not making America safer with this war, we’re not minimizing the terrorist threat, and we’re not bringing stability and security to Afghanistan?

How much more will Americans be asked to sacrifice? How many more tens of billions in taxpayer dollars will be wasted when we have so many needs right here at home? How many more Americans have to come home in a casket? How many more will take their own lives because the mental health distress of serving in a combat zone becomes too much? How many more have to spend the rest of their lives in a wheelchair, or without a limb or limbs, because of injuries suffered in an immoral and unnecessary war?

□ 1030

Believe me, Mr. Speaker, there is not a minute to waste. Now is the moment to end this war and bring our troops home.

The meeting this weekend does, however, show the importance of a plan going forward, a plan that will define the terms of our engagement with Afghanistan after the war is over.

I’ve always said that ending the military occupation does not mean abandoning Afghanistan. The question is, what form will our partnership take? And on that question, the agreement signed this weekend provides very little guidance.

According to The Washington Post, in fact, and I’ll quote them, they say: “The specifics of the U.S. commitment to Afghanistan have yet to be formally outlined.”

Then The Post adds that “the document provides only a vaguely worded reassurance, leaving many to guess at what the U.S. commitment means in practice.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, we need more than a guess. We need a clear strategy for investing in Afghanistan and it’s people. And while a lot of the talk has been about continuing to shore up Afghan security forces, we need a much more comprehensive approach.

In short, we need to implement SMART Security, the strategy that I’ve spoken of from this spot hundreds of times since 2004. SMART Security would replace our military surge with a civilian surge. It would put humanitarian aid in front and center. It would emphasize development and diplomacy instead of invasion and occupation.

It would mean, in place of troops and weapons, we send experts with tools and resources to rebuild Afghan infrastructure, hospitals, and schools. It would mean investing in programs to improve maternal health and child mortality. It would mean a focus on democracy promotion and rebuilding civil society in Afghanistan. It would also mean shifting the emphasis to peace-building, conflict prevention, and human rights education.

This approach would save lives. It would promote peace. It is a superior counterterrorism and national security strategy. It will keep the American people safe. It will advance our values in a way that a decade of war clearly has not.

We can’t wait until 2014, Mr. Speaker. We need a SMART Security approach in Afghanistan, and we need it now. And we need to start by bringing our troops home.

HONORING OUR COUNTRY’S VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. DUNCAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of our country’s veterans, and I want to begin briefly by mentioning an organization that helps veterans that was recently brought to my attention, Patriot Outreach, a nonprofit organization to assist our military with getting the help they need to deal with the trauma associated with aspects of military service. You can learn more about that at PatriotOutreach.org, and I think they’re doing a great service for our veterans.

Benjamin Disraeli once said that “the legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name, and the inheritance of a great example.” In our country, some of our greatest heroes are veterans, individuals who answered our Nation’s call to protect and defend our freedom.

Our veterans are one of our Nation’s greatest treasures and, as such, our country has given them a firm promise. Because of their willingness to protect us with their service, when their service ends, we promise to take care of them. But, unfortunately, if you talk to veterans today, they don’t believe that our government is living up to their promises.

When we made the commitment to take care of our troops when they returned home, we never said anything about making them jump through hoops or navigate a complicated bureaucracy. We promised our veterans

the Moon and, instead, have failed, in many instances, to provide them with the most basic of care.

As of March 16 this year, the Columbia, South Carolina Regional Office of the Veterans Administration had over 21,927 pending cases, with an average wait time of 232 days.

Survivor benefits for veterans' spouses can take between 10 and 18 months to be disbursed, and sometimes even longer, depending on the health status of the beneficiary.

My office is currently assisting a constituent who contacted us because he has had 12 claims pending before the VA, which date all the way back to 2004. Another constituent has had her claims delayed over 18 months because she's been told by the VA that they don't have medical records. Now, this is despite the fact that she's already sent the VA her medical records twice by certified mail.

Unfortunately, claims aren't the only backlog facing the VA. Veterans are also facing delays in seeking medical attention. A lack of doctors and inefficiency in the system have forced some veterans to have to wait months to receive medical care.

Mr. Speaker, to put it simply, the VA isn't clicking and ticking. Despite the best intentions of VA personnel to deliver a high level of service and care to our veterans, too many of our former servicemen and -women are falling through the cracks.

In the Third District of South Carolina, we recently created an advisory committee composed of retired military veterans to provide insight into some of the problems that they're facing today. Their view is not that the law needs to be changed necessarily, but that the spirit of the law is not being followed. Veterans were promised certain benefits and, in too many cases, they are still waiting to receive them.

In addition to the mounting pile of problems regarding veterans services, I'm deeply concerned that veterans will be negatively impacted by the implementation of ObamaCare. The clear goal of the Obama administration's unconditional and unconstitutional health care law is to begin lumping our servicemen and -women into the bureaucracy of ObamaCare. Not only do I think that this breaks a promise made to our veterans, but I'm afraid it will make an already bad situation worse.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we can do better; and for the sake of our living heroes, we must do better. Let us not forget the promises that we've made to our veterans, and let us not just honor our veterans with our words, but let's also honor them with our actions.

Thank you. May God bless our troops in the field, those here at home. May God bless those who have served our country in uniform, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

DISCRIMINATORY VOTER IDENTIFICATION LAWS

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to talk about the discriminatory voter ID laws that are undemocratic and simply un-American.

The American Legislative Exchange Council, also known as ALEC, has long been a secretive collaboration between big business and conservative Tea Party Republican politicians serving in this Nation's State and Federal legislatures. ALEC's goal is to advance the special interests of large corporations and the super-rich and wealthy by any means necessary.

Yesterday, I discussed how ALEC has fiendishly and unabashedly produced legislative policy that degrades our air and water quality and wrecks our environment. Last week, I outlined how ALEC has infiltrated our criminal justice system by producing legislation that stimulates higher and higher levels of incarceration, to the benefit and to the surging profits of the private for-profit prison industry.

And if that wasn't enough, with 194 days left until the general election, ALEC has been working hard to suppress the votes of the most vulnerable in our society. ALEC has met with its corporate allies and right-wing State officials behind closed doors to promote legislation to suppress the votes of likely Democratic voters.

By making it more difficult for people to exercise their right to vote, ALEC's model voter ID act grants an electoral advantage to Republicans, while undermining the right of individuals to vote.

In addition, ALEC has worked to make it easier for corporations to participate in the political process. Their Public Safety and Elections Task Force promotes model legislation that would disenfranchise millions of voters, devastate campaign finance reform, and allow for greater corporate influence in elections.

Mr. Speaker, it has injected these corrosive laws into our States, and they have spread like untreated cancer. Bills based on ALEC's model legislation have already been introduced in 34 States and passed in many of those States.

□ 1040

Voter suppression comes in many forms, from new voter ID laws to eliminating Election Day registration to restricting voter registration drives by community groups to reducing the number of days for early voting and limiting the number of days for voter registration. There is no doubt that ALEC is directly tied to the proliferation of these voter ID laws in the States' legislatures.

These policies are not about preventing fraud in the voting process. This legislation is solely about disenfranchising minorities, the elder-

ly, and other at-risk voters, such as the poor, who are unlikely to have the technical kinds of ID that these pieces of legislation demand.

After the spotlight has started to shine on ALEC, they have come out publicly and said, Okay, we're going to get out of the public policy business. They're not going to not write any more model legislation like the Florida "shoot first and ask questions later." They're not going to introduce any more of that type of legislation. They also have announced they're going to shut down their Public Safety and Elections Task Force, which is the committee that produced the voter suppression legislation.

That's a good thing. But the damage has already been done, and we're going to have to remain vigilant about this group, this shadowy group, ALEC, this unholy alliance between Tea Party Republican legislators and big business. We'll have to keep our eyes open. I'll have more to talk about in the coming days.

JONATHAN FRANK DAVIS

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

Mr. WESTMORELAND. Mr. Speaker, I've come to the floor this morning with great sadness but also with a great sense of pride to honor the service of a Georgia hero, Private First Class Jonathan Frank Davis.

On March 29, 2012, Jonathan gave the ultimate sacrifice in Kandahar province, Afghanistan, while supporting Operation Enduring Freedom.

Jonathan was the son of Reverend and Mrs. Kerry Davis of Griffin, Georgia. His mother, Tracey, described him as tenderhearted, a tenderness that extended to both his peers and animals. His heart was so large that they now have numerous pets running around their home due to Jonathan not being able to turn away a single stray.

His nurturing and giving nature was one of the things that was loved most about him. As a child, Jonathan always stood up for his classmates who were being bullied, and many of Jonathan's peers remember that he was the first to come to their defense. He was willing to give his shirt off his back to help others and was always concerned about the well-being of everyone around him, especially those less fortunate.

Jonathan was playful and strove to make others happy, either by playing funny pranks on them or with his unforgettable smile that could light up a room. Jonathan attended Griffin High School, where he played soccer, and after graduation, he, like myself, married his high school sweetheart. Her name is Kristen.

Kristen is expecting their first child, and Jonathan talked all the time of how excited he was to become a father. He carried the sonogram of baby Benjamin in his wallet everywhere he went