

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014

SPEECH OF

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 13, 2013

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 1960) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2014 for military activities of the Department of Defense and for military construction, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes:

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chair, I am pleased to offer this simple bipartisan amendment with Reps. WOLF and SCHNEIDER to expand an existing report required by Section 1242 of the bill. The amendment clarifies that the report ought to include information on how the Egyptian military is supporting the rights of individuals involved in civil society and democratic promotion efforts through non-governmental organizations or NGOs.

This is a timely issue, given the guilty verdict rendered by an Egyptian court June 4th against 43 NGO workers—including 17 Americans—because of their involvement with pro-democracy groups. The guilty verdict renews concerns about Egypt's commitment to democratic principles. In fact, I am circulating a bipartisan letter with my Virginia colleague, Rep. WOLF, urging Egyptian President Morsi to immediately reconsider this action and permit the NGOs to continue their important work. So far, more than 50 Members of Congress have signed our bipartisan letter, including Rep. SCHNEIDER, who also cosponsored this amendment.

The United States supports the aspirations of the Egyptian people to become a free and fair society, in which all NGOs—regardless of their nation of origin—are allowed to operate freely. I hope that Egyptian officials will come to this same realization and return property confiscated from the NGOs 18 months ago, remove their staff from the no-fly list, and permit them to continue their work supporting a fair and open election process and helping to improve the lives of all Egyptians.

If the U.S. government and the American people are to have any confidence that the Egyptian government is undertaking a genuine transition to a democratic state, under civilian control, where the freedoms of assembly, association, religion, and expression are guaranteed and the rule of law is upheld, then we must see a swift and satisfactory resolution to this case.

As my colleagues will recall, this ordeal began a year and a half ago, when Egyptian forces raided both American and non-American NGO offices. During the raids, Egyptian forces seized records, computers, other electronic equipment, and hard currency. At every turn Egyptian authorities assured the NGOs and U.S. authorities that the situation would be appropriately resolved, only to renege on their word. For example, three days after the raids, U.S. NGOs were waiting for the return of their confiscated property as promised by Field Marshal Tantawi while simultaneously, another Egyptian official—Fayza Abou Naga, the government minister in charge of coordinating foreign aid—was holding a press con-

ference saying the property would not be returned. Abou Naga also accused the NGOs of illicitly funneling money to the April 6th Youth Movement.

When I traveled to Egypt in March of last year, my colleagues and I raised the issue of the NGOs with General Tantawi. During that trip, we also met with the Egyptian staffers who were facing charges. They were in a precarious position, and their situation has only worsened with the June 4th verdict.

We cannot in good conscience ignore the results of the recent trial, which comes on the heels of a draft law that further restricts NGOs, fails to meet Egypt's international commitments with respect to freedom of association, and lends credence to the opinion that there is an ongoing war against civil society in Egypt.

U.S. law with regard to this issue is clear in the restrictions placed on the \$1.3 billion in military aid for Egypt:

Prior to the obligation of funds appropriated by this Act under the heading 'Foreign Military Financing Program,' the Secretary of State shall certify to the Committees on Appropriations that the Government of Egypt is supporting the transition to civilian government including holding free and fair elections; implementing policies to protect freedom of expression, association, and religion, and due process of law.

With the current state of affairs in Egypt, any such certification that Egypt is, in fact, implementing policies to guarantee the pillars of a free society would be met with skepticism. That is why news reports of Sec. Kerry's recent action to waive the restrictions on that military aid are of particular concern. It is not too late to include these important NGO issues in a larger discussion about releasing (or withholding) other tranches of money to Egypt.

Our amendment would further support the transition to democracy by requiring the Pentagon report on how Egyptian military activities contribute to an atmosphere where pro-democracy NGOs can operate freely. I encourage my colleagues to support the Connolly/Wolf/Schneider amendment and to sign the related letter to President Morsi of Egypt.

**CANCEL THE SEQUESTER: LET
HERIBERTO LEÓN DO HIS JOB**

HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 14, 2013

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell my colleagues about one of my constituents, Heriberto León, who wrote recently to explain the real-life consequences of the sequester, for him and for our country.

Mr. León is not asking Congress for much—he simply wants to be able to do his job as an EPA community involvement coordinator, helping to improve access to clean air and clean water for communities in the Chicagoland area.

My constituent spends his day providing information to communities that are dealing with well water contamination from benzene. He is working to address the environmental and health consequences of pollution, effects that are particularly harmful to children and older Americans. He obviously enjoys his work and he is making a real contribution.

Mr. León is not trying to enrich himself—in fact, he took a \$20,000 pay cut when he took his EPA job in 2010 and has been living with a three-year pay freeze. It is clear to me that, like so many Federal workers, he is committed to serving the public. And, like so many Federal workers, he cannot understand why he is unable to do his job and is being asked to take an additional personal, financial hit because of the sequester.

Mr. León is being asked to take 13 furlough days, because of the arbitrary and harsh impacts of the across-the-board sequester cuts. That's about a \$4,000—11% pay cut. We need people like Heriberto León at EPA, and I worry how we will be able to attract and retain dedicated Federal workers when they are faced with furloughs and budget cuts that prevent them from fulfilling their mission and impose serious financial hardships on them.

I hope that my colleagues will take the time to read Mr. León's full letter and that, after doing so, you will join me in supporting H.R. 900, the Cancel the Sequester Act. Our constituents are counting on us to act now.

LETTER FROM HERIBERTO LEÓN

Re Furlough Imposed on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Employees.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY: It is with much frustration and heartbreak that I write to you this letter to urge you to continue efforts to end the sequester and its impact on working class public employees such as myself.

Today is my second furlough day since the sequester began earlier this year. Because I'm not at work today, I am unable to attend to Americans struggling with the impact of soil, water and air pollution in their communities. As a community involvement coordinator in EPA's Region 5 office, I translate to Spanish EPA information for Chicago neighborhoods like Pilsen and Little Village and help explain to residents in Wedron, IL how the Superfund Law and the Clean Drinking Water Act each will help the EPA address the benzene contamination in their well water. I have similar assignments with communities facing contaminated sites throughout the Great Lakes states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. My workload is sufficient to keep me busy many hours beyond my regular work hours, which many times I am happy to offer because I love to contribute to citizens who are victims of industrial pollution. Instead I'm asked to not show up to work so that my salary can be used to save money for a made-up fiscal crisis.

According to EPA's announcement earlier this year I have a total of 13 furlough days between April and September, the end of the fiscal year. That means a pay-cut of nearly \$4000, or 11% of my salary between now and September. That amount is almost what I will need in August to pay the second installment of my Cook County real estate tax bill! Shall I sell my house and move out of Cook County or Illinois altogether?

Congresswoman Schakowsky, I gladly took a pay cut of 20K to come to work for the federal government in 2010 as I understood that I would be able to progress through the federal employment step and grade system. However, that same year a now three-year-old pay freeze was imposed on government workers.

I have had many employers in my work-life from institutions of higher learning such as Loyola University Chicago to private contractors for the Chicago Housing Authority. Never have I experienced the utter disregard and insulting treatment I feel from my employer, the Government of the United States