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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PITTEMBERG).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
July 15, 2014.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROBERT PITTEMBERG to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2014, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, I joined several of my colleagues and hundreds of people in the Congressional Auditorium to watch a gripping new film, "The Interpreters," by VICE News, about the American failure to protect Afghans who helped our soldiers as guides, interpreters, and drivers. Their lives are now at risk as a result of their brave service and our failure to act.

For almost a decade, I have been battling to have the United States honor these obligations by effectively implementing the Special Immigrant Visas program authorized by Congress. For a while, we were battling the bureaucracy itself, which issued an embarrassing total of 32 visas for all of 2012 to help save these poor souls trapped in a bureaucratic hell.

Since the beginning of the year, this bureaucratic logjam has broken and we have been able to raise it to an average of 400 a month. With that progress has come troubling news.

Congress set the cap on these visas artificially low—only 3,000 for the entire fiscal year. These visas are effectively gone now. They are used up. It is not theoretical. We have 6,000 Afghan applicants in the pipeline right now and more who are looking for relief and safety.

Recently, Secretary Kerry, in a powerful opinion piece in the LA Times, noted this challenge and called on Congress to act and raise the cap. With each day that passes, as is so vividly illustrated by VICE Media's gripping documentary, these are people whose lives and those of their families are left to the tender mercies of the Taliban seeking revenge and setting as an example.

One case just caught my eye. The plight of Mohammad is typical. His father was murdered and his toddler brother was abducted, all because of his special service to the United States. Without a Special Immigrant Visa, he was next on the list to be kidnapped, tortured, and perhaps beheaded.

As Secretary Kerry pointed out, "the way a country winds down a war in a faraway place and stands by those who risk their own safety to help us in the fight sends a powerful message to the world that is not soon forgotten." Secretary Kerry said:

And as the withdrawal proceeds, the United States is in danger of sending the

wrong message to the interpreters and others who put their lives on the line to help our troops and diplomats do their jobs.

That is why this is so urgent.

Remember how we brought the Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa back to life last October in the middle of impossible circumstances during the government shutdown? There was bipartisan support, thanks to Leader CANTOR, Leader HOYER, Chairman GOODLATTE, TULSI GABBARD, ADAM KINZINGER, and others. A number of bipartisan leaders sprung to action. We need that same bipartisan spirit of support and urgency for the Afghan visa program. As soon as possible, Congress must authorize at least 1,000 additional visas for this fiscal year to get us through these next critical months.

It is the moral obligation of every Member of Congress not to just cosponsor H.R. 4594, the bipartisan Afghan Allies Protection Act, which I have introduced with my friend and colleague ADAM KINZINGER and Senators MCCAIN and SHAHEEN in the Senate, but we should demand action before we adjourn.

As Congressman KINZINGER pointed out, it doesn't matter where you stood on the Iraq war—I thought it was a tragic mistake, and I still do—but what matters now is where we stand in keeping our commitments. Innocent lives are at stake. American honor is on the line. Our future actions could be compromised if people don't trust us.

It is our duty to save the lives of those who risked so much to help us when we needed them. They need us to cosponsor H.R. 4594 to protect innocent lives and American honor.

FOREIGN POLICY

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

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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