

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA  
PROGRAM

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for over the last decade, I have been working with a bipartisan group to deal with helping some of the foreign nationals in Afghanistan who helped Americans' mission be able to escape the tender mercies of the Taliban and others with long memories. These are men and women who helped us as guides, as translators, people who provided on-base security, construction workers, and truck drivers—a vast array of people who helped us with our vital mission. As we have scaled down and moved on, it has left these people vulnerable. We have example after example where the Taliban and al Qaeda have threatened them, have attacked their families, held them for ransom, tortured them, and, in some cases, killed them.

We have implemented a Special Immigrant Visa program that has enabled over 8,500 people to get to safety to protect themselves and their families. I have witnessed some of these tearful reunions where a guide returned, was able to escape to the United States, and united with the person, the soldier, whose life he saved. This happens time after time.

Unfortunately, the process is hopelessly tangled. It is slow, and it is bureaucratic. We have over 10,000 people still in the pipeline. Every year we struggle to be able to have sufficient visas authorized to be able to help thousands more who are at risk.

We have the National Defense Authorization Act that is coming forward that would pose another problem to help those who put their faith in us. This version would leave out all individuals who worked with the State Department and the USAID—critical parts of our mission in Afghanistan. It would leave off all the on-base staff who worked in direct support of the Department of Defense, people who did construction, firefighters, on-base security, maintenance, and administrative support, people whose services were vital and whose service to the United States is well known and who are at risk.

We are hopeful that as this bill comes to the floor that the House will be able to work with us to modify these unnecessary restrictions, to give more time to process and allow more people to come to safety.

We have a moral obligation to protect people who put their lives on the line to support Americans in these troubled areas. I would hope that we would, once again, be able to make necessary adjustments to be able to try and help more come to safety.

I have been working with my good friend ADAM KINZINGER, who represents some of the newer Members of the House who actually served in theater,

who are committed to helping people whom they saw help us.

I would hope, as the process comes forward, we can consider amendments to be able to reduce some of these restrictions; and then I hope, as it works its way through the legislative process to the Senate that does not have anything in their version of the bill speaking to the Special Immigrant Visas, that we will be able to do our job to make sure that we are not having people at risk, their families threatened, and undermining the credibility of the United States.

Remember, around the world, foreign nationals help us with our missions; and if we send a message that we are not going to stick with them when the going gets tough, then they are going to be much less likely to help us wherever it is in these trouble spots. America will be more vulnerable as people who have already helped us are at risk. We can do better.

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. ZELDIN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ZELDIN. Mr. Speaker, as a nation, supporting our veterans must always be one of our highest priorities. These brave men and women who willingly and selflessly put their lives on the line while defending our country deserve the highest quality of life and care once they return home.

According to the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency, there are 83,254 veterans who live in my home county of Suffolk. With the highest population of veterans by county in New York State and one of the highest populations in the country, there is a significant need for increased care options for our veterans in Suffolk.

There are so many options of quality care for veterans, but too often their choices are limited. Quality care can also come at great expense.

In an effort to expand access to care for our veterans, I recently introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress, H.R. 2460, which would ensure that 70 percent or more service-connected disabled veterans are able to receive adult day health care, a daily program for disabled veterans who need extra assistance and special attention in their day-to-day lives. It comes at no cost to the veterans and their families because the program is defined as a reimbursable treatment option through the Department of Veterans Affairs. This legislation has strong bipartisan support in Congress, with over 45 cosponsors, including the entire Long Island congressional delegation. My bill would greatly expand this great option of care for veterans on Long Island and across the country.

Just last month, on April 20, 2016, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee hosted a hearing of the Subcommittee on Health regarding my bill, and on April 29, 2016, the Health Sub-

committee held a markup and favorably forwarded my bill to the full committee for final consideration before being sent to the House floor for a vote.

Working with my colleagues in the House and various veterans service organizations, I will continue pushing to get this bill passed out of committee in earnest to allow this bill to come to the House floor this year.

While serving in the New York State Senate, I secured the funding necessary to create the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Program, a peer-to-peer support program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. PFC Dwyer, from Mount Sinai, New York, received nationwide recognition for a photograph that went viral showing him cradling a wounded Iraqi boy while his unit was fighting its way up to the capital city of Baghdad. Sadly, after returning home and struggling with PTSD, PFC Dwyer died in 2008. Created in his honor, the Dwyer Program was initially launched in the counties of Suffolk, Jefferson, Saratoga, and Rensselaer. Since 2013, the program has expanded to over a dozen counties across New York.

Earlier this year, I introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress, H.R. 4513, that will expand the Dwyer Program on a national level so that every veteran in the U.S. eventually has access to a peer-to-peer support group. This bill has strong bipartisan support, including the entire Long Island congressional delegation. I will continue working together with them and others in the fight to expand the Dwyer Program.

Additionally, on the east end of Long Island, working closely with the Peconic Bay Medical Center and VA, I secured an east end healthcare facility for veterans and their families at Peconic Bay's Manorville campus.

After so bravely serving our country, this facility provides an important new option for veterans, increasing access to care for those who live on Long Island's east end, while still allowing them to continue receiving other services and ongoing treatment at the VA hospital in Northport.

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There is so much more that Congress can do to improve the quality of life for our veterans. I will continue working to ensure that my bills that previously passed the House are signed into law, including H.R. 1569, to protect the benefits of deceased veterans, and H.R. 1187, which would eliminate the loan limit that the VA can guarantee for a veteran.

Congress also must continue to reform the VA wherever it underserves a veteran. A recent series of USA Today articles reported that VA supervisors in multiple States instructed employees to falsify wait times. They must be held accountable. This is a slap in the face to our vets.