

This mandate is so significant that just the county government taxpayers in New York State pay more in State-mandated Medicaid costs than local taxpayers in the 49 other States combined.

People are fleeing upstate New York because of high property taxes, and New York's Medicaid mandate is one of the reasons for that exodus.

The second initiative which I advanced was to preempt the absolute liability standard for gravity-related construction site accidents on federally funded projects. Again, New York stands alone among the 50 States in this absolute liability standard.

The fact is, this standard doesn't protect workers and adds approximately 7 percent to the cost of every building project in our State. With multi-billion-dollar projects like Gateway needing Federal support, it is critical that we use the preemption power to finally end this waste of taxpayer dollars and use those savings to rebuild and repair more infrastructure.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I must comment on the state of our political discourse in the United States. We all need to renew our efforts to conduct our debates on public issues in a civil and respectful fashion.

There is no doubt that the fragmented media and a general decline of standards has coarsened our public debate. There is plenty of blame to go around for this situation.

I encourage all those who hold elected office to recognize that we hold a sacred trust from the American people. We should uphold this responsibility in an honorable and dignified fashion and renew our efforts to improve the quality of public debate in the United States.

In doing so, we will renew our commitment to make a more perfect union. Moreover, we will give honor to those who have sacrificed to win and maintain these freedoms which we cherish.

The Constitution is forever our guide, and we should always remain true to it. We must also continue to promote individual liberty, the rule of law, and the dignity of all of our citizens. These are the characteristics of America that make ours a truly great Nation.

May God continue to bless the United States of America.

CAESAR SYRIA CIVILIAN PROTECTION ACT

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

Mr. KINZINGER. Mr. Speaker, we have got a lot of really important issues we talk about every day out here. I want to talk about something that is happening a few thousand miles away but affects us all. I want to talk about what is going on in Syria.

Mr. Speaker, I remember back, I think, in 2011 being in Israel and stand-

ing in the Golan Heights and looking over towards Syria, and our guide at the time made the comment that there is a little disturbance over there. There was some concern about where that was going to lead, and we all know what has happened since.

There is a lot of attention focused on Yemen right now, but in Syria there are 500,000 Syrian civilians who have been killed by a brutal dictator, Bashar al-Assad, 50,000 of which are children. Some of those children, in spectacular displays, were murdered by the use of chemical weapons, and I give great credit to our President and this administration for responding, as an America that believes in morals and strength should, by bombing and destroying some of the facilities that did that and holding to our red line.

But the war hasn't stopped, and the egregious nature of the war continues. I actually believe that the nature of that war is creating another generation of terrorists, people who feel that they don't have hope, people who feel that they don't have opportunity. And when hope and opportunity don't exist, people turn to extremes, and this is one case.

I want to talk specifically, though, about a really sad situation, a lady from Chicago, an American citizen, Layla Shweikani, who was murdered by the Assad regime. She was Chicago born and, a few years ago, basically made the decision that she had a passion for the people of Syria and decided to go and be an aide worker in Eastern Ghouta.

Two years ago she disappeared. We know that she was put into Assad's prison camps and tortured for 10 months—an American, by the way—before being transferred to a military court.

Unfortunately, a few weeks ago our worst fears were confirmed: Miss Layla was actually tortured to death and executed on December 28, 2016, the first American we know who was tortured and killed by Bashar al-Assad.

We know there are other Americans in captivity, and we know this is something that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, there are some in our Government, in this Chamber and in the other Chamber, that express sympathy to Bashar al-Assad and believe the antiquated theory that oppression of civilians is the only way to prevent terrorism.

I would argue that, in an age of information, in an age of knowledge, oppression only leads to more terrorists. Oppression leads to hopelessness, to a lack of opportunity, and to turning to the only option they know at that time, which may be ISIS or al-Qaida, because they don't see any other opportunity or hope.

Mr. Speaker, these people in our Government who express sympathy, while I believe that is something they have to answer with their creator ultimately someday, I am curious now what the response of everybody is when we find

out that an American woman was tortured and killed in the prison camps of Assad.

We have a bill called the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. Caesar was a brave hero from Syria who took tens of thousands of pictures of torture victims of Assad, smuggled them to the United States, brought them in front of my committee in Foreign Affairs, and showed some of these pictures.

There was an act that would sanction many members of the regime that was passed unanimously out of Foreign Affairs, passed out of the House, largely supported in the Senate, and is being held up by a junior Senator from Kentucky.

I call on the other side of this blessed Capitol to pass the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act. I call on the administration—as they said they support this—to sign this, put this on the Resolute desk.

We talk a lot about the importance of women and equality, and I couldn't agree more; but in that debate, I think it is important to remember that, in Syria, an American civilian woman was tortured to death.

We look in places like Afghanistan and know the oppression of women that occurred there. We know that America stands for something greater, and it is not just through the use of the military but through what we believe and what we stand for and the light that we shine.

Mr. Speaker, this is a terrible situation, Miss Layla's death, but let us learn from it and let us go forward, and let the people of Syria be free.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. AL GREEN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, once again I rise, and still I rise, a proud American, always proud to have the preeminent privilege of standing in the well of the Congress of the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today reflecting upon the words, the lyrics, if you will, of a song that many of us have heard. The lyrics, as I paraphrase them, are:

One day at a time, one day at a time, sweet Jesus. One day at a time. Just help me to make, just help me to take, one day at a time.

Many of us who are sons of the segregated South survived, to a certain extent, understanding the lyrics of "One Day At a Time," knowing that, if you just take one day at a time, it can become a lifetime.

Sons of the segregated South learned early that they had to compromise.

I saw something on television yesterday that caused me to reflect on all of these things, Mr. Speaker, when I saw a President who was born into plenty, not poverty, a President who was born with a pat hand, a President who was born into a life unlike that of the sons of the segregated South who were African American, who understand how to