

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating these honorees and thanking them for their service to Northern Virginia.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating the 2013 award recipients and in commending the Annandale Volunteer Fire Department for 73 years of service. I thank the brave volunteers whose dedication to public safety is deserving of our highest praise, and to each of these men and women I say: "Stay safe."

SHARING STORIES IN SUPPORT OF
COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION
REFORM

HON. JOE GARCIA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 21, 2013

Mr. GARCIA. Mr. Speaker, the following are stories of individuals affected by our Nation's broken immigration system:

Story 1: I came to the U.S. from Nicaragua when I was six years old along with my younger brother. When we first got to the U.S. it was really exciting for us—first of all boarding the plane and just trying to, you know, fulfill our curiosity, and putting our fingers wherever we can, touching everything that was shiny. And we were even more amazed when we got out of the airplane and saw the moving escalators that we'd never seen before. And we actually thought that we were at Disney World at that point (laughter)! It turned out that we weren't in Disney World when we got off the plane, but we did go to Disney World the same week we got here.

So everything was real bright and hopeful when we first got to the U.S. We came on a visa which expired after six months. Mom was with her boyfriend whom she had a daughter with, and so we all lived together for quite a while until her boyfriend started drinking and abusing alcohol. My Mom's boyfriend would abuse her and hit her and pretty much victimize her constantly. There came a point when me and my brother were coming home from school, which was right next door to our house, a trailer, and we saw that as we were walking toward the garage, it just looked like a robbery.

My Mom's boyfriend came out in boxers, and he looked out of it. His eyes were red and he was just saying all these crazy things—"Oh, your Mom this," and "your Mom that," but my Mom wasn't there at the time. My Mom pulled up in her car. She went to our rooms and got as much clothes as she could, and then she put us in her car and put our seatbelts on. As she was putting the keys in the ignition to drive off and flee, he got in front of her car and called the police. When my Mom heard the police sirens, her instinct was to protect us and to keep us together. She was trying to hide so the police wouldn't catch us, and so we were running behind other trailers but eventually we had to stop. And that was when police officers came around and put her in handcuffs, and we were watching this.

And my Mom, like, she just collapsed, pretty much, when all of this was happening, and we saw tears in her eyes.

And so I figured, you know, I know who the victim is here. I expected the police officer to do the right thing and protect my Mom, things like that. But because my Mom was

fearful, and because she had no status, she didn't speak up and all. She was she was crying and bawling inside the car. So she was unfairly detained that day. But moving fast forward, after she got out of jail for that, like the next day, my Mom became a strong and independent woman. She started working harder, and we had our own apartment without her boyfriend. It was just so peaceful when we were together. We'd watch movies together—she loved comedies, so we were always watching comedy movies. We would take turns cooking, sometimes. Everything was really good, to us, after that incident.

But that incident followed her until a day that we were around 10th grade. She was pulled over for driving without a license, and because of those charges they arrested her too. We were at home, right, expecting her to come at 11:00 p.m., which was when her shift ended at the gas station that she worked at. We were watching the clock, and we were like "oh, it's 11, she should be home anytime now," and then it became 11:30 and our eyes were still wide open, until 11:45 and 11:50 when we just fell asleep. We woke up late the next day; it was a school day and she, she wasn't there. That was the craziest experience that we ever had. It was like our mother was abducted by aliens to us and we were just like, "Where is she?" Our aunt gave us a call: "Hey your Mom was arrested for driving without a license." That's when my brother and I immediately were trying to figure out what to do. I was fifteen years old, and trying to figure out if we should pay the next month's rent or sell her car to pay an attorney.

During that period, all the charges were dropped against my Mom, but they found out about her status and they transferred her to ICE and then they deported her.

What bothers me the most, and what angered me the most during this whole ordeal, was that I was never given the opportunity to say bye to her, to look at her, to hug her, or to make her a promise that I'll see her again. We didn't have any form of ID that allowed us to go inside the detention center. And that's really what has angered me the most and why I'm at this site, to make that sure no one has to go through this again.

After my Mom was deported, some of my aunts were financially struggling themselves, but they offered to take us in. Unfortunately, due to economic hardships, they couldn't sustain us. And that's how I ended up in the foster system with some strangers—with a family I didn't know. To me it was just truly nerve-wracking. The first night I couldn't sleep because I didn't know what was going to happen to me, or who these people were that were in the room with me. And the reason I felt like I didn't belong there was because I was never abused or neglected by my Mom. My Mom was an outstanding woman. Most kids go through the foster system for that reason—they were either abused, neglected, or abandoned. That was not the case for me. So I ended up there and now I've aged out of the foster care. I'm 18, I live alone, and it's difficult to come home and not have my family to tell them, "Hey, this is how my day went," or "Hey, I had a bad day, let's talk about it." It's really tough.

Story 2: My dream is to be a citizen of this country because I came here when I was three months old. I am now twenty-one, almost twenty-two, so that is almost my whole life. CIR would change my life and my family's because I have seen my parents suffer and work so hard every day of their life in the sun and see the struggle that they're in and provide a better future for them to see

the happiness in their eyes because they haven't seen their families in 15 years and it hurts me because I know that I haven't seen my mom or my dad it would be so hard. I want to see them happy one day and reunited with their families and for them to come back without the worry of being sent home. I have much hope that this will come very soon.

Story 3: I am originally from Cuba. I came in the sixties and for over 10 years I have been involved with immigration issues. For Cubans, you know, it has always been easy to get the papers in order, but I think the system is very unfair for the other immigrants. Other immigrants come here for various reasons, mostly because of the poverty in their homes and the political situations from their home land. And they are always being created by the government of the United States and the corporations of the United States with the help of the government. Especially comparing the Cubans with the Haitian people and the wet foot, dry foot—to us, we call it, white foot, black foot. The Haitian people need—just as much as the Cubans—to be accepted by this country and be allowed to come. The policy of the United States is wrong, you know, saying that the situation with the Cubans is political as they are suppressed by a communist government but Haiti supposedly is being run by democratic governments which is not true, they have a lot of dictators there. And a lot of pressure and interference from the United States. So it is political too, besides the poverty that's been created there, so they should be treated just like Cubans. Other immigrants—they should be treated the same. Stop the restriction they got making it hard for families to reunite. Senator Marco Rubio said he approves of immigration reform if they come here legally and wait in the line, but people have been waiting 15-20 years in the line. That's not fair. Besides we give this wrong sense of reality of what's going on in this country because we export movies and TV shows where everybody lives in fabulous mansions, got great jobs, fancy cars, and when they come here they find that the land of the dream is nothing but the land of the nightmare.

Story 4: I've been in this country for 14 years. My kids were born here, we're a part of this country. I pay taxes, we're part of the country's economy. We haven't committed any crimes. We drive a car without insurance. I think that that's bad for the country's economy. There are 12 million [people] driving without insurance. I think that being able to have a license is a good option and that residency should come with a path to citizenship. Us immigrant believe that we are helping the country. I don't see any reason for not wanting to make a path to citizenship. We have a clean record, we've bought property. I think we'd all be better off financially by contributing to this country, it's healthy for the country. We hope that Senator Marco Rubio understands a little of the problem.

Story 5: My dream is for immigration reform because immigration reform will allow me to attend any college I choose and to have a bigger dream than my parents had.

Story 6: Immigration reform will change my life because it will give me reassurance that my friend will not be deported.

Story 7: I'm an aspiring student. A pathway to citizenship will allow everyone to pursue their dreams.

Story 8: For the past two years I have been trying to renew my driver's license, but I have not been successful. I am required to present additional immigration documents that I am not eligible to have.

A few days ago I was given a ticket for driving without proper ID. Today I am limiting my driving as much as I possibly can. What you need to understand is that we have been living in Miami for the past 17 years and have been running our family business in Miami for the past eight years.

If I don't have the freedom to drive around, I am afraid that our family business will suffer to the point that we as a family will not be able to sustain ourselves.

Story 9: I came to the United States 17 years ago. I applied for political asylum and was denied. Without realizing it, I had a deportation order and I was very scared. I have a young child and am wishing for comprehensive immigration reform for the single moms, for the moms that have young children, because it makes me scared to leave my child. I'm hoping for immigration reform for all the women out there that work as housekeepers, maids, etc., and also for folks with deportation orders that have small children and can't leave them. This is the best place for them, and they can't go back. I'm hoping it will help all of us too. Thank you very much.

Story 10: I've been an American citizen for more than 20 years. I became one in Chicago. There are so many things that we are hearing every day dealing with immigrants and the manner in which immigrants are abused because they're farmers and unfortunately undocumented. We hear about the suffering of these poor people who are my race too. It's an explosion from both political parties—Democrats and Republicans. Immigrants have been abused constantly since when I was young. Now I'm 74 years old. The suffering these people have gone and are going through is inhumane. What they're doing to my people is criminal. That's why I'm fully in favor of them becoming citizens as soon as possible. Thank you very much.

Story 11: I live in Lakeland, Florida. I'm Mexican, and I have lived in here for over 23 years. My four children are citizens, and I have my house paid for 14 years. My problem is immigration. I worked many years as a farm worker, but one day I looked for work in construction. After starting construction work, the boss told us that we have to give fingerprints. But what happened? A week later they called me to come back because something had come up. I went back and they told me "Just wait here. Something went wrong." Then came two police officers to interview me. They said, "I want to see the tattoos you have." I told them, "I have no tattoos, sir." They were confusing me with someone else and there began my problem. I was in jail for six days. Immigration takes its inmates to Tampa around 6:00 a.m. There, I set a bail of \$1,500, and I was let go. But my problem is still pending. And again, I am looking for a better job. Now I have a deportation order for May 7, and if nobody helps me I'll be deported. So I ask the Senator Marco Rubio and Congressman Dennis Ross please say yes to immigration reform, no more for me but for thousands of undocumented families who are here. I do not want to see them go through the same problem I'm having. Thank you very much.

Update: He received a stay of removal from Immigration and Customs Enforcement. He applied for a work permit and driver's license after receiving the notification. The fear of being separated from his family has been lifted, at least temporarily.

Story 12: I agree to the legalizing 11 million illegal immigrants. They have the right to remain in this country because many have brought their families, their children have grown up here, and they already have Amer-

ican ways. Take my case, for example—I came to this country for education and for a better life for my family. I went without seeing my daughter for years, but once I became a resident I was able to request her. It is for this reason that I agree that illegal immigrants and their families should receive their documents and live more peacefully. Living anxiously and not having status is horrible. I support all people of good will to resolve their immigration status.

Story 13: I'm Mexican. I came to the U.S. eight years ago following my husband. He has lived here for 25 years. We have three children, two living in Mexico and one living with us here in the U.S. Although not born here, he does not know any country other than this one. Since I arrived here, I have served as a volunteer at my son's school. I know all the work that teachers do in Mexico because I worked as a teacher for 20 years. I have 20 years of experience, but here for lack of papers, I had to work as a maid. I want immigration reform to pass.

Story 14: I say yes to citizenship and residence. My mom is a person of 72 years. She must have psychiatric treatment because of her depression, which is caused by the fact that one of my brothers, who is 45, cannot be a resident, even though he has lived here for more than 10 years. The reform [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] is only for young people. Then I have another brother who is a citizen and has been diagnosed with colon cancer. For these reasons we need my brother to stay with us. He is the only one that does not have papers. I think there should be a reform as soon as possible.

Story 15: I say yes to citizenship. I came here in 2001 with my tourist visa and my daughter. She came on the same visa with me. She grew up here during the past 12 years, but she is now back in Ecuador. My driver's license expired in 2006, so now I am frustrated because I cannot drive. I am a very good-hearted person and have a lot of creativity. I have been working with Amway, and I pay my taxes. I would like to go out and drive and have clients. I have been very obedient. I have not driven. Instead, I have my bike and I go by buses. My daughter was so frustrated that she went back to Ecuador two years ago. She loves this country as I love this country. We help people so I am prepared to help people in very good ways.

GIVING THANKS FOR AMERICA'S "FIRST FREEDOM"

HON. FRANK R. WOLF

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 21, 2013

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, I submit for the RECORD remarks I delivered yesterday at America's Table Thanksgiving Luncheon hosted by the American Jewish Committee:

I would like to begin by thanking AJC for the invitation to join you at the annual "America's Table Thanksgiving Luncheon" the theme of which is religious freedom.

In 1620 a hearty band of Pilgrims set sail for the New World in the face of tremendous peril and uncertainty such that they might be able to live, act and worship according to the dictates of their conscience.

The traditional first Thanksgiving feast celebrated at Plymouth was a time for the Pilgrims who had survived the journey by sea and the harsh winter that followed to give thanks for the bountiful harvest and

recognize the hand of Divine Providence that had guided them to this point.

I read with great interest recently that this year, for the first time since 1888, Thanksgiving and the first full day of Hanukkah fall on the same day.

There are of course deep thematic commonalities between the two holidays—both grounded in triumph over religious oppression.

But even as we celebrate the American experience in this regard, I am reminded anew that religious freedom remains an elusive hope for too many. As I reflect on the privilege of living in America I am cognizant of the responsibility that comes with that to help those around the world who are oppressed or persecuted.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." Dr. King's statement is so poignant. In times of trouble, the silence of an enemy is expected, but the silence of a friend is devastating.

I am concerned that this nation, which has always been a friend to the oppressed, the marginalized and the forgotten is at risk of sidelining this "first freedom" and failing to speak out when it comes under attack.

Arguably religious freedom has never been more under assault than it is today.

Looking to the Middle East there is often societal and communal violence and repression against religious communities which specifically targets religious minorities. Too often the governments of these lands foster an atmosphere of intolerance or in some cases such as Iran, outright criminality as it relates to different faith traditions like the Baha'is. Tragically, since 1979, the Iranian government has killed more than 200 Baha'i leaders and dismissed over 10,000 from government and university jobs.

The dangerous realities facing religious minorities have been exasperated by the so-called Arab Spring—a Spring which has devolved into Winter for many of the most vulnerable in these societies.

In February I travelled to the Middle East—specifically to Lebanon and Egypt. One of the main purposes of the trip was to spend time with the Syrian Christian community—a community with ancient roots dating back to the 1st century. I wanted to hear firsthand from Syrian Christians about their concerns and to put this issue in the larger context of an imperiled Christian community in the broader Middle East, specifically in Egypt and Iraq.

In my meetings with Coptic Christians and other minorities in Egypt they spoke of being increasingly marginalized with the ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood. While Morsi has since been removed from power, the situation in Egypt today remains fluid. However, this much is clear: Attacks against Coptic Christians have escalated and they are feeling threatened in the land they have inhabited for centuries.

The issues I've just outlined must be viewed not simply as today's news but rather through the lens of history. A phrase not often heard outside the majority Muslim world is "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people." The "Saturday people" are, of course, the Jewish people.

Except for Israel, their once vibrant communities in countries throughout the region are now decimated. In 1948 the Jewish population of Iraq was roughly 150,000; today no more than 4 remain . . . some reports indicate there may actually be just one Jewish person left in Iraq. In Egypt, the Jewish population was once as many as 80,000; now roughly 20 remain.