people around this country to please sign this petition with their name and State, nothing else, who agree with us. We have people from both sides, but we need more Members, that 2013 is the time to start bringing our troops home, not waiting until 2014.

Mr. Speaker, beside me, again, I bring posters to the floor to show the Members of the House that we are still at war. The poster beside me, Mr. Speaker, is an Honor Guard bringing a flagged-draped transfer case off a plane.

Again, I join my friends and ask the Members of Congress to start debating the policy, and let's start bringing our troops home in 2013 and not wait until December of 2014. As a former commandant said, when our friends start killing us, then it's time to pull the plug.

I close by asking God to please bless our men and women in uniform, to bless the families of our men and women in uniform. I ask God in His loving arms to hold the families who've given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

God, please bless the House and Senate, that we will do what is right in Your eyes for Your people here in the United States of America.

God, please give strength, wisdom, and courage to President Obama, that he will do what is right in Your eyes for his people.

And I close by saying three times: God, please, God, please, God, please continue to bless America.

RESULTS OF PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS PLEBISCITE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, Puerto Rico recently held a plebiscite on its political status. I want to convey the results to the American public, describe their significance, and outline the next steps I will take.

As background, Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898. The island is home to 3.7 million American citizens who cannot vote for President, are not represented in the Senate, and elect one nonvoting Member to the House. Federal law is supreme in Puerto Rico, but its residents are treated unequally under many Federal programs.

Plebiscite voters were first asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. Over 1.7 million people answered, which is about 75 percent of registered voters on the island. Fifty-four percent said they did not want the current status to continue, while 46 percent said they did.

Voters were then asked to express their preference among the three viable alternatives to the current status: statehood, free association, and independence. Over 1.3 million people chose an option. Sixty-one percent voted for statehood, 33 percent voted for free association, and 5.5 percent voted for independence. In addition, 472,000 voters did not provide an answer.

This plebiscite marked the first time voters were directly asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. One of the two main political parties in Puerto Rico urged a ''yes'' vote. Nevertheless, the ''no'' vote won by eight points. Those voting ''no'' included statehood supporters, as well as advocates of independence and free association. These three groups are united in their opposition to the current status which is colonial in nature. It deprives Puerto Ricans of their right to choose their leaders who make their national laws and to equal treatment under those laws.

□ 1010

Not one of my stateside colleagues in Congress would accept this response for their constituents. So they should respect that my constituents no longer accept it either.

The rejection of territory status fundamentally changes the terms of this debate. After this vote, the question is not whether but when Puerto Rico will cease to be a territory and will have a fully democratic status. Defenders of the status quo may obstruct change in the short term, but in a democracy, the will of the people ultimately prevails.

Let me turn to the second question in the plebiscite, asking voters which status should replace the current status. Of the 1.3 million people who voted for one of the three options, a supermajority chose statehood. Of critical importance, the 810,000 votes for statehood on the second question exceeded the 803,000 votes for the current status on the first question. For the first time, there are more people in Puerto Rico who want to become a State than who want to continue as a territory. This fact further undermines the democratic legitimacy of the current status.

Some wish to downplay the results of the plebiscite by citing the voters who left the second question blank, but this argument does not withstand scrutiny. In our democracy, outcomes are determined by ballots properly cast. Power rests with the citizen who votes, not the one who stays home or who refuses to choose from among the options provided.

Some voters may have left the second question blank simply because they prefer the current status to its alternatives. Those voters were able to vote for the current status in the first question. So their viewpoint was reflected in the plebiscite results. Others may have declined to answer because they were led to believe there was another option that should have been on the ballot, a best-of-all-worlds proposal called ''enhanced commonwealth.'' But each of the last four Presidential administrations has rejected this proposal, as have all key congressional leaders. A blank vote to protest the exclusion of an impossible status proposal is entitled to no weight.

As Puerto Rico's representative in the U.S. Congress, I will work with my allies to ensure that the President and Congress take appropriate action in light of these results. The people of Puerto Rico have spoken, and I intend to make certain that their voice is heard loud and clear.

ACCELERATE THE TIMETABLE: BRING THE TROOPS HOME BEFORE 2014

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since the House last convened in late September, about 30 more Americans have given their lives in the war in Afghanistan. The total number of fatalities has now passed 2,000. And as of October 7, we've been at war in Afghanistan for a staggering 11 years. There are more than 2,000 families that will have an empty chair this Thanksgiving, more than 2,000 families with a void that can't possibly be filled—husbands and wives who will have to go on without their life partner, children missing a parent, parents who are suffering the terrible grief of losing a child.

The human cost has become too steep for our Nation to bear. We can't ask our troops and their families to endure any more sacrifice for a military occupation—now more than a decade old—which has not accomplished its goals and is undermining our national security as well.

And of course, the fiscal burden is one that rests on the shoulders of every single taxpaying American. The Afghanistan pricetag would be high even for a successful, well-executed policy that was actually making America stronger. But to waste the people's money to the tune of $10 billion a month on this failure is a national scandal.

To every one of my colleagues who has spoken on this floor about excessive government spending, it's time to look at the cost of foreign wars before we start cutting domestic programs that our very own people need to survive.

It's not just progressives like me who believe we need a change in policy, Mr. Speaker. There is a clear consensus among the American people. They agree that this military occupation is bad for America, bad for Afghanistan, and bad for the cause of peace and stability around the world. I think it was pretty telling that, during the recent campaign, even the Republican candidate for President ended up supporting a withdrawal of troops by 2014. But in my opinion, that's not nearly soon enough.

Now that the Presidential campaign is over, we must accelerate that timetable and end this war as soon as is safely possible because every remaining day that we have troops on the ground is another day that gives

strength to the very extremists that we're trying to defeat.

The time has come to invest in Afghanistan the right way, with humanitarian aid and civilian support rather than military force. It's time for a SMART Security approach that puts development and diplomacy first—not just in Afghanistan but throughout the developing world and in other nations where terrorism poses a threat. It's not only the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker; it's the most cost-effective way as well. It's pennies on the dollar to invest in humanitarian support for nations rather than military involvement.

On Sunday, many of us took part in Veterans Day parades back in our home districts. In doing so, we heard expressed that our Nation is so grateful for the service of these men and women, those who left their families and their communities to serve their country. I bow to no one in my respect for our veterans and those currently deployed overseas. But I believe the best way for us to support them right now and the best way to honor American values is to end the war in Afghanistan and bring our troops home.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 16 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Donna Kafer, Arizona Legislative Chaplaincy, Peoria, Arizona, offered the following prayer:

Dear Holy and Righteous Father,

As this honored body of Congress convenes today, we come first to humbly submit ourselves before You, acknowledging You as Lord and Creator, the One who directs the paths of those who call upon Your precious name. Savior God, we also want to thank You for Your infinite grace, Your divine mercy, and for the deep love that You extend to each of us.

Father, I ask that You faithfully pour out an overflowing measure of health, wisdom, and clarity of mind on our leaders as they attend to the many critical tasks at hand. Provide each Member with an ever-increasing abundance of comfort, peace, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Lord, may we grasp the full spectrum of Your character, so that our love for You might never waver. And Sovereign God, may Your life-giving truth preside here forevermore. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND DONNA KAFER

The SPEAKER. Without objection, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona. Mr. Speaker, I was gratified today to hear our beloved citizen of Arizona, Chaplain Donna Kafer, offer our prayer.

Chaplain Kafer is the author of two books, ''Women of Courage'' and ''Women of Faith,'' and she's currently working on a third book called ''Women of Grace.'' And that will complete the series, ''Gardens of Grace.''

Mr. Speaker, I think it's especially appropriate because, indeed, Donna Kafer is a woman of grace that I've had the privilege to know for a very long time and am so grateful to be able to call her ''friend.''

She has made her aim in life to serve her God, her country, her family, and the truth. She serves as the appointed chaplain for the Arizona State Legislature, where she has provided spiritual encouragement for leaders, staff, and State employees for about 14 years now, Mr. Speaker.

Chaplain Kafer has a master's degree in ministry through Phoenix University of Theology, and has received chaplaincy training through the Southwest School of Chaplaincy.

Chaplain Kafer is an Arizona native. She lives in Peoria, Arizona, with her husband of 23 years, Ross, a firefighter-paramedic, and their daughter, Andrea, a 20-year-old college student. They've been members of Christ's Church of the Valley in northwest Peoria for nearly 18 years, under the noble leadership of Pastor Don Wilson. And it is my honor for her to be our guest today.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. YODER). The Chair will entertain 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF ARMY STAFF SERGEANT KENNETH BENNETT

(Mr. CRAWFORD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CRAWFORD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Army Staff Sergeant Kenneth Bennett. As an explosive ordnance disposal technician, Bennett put his life on the line every day to protect his comrades. As a former EOD tech myself, I know the danger Bennett faced, and today I honor his ultimate sacrifice.

Staff Sergeant Kenneth Bennett is an American hero. He entered the Army in 2004, and in 2006 he trained to be an explosive ordnance disposal technician. Bennett was serving his third, and what was to be his last, deployment to Afghanistan. Bennett earned numerous awards for his service, including the Defense Meritorious Service Medal and the Combat Action Badge.

I did not know personally Staff Sergeant Bennett, but I do know this: He was a son, a husband and father, and a friend to many. Staff Sergeant Bennett leaves behind his wife, Mandi, their 2-year-old daughter, and another child on the way. Because he served, America and the world are more free.

EOD technicians are the first line of defense in protecting our servicemembers overseas and with homeland missions. The EOD community deserves the respect and full resources of the Department of Defense to continue saving lives.

God bless the memory of Staff Sergeant Kenneth Bennett, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

SUPPORT RECOGNITION OF MALALA YOUSUFZAI BY THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. First, I think it is appropriate to welcome back my colleagues and to congratulate all of those who have chosen again, if reelected, to serve this great, great Nation, and for those for the first time who have the honor and privilege of being in this storied institution.

Now words are that we can come together and make a difference in the lives of Americans and we can, in fact, find a way to help the most vulnerable, the impoverished, and those who work every day. I know that we can solve this problem of sequestration.

I lead now into something that is quite contrary to the idea of America's issues and problems and ask my colleagues to join me in supporting a Congressional Gold Medal for Malala Yousufzai. This is the little girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan standing up for education for our children and for her fellow boys and girls. What an amazing young lady now healing in a British hospital.