

Mr. Speaker, it is not often that on the floor of this Chamber we can deal with several major issues simultaneously, but such is the case today as we deal with House Resolution 58, which would deny the waiver of the Jackson-Vanik for the nation of Vietnam. This issue is not just of trade and international commerce. It truly is an opportunity for the United States to help get our story straight regarding one of the great tragedies of our time.

The war in Vietnam was truly a tragedy for that nation. Great damage was inflicted upon the people, on a country that had been at war for over a third of the century, from World War II to the conclusion of that effort, but it had serious implications for our country. It divided generations, divided families, polarized our society.

I have great respect for the men who served in Vietnam. It has been a privilege for me to become acquainted with our colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. Sam Johnson), and the suffering that he and his family went through. I have been touched by that extraordinary sacrifice.

Yet, at the same time it is clear to me that it is important for us to acknowledge the problems that we faced as a Nation dealing with the war in Vietnam. We were on the wrong side of history. Just this week, we had before the John Quincy Adams Society, Robert McNamara acknowledging that he was well aware, during his tenure, that the war was not winnable and acknowledged the problems with the rationale that was advanced. These were items that were known, frankly, on college campuses around the country at this time but denied at the highest levels of our government.

Last year, on the eve of the Jackson-Vanik waiver vote, I received a call from Vietnam from my daughter who was visiting. She was struck by the kindness of the Vietnamese people, the beauty of the landscape and as a college student she was not really aware, until her experience in Vietnam, of the tragedy of that conflict.

I have in mind today that conversation and her experience as we come forward. We are going to talk about trade and economic opportunity, and that is important. We are on the verge of signing a major trade agreement with Vietnam that will accelerate the economic prospects of that country. We have in the capitol today, Ambassador Pete Peterson, who has performed a tremendous service over the last few years in his work in Vietnam. He is arguably the best qualified person in America to bring about the reconciliation. His political and military experience, his passion and his compassion set him apart and make him uniquely qualified. I continue to be amazed at his efforts.

We have the opportunity to build on his efforts with the rejection of the disapproval resolution, to make progress on human rights, transparency of economic activities. We have the opportunity to help in Southeast Asia, the world's 12th most populous country, hasten their economic progress, but it goes far beyond that. The defeat of House Resolution 58 will help accelerate the integration of Vietnam into the world economy. It will help open up their society, but more important it will be an opportunity for us here on this floor to acknowledge the United States needs to get beyond this terrible legacy.

It is more than economics. It is an opportunity for America to get things right. I strongly urge my colleagues to join with us this morning in the Capitol, room H-137. Pete Peterson will be meeting with us individually to talk about his experience, to talk about this opportunity, to give us a chance to not only move Vietnam forward economically but to do what is right by the American people in this conflict.