AMENDMENT TO RULES COMMITTEE PRINT 117-13

OFFERED BY MS. SPEIER OF CALIFORNIA

Add at the end of title LX of division E the following:

SEC. _____. AFGHAN REFUGEES OF SPECIAL HUMANITARIAN CONCERN.

(a) In General.—The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall designate as Priority 2 refugees of special humanitarian concern the following individuals:

(1) Individuals who—

(A) are or were habitual residents of Afghanistan;

(B) are nationals of Afghanistan or stateless persons;

(C) have suffered persecution or have a well-founded fear of persecution; and

(D) share common occupational characteristics that identify them as targets of persecution in Afghanistan on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social
group, or political opinion, as determined by the Secretary of State, including the following:

(i) Civil servants.

(ii) Public officials and government personnel, including members of the peace negotiation team.

(iii) Democracy and human rights defenders.

(iv) Women’s rights defenders.

(v) Journalists and media personnel.

(vi) Legal professionals.

(2) Individuals who—

(A) are or were habitual residents of Afghanistan;

(B) are nationals of Afghanistan or stateless persons; and

(C) were employed in Afghanistan for an aggregate period of not less than 1 year by—

(i) a media or nongovernmental organization based in the United States; or

(ii) an organization or entity that has received a grant from, or entered into a cooperative agreement or contract with, the United States Government.

(3) Individuals who—
(A) are or were habitual residents of Afghanistan;

(B) are nationals of Afghanistan or stateless persons; and

(C) are beneficiaries of an approved I–130 Petition for Alien Relative.

(b) Processing of Afghan Refugees.—The processing of individuals who are or were habitual residents of Afghanistan, are nationals of Afghanistan or stateless persons, and have suffered persecution, or have a well-founded fear of persecution, for classification as refugees may occur in Afghanistan or in a third country.

(c) Eligibility for Admission as a Refugee.—An alien may not be denied the opportunity to apply for admission as a refugee under this section solely because such alien qualifies as an immediate relative of a national of the United States or is eligible for admission to the United States under any other immigrant classification.

(d) Identification of Other Persecuted Groups.—The Secretary of State, or the designee of the Secretary, is authorized to classify other groups of individuals who are or were nationals and residents of Afghanistan as Priority 2 refugees of special humanitarian concern.
(e) Satisfaction of Other Requirements.—
Aliens designated as Priority 2 refugees of special humanitarian concern under this section shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements under section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1157) for admission to the United States.

(f) Timeline for Processing Applications.—

(1) In General.—The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall ensure that all steps under the control of the United States Government incidental to the approval of such applications, including required screenings and background checks, are completed not later than 6 months after the date on which an eligible applicant submits an application under subsection (a).

(2) Exception.—Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the United States Refugee Admission Program may take additional time to process applications described in paragraph (1) if satisfaction of national security concerns requires such additional time, if the Secretary of Homeland Security, or the designee of the Secretary, has determined that the applicant meets the requirements for status as a refugee of special humanitarian concern under this section and has so notified the applicant.
(g) ADDITIONAL FORMS OF IMMIGRATION RELIEF.— The Secretary of State shall consider additional forms of immigration relief available to Afghans and coordinate with embassies, nongovernmental organizations, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to receive referrals for individuals who—

1. are or were habitual residents of Afghanistan;
2. are nationals of Afghanistan or stateless persons; and
3. are described in subsection (a) or otherwise face humanitarian concerns.

(h) ISSUANCE OF TRAVEL DOCUMENTS.—Each officer or employee of the Federal Government whose official duties include issuing travel documentation, diplomatic notes, letters of support, or other relevant materials for individuals described in subsection (a) or for nationals of Afghanistan who are applying for special immigrant visas or any other humanitarian relief under the immigration laws, shall carry out such duties as expeditiously as possible, and shall prioritize facilitating the evacuation of such individuals.

(i) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that—
(1) the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security, should establish a special humanitarian parole program that—

(A) is for individuals described in subsection (a) and for nationals of Afghanistan who are applying for special immigrant visas or any other humanitarian relief under the immigration laws, who are human rights defenders, democracy workers, women’s rights activists, women politicians, journalists, or other highly visible women leaders; and

(B) prioritizes providing assistance for women; and

(2) women’s organizations in Afghanistan should be included as recipients of any Federal funding for assistance in Afghanistan, such as for food, water, and shelter, as such organizations serve as trusted resources for vulnerable Afghan women seeking such assistance, most often as they are fleeing direct violence and threats on their lives.