

On the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other embassy personnel were killed in what appears to have been a coordinated assault on our consulate in Benghazi, Libya. The attack came on the same day demonstrators scaled the walls of the U.S. embassy in Cairo, Egypt, taking down and burning our flag.

The murder of the four Americans and the affront to our diplomatic missions – in these countries and elsewhere – is a violation of international law. Those involved in the deaths of our officials must be held accountable.

Furthermore, the governments of these nations are served notice that transgressions against American diplomatic personnel or our embassies and consular offices – sovereign U.S. territory – will not be tolerated. Finally, and most importantly, there must be a thorough investigation of the administration's handling of these events.

New York Times: Americans Should Face Government Alone:

Over the years I have found much within the pages of the New York Times that I couldn't agree with, from their consistent editorial bias against our state and the South in general, to their lack of balance in political reporting. Yet, I have never read a more distorted view of the facts in America's third largest paper than in a recent opinion piece arguing that Congress should no longer help ordinary Americans.

The op-ed titled, "A Congress for the Many," concludes that Congress has no business advocating for Americans when they encounter the inevitable stone walls that ring our federal bureaucracy. Instead, the author apparently thinks a grandmother struggling to correct errors in her Social Security records that are literally denying her well-earned benefits, or a U.S. citizen stuck in a foreign country and unable to reach American embassy personnel for assistance, should be left to fend for themselves. In short, Americans should have no advocate in their federal government other than the president and his army of unaccountable bureaucrats.

The writer cites the Constitution to justify his narrow view that the legislative branch should not

intercede on behalf of Americans who drop through the cracks. Instead, he says Congress has only one role: pass laws.

For a moment, let's live in his world. During the confusion and uncertainty of Hurricane Katrina, patients at the VA hospital in Biloxi, Mississippi, were evacuated by the government to safer facilities farther inland. Unfortunately, amid the fog of this unfolding disaster, officials could not tell worried family members where their loved ones had been relocated. Hours into the storm, my congressional office received a frantic call from a citizen from South Alabama who lost track of her husband, a VA patient in Biloxi. She did as the op-ed writer implied and contacted the VA hospital for help – of course, she got no answers. She turned to her congressman. My office spent no less than a week on the phone with VA officials before we were able to verify her husband was safe in the VA hospital in Tuscaloosa. This may seem a small thing to the writer up in New York City, but to this lady – rightfully concerned over the status of her infirmed husband – this was the most important matter in the world.

Unfortunately, I could recite thousands of stories like this one. We could also debate whether our bureaucracy – from the VA to Social Security to the IRS – has become so detached from individual Americans that "customer service" has sadly become an afterthought. Curiously, the writer isn't as concerned about the bloated maze of federal agencies, whose authority is not enumerated in the Constitution. Nevertheless, in America, every citizen has the right to representation and the Founding Fathers created Congress to be closest to the people.

Since coming to office ten years ago, my staff and I have handled nearly 20,000 inquiries from citizens of the First Congressional District. Over 3,300 of these cases related to problems people were experiencing with Social Security, and more than 3,100 involved the VA. My office worked over 540 written inquiries with FEMA in the aftermath of hurricanes Ivan and Katrina, and more recently handled more than 300 oil-spill related inquiries from citizens and local business owners. I am not seeking a pat on the back for the work of my staff, just defending the right of hardworking Americans to call their congressman if they need help.

It is particularly offensive that the writer suggests those who are personally connected to a congressman will likely receive more help. I can only speak for my office, but we have no litmus test. If you are a resident of the First Congressional District, you have a right to expect, and will receive, assistance with your case from my office.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free

at 1-800-288-8721.

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