



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 10, 2020

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The Goodness of America

Land of the Free, Home of the Brave

Janis Shinwari had been serving the U.S. military as an Afghan interpreter for eight years before coming to the United States in 2013. This past Fourth of July, Shinwari and his family celebrated their first Independence Day as American citizens.

According to CNN, Shinwari decided to side with the United States after seeing the Taliban's terror campaign. He knew the best way he could serve was by acting as a translator, despite the enormous dangers it posed. "If the Taliban catch you, they will torture you in front of your kids and families and make a film of you and then send it to other translators as a warning message to stop working with the American forces," Shinwari explained.

CNN reported that Shinwari's contribution to the military in Afghanistan was massive. Not only did he save multiple American lives, but he also killed several Taliban members, landing himself on the Taliban "kill list."

Shinwari told NPR he was not supposed to fight as an interpreter, but he found himself in a position in 2008 in which he felt he had no choice. "I saw [Captain] Matt Zeller, that he was alive in a ditch and there were two Taliban behind him to kill him," Shinwari recalled. "I shot the two Taliban and I saved Matt Zeller's life."

Zeller recalled seeing Shinwari standing above him and warning, "I'm Janis. And I'm one of your translators. You're not safe." Zeller and Shinwari have been close ever since that fateful day.

But Shinwari's actions placed him in grave danger, and he was kept hidden on a U.S. military base near Kabul for his safety, which meant he could not see his family, including his children.

Zeller wanted to do something to help Shinwari and his family. He told CNN he "asked anyone who would listen" if they could help. By 2013, he was able to help Shinwari and his family obtain visas to come to America. Zeller also launched a GoFundMe page to raise money for Shinwari and his family to help them get situated, but Shinwari refused the money, instead using it so that he and Zeller could set up No One Left Behind, a nonprofit that works to bring interpreters to the United States. That organization has helped more than 5,000 translators and their families come to the United States.

Meanwhile, Shinwari said he is beyond grateful for his new life in America. "Once you are here, you're free," he said. "You don't have to worry, you can sleep well."

But he said he will continue to work tirelessly to help rescue his coworkers still in Afghanistan and Iraq get to safety. "It doesn't matter how long does it take," he vowed. "But I will fight for them."

On June 29, acting Homeland Security Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli administered the oath of allegiance to Shinwari and his wife in Fairfax, Virginia, CNN reported. "During his service, he saved the lives of five American soldiers," Cuccinelli said, according to NPR. "That is not something many people can say."

Let Freedom Ring

There is perhaps no better example of what Independence Day is all about than actions California



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citizens took on the Fourth of July.

California and its cities have enacted a number of draconian measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic, including a lengthy shelter-in-place order and a ban on public fireworks displays, which affected July 4 celebrations, the *OC Register* reported.

But it seems California citizens are fed up with the restrictions and double standards, particularly since California officials said nothing against the massive protests and riots following the in-custody death of George Floyd in May. “For those of you out there protesting, I want you to know that you matter,” California’s Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom said on June 1. “To those who want to express themselves ... God bless you. Keep doing it. Your rage is real.”

But as Independence Day approached, officials suddenly became concerned that large group gatherings would cause COVID-19 rates to spike. “One of the areas of biggest concern as it relates to the spread of COVID-19 in this state remains family gatherings,” Newsom said at the start of July.

“I really cannot impress upon you more — the tendency to invite friends, neighbors over that you haven’t seen is there. Perhaps you’ve already done that,” he added. “I hope you’ll reconsider those gatherings with people you do not live with that are not in your immediate household.”

Los Angeles County announced a fireworks ban and beach closures ahead of holiday celebrations. Despite these bans, video after video appeared online featuring the Southern California sky illuminated with fireworks on the Fourth of July as individuals chose to shirk the bans and celebrate America’s birthday.

And the city of Lancaster outright defied the Los Angeles County fireworks ban by hosting a public fireworks show, City News Service reported. “The city has considered all risks and feels confident in our ability to safely host a show,” Lancaster Mayor R. Rex Parris wrote on the city’s Facebook page days ahead of the celebration. “A show our residents deserve after a year of continuing challenges.”

Mayor Parris added officials should not be taking a cookie-cutter approach to the health crisis. “When you look around here, this city is the safest city in Los Angeles County,” he told KTLA-TV. “If you look at the number of hospital admissions and our death rate — we are the safest city.”

Mayor Parris, who said he was fed up with the politics, set off the fireworks himself so that he could assume responsibility and relieve anyone else of guilt.

“It’s lost all sense of principle, it’s lost all sense of public safety. I would suggest that that’s what’s wrong with America — that we’ve become so polarized by ‘who’s the bigger bully.’ What the people of Lancaster want is to celebrate Independence Day and that’s what we’re going to do. And we’ll deal with the fallout later,” he said moments before he set off the fireworks.

To prevent virus spread, officials asked people to either remain in their vehicles to watch the display, or wear a mask if they wanted to stand outside.

It’s nice to see a decidedly blue state assert its freedoms in the face of government overreach.



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