

punishing the American people because you are upset with somebody else, and would you stop being so unbelievably inconsistent?

Don't tell us that trade and travel is a constructive way to deal with Communist countries and then tell us that dealing with Cuba 90 miles off our shore requires us to punish the American people by restricting their right to travel.

I say again: What right does this government have to tell an American citizen where they can travel? They can go to North Korea, Iran, China, Vietnam, but not travel to Cuba. That is obscene. It makes no sense to me. Aside from we ought to stop doing stupid things, aside from just that notion, we surely ought to decide that it is not in the interests of this country to have its government telling people how, when, and where they can travel.

I wish to finish by just saying this again. I don't deny there are substantial human rights abuses in Cuba. I have been there. I have talked to the dissidents. I have talked to the Cuban people who have come to this country who know of, who have seen, who have watched the unbelievable lack of human rights that exist in that country. So that is not the point. The point isn't to deny the charts that people show on the floor of the Senate showing abuse. I could bring to the floor of the Senate, as chairman of the commission that deals with China, dozens of photographs of Chinese prisoners held in the darkest cells in the farthest reaches of China who have done nothing but are suffering. But we have not decided as a country that we will restrict the American people's right to go to China because that exists in China. We have set quite the opposite policy. We believe the best way to promote a march toward greater human rights in China and Vietnam and elsewhere is through trade and travel. That is the construction that this country has taken for a long while, except with respect to Cuba. In that circumstance, we say, no, we must, we must, we must prevent Americans from traveling to Cuba.

I say, again, 74 leading Cuban human rights leaders have signed a letter sent to us from Havana, Cuba—74 of them—and have said: Lift this travel ban. This travel ban makes no sense. You want to help Cuba? You want to help the people of Cuba? Lift this travel ban.

I also would say again, if I can find the chart that I had, the very brave citizens in Cuba who have spoken out and who are widely recognized, who have suffered: Marcelo Rodriguez, Yoani Sanchez, Guillermo Farinas, Oscar Chepe, and Miriam Leiva, all of them have suffered in Cuba. All of them believe this travel ban ought to be lifted.

I hope this Senate pays some attention to that and finally sees we can't do two things at the same time: No. 1, stop punishing the American people be-

cause we disagree with another country's government and, No. 2, do smart things that allow us to find ways to push and move that government toward greater human rights for its citizens.

Lifting the travel ban will accomplish both because there are 40 of us in the Senate who have sponsored and co-sponsored legislation to lift that travel ban. When we have the opportunity for that vote in the Senate, I believe we will prevail at last—at long last—and we will prevail, and it will be constructive public policy for this country to have done so. Certainly, it will have lifted the yolk of oppression by a government that restricts the rights of its own citizens—I am talking about our government—that will lift the yolk of oppression that has existed for some 50 years by a government that tells its citizens where it can and cannot travel.

I don't want to hear any more about a government that tracks down a guy from the State of Washington whose father was a minister in a small church in Cuba, who immigrated to this country, and his father died and his father's last wish was that his ashes would be strewn on the church property in Cuba where he was a minister. So his son carried out his father's wish. He went to Cuba and took his father's ashes to the church where he once served and deposited them on the lawn by that church. For that his government tracked him down and attempted to levy a very substantial fine on that young man from the State of Washington.

I am tired of those stories. Those stories are an embarrassment about public policy gone wrong, and we need to fix it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

CROSS-BORDER THREAT OF ASSAULT WEAPONS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last month, Mexican President Felipe Calderón addressed a joint session of Congress, highlighting the dangerous role that American-made firearms play in the violence currently plaguing both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. President Calderón drew a link between the 2004 expiration of the U.S. federal assault weapons ban and a subsequent surge in violence in Mexico. In his speech, President Calderón urged Congress to reinstate a federal ban on assault weapons, a call I have long supported. By exploiting weak U.S. gun laws and corrupt gun sellers in the United States, Mexican drug gangs have amassed arsenals of military-style assault weapons. These guns have been used to kill thousands in Mexico and pose a grave and growing security threat to Americans north of the border.

Mexican law enforcement officials increasingly are being out-gunned by drug gangs bearing military-style assault weapons, .50 caliber sniper rifles and other high-powered weapons that

originate in the United States. Using trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, ATF, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO, determined that from fiscal year 2004 to fiscal year 2008, over 20,000, or 87 percent, of firearms seized by Mexican authorities originated in the United States. Additionally, the GAO reported that the number of assault weapons within this total continues to grow. In fact, approximately 25 percent of the firearms seized by Mexican authorities in fiscal year 2008 were high-powered assault weapons, such as AR-15 and AK-type semi-automatic rifles.

However, the threat posed by assault weapons is not faced exclusively by law enforcement personnel in Mexico. Drug trafficking across the border into the United States has been increasingly accompanied by violence in the American Southwest, forcing police departments to combat criminals with military-style arsenals. Former Houston Police Chief Harold Hurtt acknowledged the AK-47 assault rifle has become the "weapon of choice" for major drug dealers, warring gangs and immigrant smugglers. "The reality on the street is that many of these weapons are readily available," according to Hurtt, forcing the Houston Police Department to consistently upgrade its weaponry to match the firepower of criminals armed with assault weapons. Just last week, Jeffrey Kirkham, the Chief of Police in Nogales, Arizona, reported that Mexican drug cartels have made death threats against his department in response to a successful drug bust. Criminals armed with assault weapons are a direct threat to American law enforcement officials and the communities they protect.

Reauthorizing a Federal ban on assault weapons would help to reduce violence in Mexico and the United States. When the first federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, 19 of the highest powered and most lethal firearms became legal to purchase, including semiautomatic weapons that incorporated bayonet mounts or grenade launchers. In the absence of a ban, these lethal weapons continue to stream across the Mexican border, arming criminals and placing border communities in grave danger. The reinstatement of a Federal assault weapons ban has the overwhelming support of the law enforcement community, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate toward that goal.

REMEMBERING SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, West Virginia, the U.S. Senate, and our Nation have experienced an incredible loss. Over the last few weeks, this Chamber witnessed poignant eulogies and remembrances of the legendary Senator Robert Byrd. Much has been said and written since Senator Byrd's death on June 28, 2010.

Those who have so eloquently written and spoken knew the Senator much better than I—Presidents, Senators, world leaders, dignitaries, as well as members of his family and friends in West Virginia.

He will be remembered as an intelligent, compassionate and illustrious figure. A giant.

Many people have recalled his historic milestones, distinguished career and legendary speeches. I first met Senator Byrd when I arrived in the Senate in 2007. I introduced myself and told him about a friend and patient of mine from Wyoming who had told me that Robert Byrd was his favorite senator. Like Senator Byrd, my friend uses a wheelchair. Senator Byrd asked me why my friend liked him so much. I told him it was because of their mutual commitment to the Constitution.

I went on to say that he thought Senator Byrd was “the best thing since sliced bread.” Senator Byrd’s eyes brightened and widened with the reference to sliced bread. He then gave me a complete history of sliced bread in America and the date when the first mechanical bread slicer was used in the United States. As a true man of the people, Senator Byrd also sent a note and a copy of the Constitution to my friend in Wyoming.

When former Wyoming Senator Cliff Hansen died late last year, I shared the news with Senator Byrd. Senator Byrd said, “I liked Cliff Hansen. Cliff Hansen was a friend of mine. Cliff Hansen knew what he stood for.” The same can be said for Senator Byrd.

As a public servant, he had few equals. As a parliamentary expert, he had none. Every day, Senator Byrd showed his enduring dedication to his family, the people of West Virginia, the United States Constitution, and our Nation.

Senator Byrd leaves us with a memory of the man—the memory of his kindness, grace, and passion. He had a depth of institutional understanding and knowledge of the traditions of the U.S. Senate that will never be replaced. While many of us are students of history, Senator Byrd truly lived this Nation’s history. His strength, determination, and unyielding pursuit of knowledge serve as a model for all of us.

To his daughters Mona Byrd Fatemi and Marjorie Byrd Moore, his grandchildren, and family, I extend my family’s sympathy and hope the coming days are filled with love, enduring strength, and God’s grace.

Bobbi and I wish the Byrd family our best and our prayers are with you.

KYRGYZSTAN

Mr. KAUFMAN. Mr. President, in the last few weeks, great turmoil has unfolded in Kyrgyzstan. According to media reports, ethnic riots in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad have left up to 2,000 dead—309 confirmed by the Kyrgyz Government—thousands have been injured, and ap-

proximately 400,000 Uzbeks have been displaced.

I am deeply concerned about ethnic clashes and ongoing tension between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, especially given reports that international observers have noted they are reminiscent of the tragedies in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s. Today, the situation appears to have stabilized, but we cannot discount the potential for renewed conflict after an apparent lull, which happened in both Bosnia and Rwanda.

We must also not forget that what happens in Kyrgyzstan has implications for U.S. interests throughout central Asia. As the Senate noted in Resolution 566, which passed unanimously on June 25, the events of the past month could spark unrest across the Ferghana Valley, which borders Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan also plays host to a U.S. air base at Manas International Airport that serves as a critical supply line for NATO and U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan.

For these reasons, I rise today to urge the provisional government and all citizens of Kyrgyzstan to move ahead with the process of reconciliation. I would also like to commend the Obama administration and others in the international community—particularly the United Nations and Russia—who have rendered fiscal and humanitarian aid to the Government of Kyrgyzstan during this difficult time. The international community must call on all parties to refrain from violence, cease persecution of minorities, and explore peaceful routes to conflict resolution.

There is other news out of Kyrgyzstan worth noting—namely, the referendum held on June 27 in support of a constitution that will establish central Asia’s first parliamentary democracy. This referendum was peaceful and inclusive, and I commend the provisional government for organizing this process. The referendum marked a historic opportunity to usher in a new period of democracy and stability in Kyrgyzstan, and the stakes are high. This is why I would like to highlight three areas where I hope there can be additional progress can be made.

Perhaps most importantly, there must be a credible investigation into the recent violence. One of the most important actions to take is to establish an investigative team that is viewed as credible by all sides. This investigation must ensure the perpetrators of violence are held accountable for their actions and initiate a process whereby all citizens, including ethnic Uzbeks, see themselves as sufficiently represented in the country’s national institutions.

The interim government must also ensure a smooth transition to the new Constitution. This means that the Kyrgyz authorities should redouble efforts to prevent the escalation of violence, and observers must monitor the

elections. The first transition of power is critical to the success of this democratic transition because it will set the baseline for all future elections. The people of Kyrgyzstan have shown overwhelmingly that they want democracy, and now the provisional government should do everything in its power to make those aspirations a reality.

Finally, the government must promote freedom of the press. According to Freedom House, in 2010, Kyrgyzstan was ranked 159th of 192 countries. At this critical juncture, the interim government may feel tempted to muzzle criticism to avoid giving fodder to dissidents. But to do so would undermine its credibility far more than any words published in a free press. There is an undeniable connection between a population’s confidence in their political system and the capacity of that system to ensure the free flow of information through an independent media. If the interim government and its successor want to identify the failures of previous governments in Kyrgyzstan, they need look no further than its abysmal record in the area of press freedom. To make the new constitution in Kyrgyzstan a success, the nation needs a truly independent media.

Mr. President, we are at an important turning point in Kyrgyzstan, where there is a glimmer of hope about democracy taking root in the future. At the same time, the potential for renewed unrest, rampant corruption, and curtailed freedoms could easily jeopardize recent progress. It is incumbent on all sides to act responsibly and to ensure there is not a resurgence of violence, so that the new Government of Kyrgyzstan can set an example of successful democracy for the region.

SMALL BUSINESS LENDING

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, I rise to speak of an amendment, cosponsored by Senators GRASSLEY, ENZI, ISAKSON, and COLLINS, which has proven small business job creating power.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that it remains difficult for small businesses to access credit. We have all heard the justifiable frustration and outrage expressed by entrepreneurs nationwide in response to the albatross of tight credit which has a chokehold on our economy. And frankly, who could blame them, when just this past April, the Federal Reserve’s Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey found the percentage of banks easing credit terms for small businesses was just a meager 1.9 percent—after it was an astonishing zero percent in both the past January and October surveys! Is this any way to jumpstart an anemic economy?

As ranking member of the Senate Small Business Committee I, along with Chair LANDRIEU, have vigorously championed measures to ease credit and increase small business lending. Together, we fought to include in the