

(Mr. COBURN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) and the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) were added as cosponsors of S. 862, a bill to amend section 5000A of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an additional religious exemption from the individual health coverage mandate.

S. 865

At the request of Mr. HELLER, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. AYOTTE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 865, a bill to provide for the establishment of a Commission to Accelerate the End of Breast Cancer.

S. 867

At the request of Mr. PRYOR, the names of the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. JOHNSON) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) were added as cosponsors of S. 867, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for pharmacy benefits manager standards under the Medicare prescription drug program, to establish basic audit standards of pharmacies, to further transparency of payment methodology to pharmacies, and to provide for recoupment returns to Medicare.

S. 871

At the request of Mrs. MURRAY, the names of the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) and the Senator from Georgia (Mr. CHAMBLISS) were added as cosponsors of S. 871, a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to enhance assistance for victims of sexual assault committed by members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

S. 877

At the request of Mr. BEGICH, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 877, a bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to allow public access to research of the Department, and for other purposes.

S. 878

At the request of Mr. FRANKEN, the name of the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 878, a bill to amend title 9 of the United States Code with respect to arbitration.

S. 886

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. AYOTTE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 886, a bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to protect pain-capable unborn children in the District of Columbia, and for other purposes.

S. 888

At the request of Mr. JOHANNIS, the name of the Senator from Nebraska (Mrs. FISCHER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 888, a bill to provide end user exemptions from certain provisions of the Commodity Exchange Act and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934.

AMENDMENT NO. 802

At the request of Ms. LANDRIEU, the names of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. LAUTENBERG), the Sen-

ator from New York (Mr. SCHUMER) and the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 802 intended to be proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 803

At the request of Mr. WHITEHOUSE, the names of the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. COWAN) and the Senator from New York (Mr. SCHUMER) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 803 proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 804

At the request of Mr. COBURN, the name of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 804 intended to be proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 805

At the request of Mr. COBURN, the names of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 805 proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 806

At the request of Mr. PRYOR, the name of the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 806 proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 810

At the request of Mr. PAUL, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 810 intended to be proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 813

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the names of the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN), the Senator from Minnesota

(Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 813 proposed to S. 601, a bill to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

At the request of Ms. STABENOW, her name was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 813 proposed to S. 601, *supra*.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. SANDERS (for himself, Mr. BURR, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. BROWN, Mr. TESTER, Mr. BEGICH, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. JOHANNIS, Mr. MORAN, Mr. BOOZMAN, and Mr. HELLER):

S. 893. A bill to provide for an increase, effective December 1, 2013, in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am proud to introduce the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2013. I am also pleased to be joined by Ranking Member BURR and all of my colleagues on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in introducing this important legislation. I look forward to our continued work together to improve the lives of our Nation's veterans.

Effective December 1, 2013, this measure would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the rates of veterans' compensation to keep pace with a rise in the cost-of-living, should an adjustment be prompted by an increase in the Consumer Price Index, CPI. Referred to as the COLA, this important legislation would make an increase available to veterans at the same level as the increase provided to recipients of Social Security benefits.

Last year, I was proud to cosponsor the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2012, which provided a 1.7 percent increase in veterans' compensation. The annual COLA legislation is so important because it impacts vital benefits, including veterans' disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. In fiscal year 2014, it is projected that over 4.2 million veterans and survivors will receive compensation benefits.

As a longstanding advocate of our Nation's veterans, I understand the critical nature of these benefits as many recipients depend upon these tax-free payments to feed their families,

heat their homes, pay for prescription drugs, and to provide for the needs of spouses and children. We have an obligation to the men and women who have sacrificed so much to serve our country and who now deserve nothing less than the full support of a grateful Nation. The COLA brings us one step closer to fulfilling our Nation's promise to care for our brave veterans and their families.

We also must continue to ensure that these benefits are not diminished by the effects of inflation. For this reason, I strongly oppose the President's proposal to adopt the chained CPI. I am joined in opposition by nearly every major veterans' organization in America. The Gold Star Wives, The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans and many, many more all oppose the chained CPI.

I will do everything within my power as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee to ensure we honor the promise we made to veterans and survivors. It is important that this country address our budget deficit, but there are fairer ways to do it than on the backs of disabled veterans—men and women who have already sacrificed so much for their country.

I ask my colleagues to join with me in honoring the promise that has been made to our Nation's veterans. We cannot allow this misguided attempt to balance the budget on the backs of those who have so proudly served our Nation diminish the benefits provided to veterans and their survivors.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 893

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2013".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—Effective on December 1, 2013, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall increase, in accordance with subsection (c), the dollar amounts in effect on November 30, 2013, for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation under the provisions specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) WARTIME DISABILITY COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts under section 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount under section 1162 of such title.

(4) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO SURVIVING SPOUSE.—Each of the dollar amounts under subsections (a) through (d) of section 1311 of such title.

(5) DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION TO CHILDREN.—Each of the dollar

amounts under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—Each dollar amount described in subsection (b) shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2013, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons under section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who have not received compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

(e) PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b), as increased under subsection (a), not later than the date on which the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2014.

By Mr. SANDERS:

S. 894. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend expiring authority for work-study allowances for individuals who are pursuing programs of rehabilitation, education, or training under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to expand such authority to certain outreach services provided through congressional offices, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to ensuring we provide our Nation's veterans the opportunities they need to successfully transition back to civilian life. One of the programs afforded to veterans to assist them during this difficult time is the Department of Veterans Affairs' work-study program.

VA's work-study program provides veterans participating in several VA educational, vocational, and rehabilitation programs the opportunity to work alongside school certifying officials and State and Federal employees to assist veterans with VA benefits and services. In fiscal year 2012, this program assisted more than 10,000 veterans, who received approximately \$25.7 million in work study payments. Under current law, this program is set to expire this year.

I am proud to introduce legislation that would extend VA's work-study program for three more years. This legislation would allow veterans to continue doing such important activities as conducting outreach programs with State Approving Agencies; working with a National Cemetery or a State Veteran's Cemetery; assisting in caring for veterans in State Homes; and working with school certifying officials, claims processors, and other state and federal employees to provide much needed benefits and services to our Nation's heroes.

VA has determined work-study participants do not have the authority to work in congressional offices, despite their successful service in such offices in the past. These veterans were critical to Congress' efforts to understand the needs of our Nation's veterans. They used congressional resources and personal experience to help veterans access earned benefits and services. This legislation would allow veterans to work in congressional offices to assist other veterans with casework issues, help congressional staff address the unique challenges facing our newest generation of veterans, and develop the knowledge and experience needed to successfully transition into the civilian workforce.

Our veterans have sacrificed so much in defense of this country. They deserve a seamless transition when they look to return to civilian life. This legislation would expand a program that has been so vital in preparing veterans to succeed in the civilian workforce.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 894

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. EXTENSION AND EXPANSION OF AUTHORITY FOR CERTAIN QUALIFYING WORK-STUDY ACTIVITIES FOR PURPOSES OF THE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) EXTENSION OF EXPIRING CURRENT AUTHORITY.—Section 3485(a)(4) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "June 30, 2013" each place it appears and inserting "June 30, 2016".

(b) EXPANSION TO OUTREACH SERVICES PROVIDED THROUGH CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES.—Such section is further amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

"(K) During the period beginning on June 30, 2013, and ending on June 30, 2016, the following activities carried out at the offices of Members of Congress for such Members:

"(i) The distribution of information to members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their dependents about the benefits and services under laws administered by the Secretary and other appropriate governmental and non-governmental programs.

"(ii) The preparation and processing of papers and other documents, including documents to assist in the preparation and presentation of claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary."

(c) ANNUAL REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than June 30 each year, beginning with 2014 and ending with 2016, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a report on the work-study allowances paid under paragraph (1) of section 3485(a) of title 38, United States Code, during the most recent one-year period for qualifying work-study activities described in paragraph (4) of such section, as amended by subsections (a) and (b) of this section.

(2) CONTENTS.—Each report submitted under paragraph (1) shall include, for the year covered by such report, the following:

(A) A description of the recipients of such work-study allowances.

(B) A list of the locations where qualifying work-study activities were carried out.

(C) A description of the outreach conducted by the Secretary to increase awareness of the eligibility of such work-study activities for such work-study allowances.

By Ms. WARREN:

S. 897. A bill to prevent the doubling of the interest rate for Federal subsidized student loans for the 2013–2014 academic year by providing funds for such loans through the Federal Reserve System, to ensure that such loans are available at interest rates that are equivalent to the interest rates at which the Federal Government provides loans to banks through the discount window operated by the Federal Reserve System, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, on July 1, the interest rate on new federally subsidized student loans is set to double from 3.4 to 6.8 percent. That means unless Congress acts, for millions of young people the cost of borrowing money to go to college will double.

The student debt problem in this country is a quiet but growing crisis. Today's graduates collectively carry more than \$1 trillion in debt—more than all the outstanding credit card debt in the whole country. Doubling the interest rate on new student loans will just increase the pressure on our young people.

Keep in mind: these young people didn't go to the mall and run up charges on a credit card. They worked hard, they stayed in class, they learned new skills, and they borrowed what they needed to pay for their education. Their education will improve their opportunities in life, but their education will not just help these students. When they acquire more skills, these students help us build a strong and competitive economy and they strengthen our middle class.

Student interest rates are set to double in less than 2 months, but so far this Congress has done nothing—nothing—to address this problem. Some people say that we can't afford to help our kids through school by keeping student loan interest rates low. But right now, as I speak, the Federal Government offers far lower interest rates on loans, every single day—they just don't do it for everyone.

Right now, a big bank can get a loan through the Federal Reserve discount window at a rate of about 0.75 percent. But this summer a student who is trying to get a loan to go to college will pay almost 7 percent. In other words, the Federal Government is going to charge interest rates that are nine times higher than the rates for the biggest banks—the same banks that destroyed millions of jobs and nearly broke the economy. That isn't right. And that is why I am introducing legislation today to give students the same deal that we give to the big banks.

The Bank on Students Loan Fairness Act would allow students eligible for federally subsidized Stafford loans to borrow at the same rate the big banks

get through the Federal Reserve discount window. For 1 year the Federal Reserve would make funds available to the Department of Education to make loans to students at the same low rates offered to the big banks. This will give students relief from high interest rates while giving Congress a chance to find a long-term solution.

Some may say we can't afford this proposal. I would remind them the Federal Government currently makes 36 cents in profit for every \$1 it lends to students. Add up those profits and you'll find next year student loans will bring in \$34 billion. Meanwhile, the banks pay interest that is one-ninth of the amount students will be asked to pay. That is just wrong. It doesn't reflect our values. We shouldn't be profiting from our students who are drowning in debt while we are giving a great deal to the big banks. We should be investing in our young people so they can get good jobs and grow the economy, so let's give them the same great deal the banks get.

Some explain that we give banks exceptionally low interest rates because the economy is still shaky and banks need access to cheap credit to continue the recovery. But our students are just as important as banks to a strong recovery, and the debt they carry poses a serious risk to that recovery. In fact, in March of this year, the Federal Reserve said because of the economic impact on family budgets, high levels of student debt pose a risk to our shaky economic recovery.

If the Federal Reserve can float trillions of dollars to large financial institutions at low interest rates to grow the economy, surely they can float the Department of Education the money to fund our students, keep us competitive, and grow our middle class.

Let's face it, banks get a great deal when they borrow money from the Fed. In effect, the American taxpayer is investing in those banks. We should make the same kind of investment in our young people who are trying to get an education. Lend them the money and make them pay it back, but give our kids a break on the interest they pay. Let's bank on students.

The Bank on Students Loan Fairness Act is my first stand-alone bill in the Senate. I am introducing this bill because our students are facing a crisis. We cannot stand by and simply watch. This is about our students, our economy, and our values. The Bank on Students Loan Fairness Act is a first step toward helping young people who are drowning in debt. Unlike the big banks, students don't have armies of lobbyists and lawyers. They have only their voices. And they call on us to do what is right.

I thank the Chair.

By Mr. REED (for himself and Mr. DURBIN):

S. 909. A bill to amend the Federal Direct Loan Program under the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide for

student loan affordability, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I am pleased to introduce the Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act with Senator DURBIN to offer a long-term approach to setting student loan interest rates.

Congress must take swift action to prevent the doubling of the interest rate on need-based loans on July 1, 54 days away. We also need a new mechanism for setting interest rates on all federal student loans for the long term so that students and taxpayers are protected, and we need to take the time to get it right.

In April, I introduced the Student Loan Affordability Act to keep the rate on subsidized loans at 3.4 percent for the next 2 years. This would give Congress time to debate a long-term solution as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Today, I am introducing legislation with Senator DURBIN and Congressman TIERNEY and Congressman COURTNEY to overhaul the mechanism for setting the interest rates on federal student loans. Instead of setting a numerical rate in law, which quickly becomes out of sync with the economic and interest rate environment, or locking borrowers into a fixed rate with no opportunity to refinance when rates drop, our proposal will offer adjustable rate loans for students and parents with the protection of a cap on the maximum interest rate that could be charged during periods of high interest rates.

In today's low interest rate environment, the fixed rates for student loans are too high, resulting in student loans generating a profit for the Federal Government. If we would have maintained the variable rate for student loans that was in law before 2006, the interest rate for students in repayment on their loans would be 2.39 percent this year. At today's fixed rates, they will pay 3.4 percent for subsidized loans and 6.8 percent for unsubsidized loans. The Federal Government provides student loans to increase the number of Americans who attain college degrees, not to generate revenue. Yet, according to CBO estimates, the Federal Government will save more than 36 cents for every dollar lent in the student loan programs for fiscal year 2013. CBO projects that the student loan programs will continue to generate savings on the backs of students through fiscal year 2023. We need to change this.

The Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act will offer adjustable rate loans for students and parents with a cap on the maximum interest rate that could be charged to protect borrowers during periods of high interest rates. Interest rates for need-based, subsidized loans will be capped at 6.8 percent. Rates for unsubsidized and parent loans will be capped at 8.25 percent. Rates will be set every year based on

the 91-day Treasury bill plus a percentage determined by the Secretary of Education to cover program administration and borrower benefits. The Secretary must set the rate so that the student loan programs are revenue neutral.

The Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act will also correct an inequity for undergraduate students who qualify for subsidized loans. Currently, a dependent undergraduate student can borrow up to \$31,000 total. However, the maximum amount that can be subsidized is \$23,000, which means that needy students often have to resort to more expensive unsubsidized loans to finance a part or the remainder of their education costs. The Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act will allow borrowers with demonstrated financial need to have up to the full loan limit in the lower cost subsidized program.

Finally, the Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act will allow borrowers with high fixed-rate federal student loans to refinance those loans into the new variable rate loan with a cap. This could be a real help to borrowers trying to make ends meet, considering that, under current conditions, rates calculated under a bill would be much lower than the fixed rates for unsubsidized loans 6.8 percent, PLUS loans made under the old bank-based program, 8.5 percent, and PLUS loans made through the Federal Direct Loan program 7.9 percent.

We need a multi-faceted approach to solving our student loan debt crisis, which reports from the Federal Reserve and others show is a drag on our economy. We cannot allow this generation of Americans to flounder, unable to buy a home or a car or secure credit or start a family under the weight of student debt.

We need to keep rates low in the short term—that means taking quick action to keep the rate from doubling in July. It also means over the long-term, setting rates in a way that does not add to the growth of student debt. I encourage our colleagues to join Senator DURBIN and me in cosponsoring the Responsible Student Loan Solutions Act to put in place a long-term approach to setting student loan interest rates that is fair to students and taxpayers. I also urge our colleagues to support taking immediate steps to reassure students and families that the rate on subsidized loans will not double this July.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 131—RECOMMENDING THE DESIGNATION OF A PRESIDENTIAL SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE BALKANS TO EVALUATE THE SUCCESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, TO PROVIDE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND TO REPORT BACK TO CONGRESS WITHIN ONE YEAR

Mr. BEGICH submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 131

Whereas, on December 14, 1995, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (referred to in this resolution as “BiH”), known as the Dayton Peace Accords, brought an end to the brutal conflict in that country that was marked by aggression and ethnic cleansing, including the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide;

Whereas the Dayton Peace Accords define BiH as a country with three constituent peoples—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs—to be comprised of two internal entities known as the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), from which an extremely complex, fundamentally flawed system of governance and administration has been derived;

Whereas the Dayton Peace Accords included many compromises imposed by the need for quick action to preserve human life and bring an end to the conflict in BiH, and as a result may have hindered efforts to develop efficient and effective political institutions capable of overcoming the challenges required to become an integral member of the Euro-Atlantic community of nation-states;

Whereas, since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, the Government and people of BiH have been working in partnership with the international community to achieve progress in building a peaceful and democratic society based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a free market economy;

Whereas BiH demonstrated its commitment to the shared values of democracy, security, and stability by joining the Partnership for Peace program of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in December 2006;

Whereas BiH received a conditional Membership Action Plan status in NATO in April 2010 pending completion of specific military and political reforms;

Whereas the Government of BiH took the first important step on the road toward European Union (EU) membership by signing a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in June 2008;

Whereas, despite these notable achievements, the Government and people of BiH continue to face significant challenges in their efforts at integrating into Euro-Atlantic institutions and the country's economy continues to decline;

Whereas the Council of Europe's Venice Commission concluded that the current constitutional arrangements in BiH are not conducive to the efficient or rational functioning of state institutions, hindering the pace of the country's accession to NATO and the EU;

Whereas the Government of BiH has the obligation to implement the ruling of the

Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Sejdić-Finci from 2009 with regard to the election to the Presidency and House of Peoples of BiH of Others, who are defined as those Bosnian citizens who are not primarily a member of the Dayton Accords' stipulated three constitutive peoples—the Serb Bosnians, the Croat Bosnians, and the Muslim Bosnians or Bosniaks;

Whereas reform at any level, including that originating from the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights ruling on the Sejdić-Finci Case, should take into account the protection of equal constitutional rights of all;

Whereas the elections in BiH should reflect the right of the constituent peoples and others to choose their legal representatives, who would therefore represent those people consistent with the founding provisions of the Dayton Peace Accords, as opposed to the existing practice, which allows for the representatives of one people to be elected by the members of other constituent peoples, hindering the political stability of BiH;

Whereas only the full protection of equal political, economic, legal, and religious rights of all the constituent peoples and others throughout the territory of BiH, including the inalienable right to return, will guarantee the future stability, functionality, and effectiveness of the country;

Whereas the number of Bosnian Croats has declined from 820,000 before the war to around 460,000 remaining in BiH today, as reported by the Catholic Church in BiH which has played an important role in protecting rights of Catholic Bosnian Croats and reporting problems and cases of destruction of personal and real property of both the Catholic Church and Croat returnees;

Whereas it is not acceptable that this negative demographic trend is reflected in the reduction of constitutional rights of Bosnian Croats, as that reduction directly causes political and administrative dysfunctionality of the country;

Whereas a functional BiH as a whole is not possible without a fully functional FBiH, one of the two entities established by the Dayton Peace Accords, both being ethnically and administratively composite;

Whereas FBiH's protracted poor functionality only exacerbates the existing predominant separatist tendency in the RS, the predominantly Serb entity of BiH, thus threatening the very integrity of the country as a whole;

Whereas continuous economic decline is a direct consequence of the fact that most of BiH's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated from the publicly owned companies, which are run at the RS and FBiH entity levels by political parties with enduring ethnocentric agendas reflecting their particular and non-common interests, preventing the further creation of much-needed free enterprise business development and closely integrated national internal markets;

Whereas the social fabric of BiH is the single most important victim of the war and ensuing political conflict, and the need for repair, strengthening, and further development of civil society is fundamental to the country's recovery and desired development;

Whereas the Republic of Croatia has clearly demonstrated that allegiance to democracy, market economy, rule of law, and respect for human and citizen rights is conducive to full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, and the Government of Croatia continues to play an active role in contributing to BiH's political stability, internal integrity, and international viability;

Whereas all the other neighbors of BiH share the ambition to join the European Union; and