

damaged or destroyed 300,000 homes, and hurt a quarter million businesses.

While the road to recovery is long and hard, New Yorkers are strong. I know we will rebuild better and stronger. But we in Congress have to continue to do our part. And to this day, more than a year later, homeowners are still struggling to rebuild, facing costly repairs to storm damage and what could be even costlier flood insurance premiums.

They survived Sandy, are trying to put their lives back together, but the premium increases mandated by the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 is what threatens to force many New Yorkers out of their homes and the communities they love.

We can and must prevent this—by passing our legislation to prevent a spike in flood insurance premiums until after FEMA fulfills its responsibility, and reports to Congress with a plan to make these rates more affordable. That's just common sense, and it's the right thing to do for homeowners across the Northeast, who are still putting their lives back together in the wake of this storm. The last thing they need is another burden like this.

I hope our colleagues reconsider their objection, and allow us to vote on this bipartisan bill and join us in helping these families rebuild and stay in their homes.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN HUNGARY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, earlier this year I chaired a Helsinki Commission hearing on the situation in Hungary. Today, I would like to revisit some of the issues addressed by our witnesses.

Since the April 2010 elections, Hungary has undertaken the most dramatic legal transformation that Europe has seen in decades. A new Constitution was passed with votes of the ruling party alone, and even that has already been amended five times. More than 700 new laws have been passed, including laws on the media, religion, and civic associations. There is a new civil code and a new criminal code. There is an entirely new electoral framework. The magnitude and scope of these changes have understandably put Hungary under a microscope.

At the Helsinki Commission's hearing in March, I examined concerns that these changes have undermined Hungary's system of democratic checks and balances, independence of the judiciary, and freedoms of the media and religion. I also received testimony about rising revisionism and extremism. I heard from Jozsef Szajer, a Member of the European Parliament who represented the Hungarian Government at the hearing. Princeton constitutional law expert Kim Lane Scheppelle, Dr. Paul Shapiro from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Sylvana Habdank-Kolaczowska from Freedom House presented compelling testimony.

Unfortunately, developments in Hungary remain troubling.

Even though Hungary's religion law was tweaked after the Constitutional Court struck down parts of it, it retains a discriminatory two-tier system. Moreover, the Parliament is empowered with the extraordinary and, for all practical purposes, unreviewable power to decide what is and what is not a religion.

This month, the government announced it is launching an investigation into the Methodist Evangelical Church, a church persecuted during communist times. Today, the Methodist Evangelical Church is known for its outreach to Roma, work with the homeless and is one of the largest charitable organizations in Hungary. As I noted at the Helsinki Commission hearing in March, it is also one of the hundreds of religious groups stripped of official recognition after the passage of Hungary's new religion law.

The church has now complied with submitting the necessary number of supporters required by the law and, as a reply, the government has announced an unidentified "expert" will conduct an investigation into the church's beliefs and tenets. This step only reinforces fears that parliamentary denial of recognition as a so-called "Accepted Church" opens the door for further repressive measures.

Veneration of Hungary's wartime regent, Miklos Horthy, along with other anti-Semitic figures such as writer Jozsef Nyiro, continues. In November, a statue of Hungarian Jewish poet Miklos Radnoti, who was killed by Hungarian Nazis at the end of 1944, was rammed with a car and broken in half. At roughly the same time, extremists staged a book burning of his works along with other materials they called "Zionist publications." At the beginning of December, two menorahs were vandalized in Budapest.

Reflecting the climate of extremism, more than 160 Hungarian nationals have been found by Canada this year to have a well-founded fear of persecution. Almost all are Romani, but the refugees include an 80-year-old award winning Hungarian Jewish writer who received death threats after writing about anti-Semitism in Hungary, and was stripped of his honorary citizenship of Budapest on an initiative from the far-right Jobbik party, supported by the votes of the ruling Fidesz party.

While there are many who suggest the real problem comes from the extremist opposition party Jobbik, and not the ruling government, it seems that some members of Fidesz have contributed to a rise in intolerance.

I am particularly troubled that the government-created Media Council, consisting entirely of Fidesz delegated members, has threatened ATV—an independent television station—with punitive fines if it again characterizes Jobbik as extremist. If you can't even talk about what is extremist or anti-Semitic in Hungary without facing

legal sanctions, how can you combat extremism and anti-Semitism? Moreover, this decision serves to protect Jobbik from critical debate in the advance of next year's elections. Why?

Other new measures further stifle free speech.

Unfortunately, and somewhat shockingly, last month Hungary amended its defamation law to allow for the imposition of prison terms up to 3 years.

The imposition of jail time for speech offenses was a hallmark of the communist era. During the post-communist transition, the Helsinki Commission consistently urged OSCE countries to repeal criminal defamation and insult laws entirely. In 2004, for example, the Helsinki Commission wrote to Minister of Justice Peter Barandy regarding the criminal convictions of Andras Bencsik and Laszlo Attila Bertok.

This new law, raced through under an expedited procedure in the wake of a bi-election controversy in which allegations of voter manipulation were traded, was quickly criticized by the OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media. I share her concerns that these changes to the criminal code may lead to the silencing of critical or differing views in society and are inconsistent with OSCE commitments.

Hungary was once held up as a model of peaceful democratic transition and is situated in a region of Europe where the beacon of freedom is still sought by many today. I hope Hungary will return to a leadership role in the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, today I wish to honor Lancaster County, Pennsylvania's impressive feat of preserving 100,000 acres of farmland. Lancaster County became the first county in the Nation to preserve this many acres of farmland, a full 25 percent of all land available for farming in the county. My father, Governor Robert P. Casey, served as Governor of Pennsylvania from 1987 to 1995 and signed into law the State farmland preservation program. Governor Casey made preserving farmland a high priority to ensure that Pennsylvania's farmers could continue to produce agricultural products and sustain the Commonwealth's number one industry.

Farmland preservation is one of Pennsylvania's noblest accomplishments. There are a lot of words that can describe this achievement. But the one word that I think is most important is the word sacred. This is truly a sacred act. Reflecting on this tremendous milestone, I am reminded of a line from the Prayer of Saint Francis, which reads "For it is in giving that we receive." When I think about conservation, I am inspired by the gifts which flow so directly from the preservation of land. Conserved lands purify our

water, clean our air and maintain open spaces. Conserved lands serve as precious wildlife habitat, allowing species to forage and to flourish.

We know that bees, which provide sweet honey and pollinate our crops, are searching for habitat in these modern times. Lancaster County's triumph in conservation helps afford bees, which have lived on Earth for more than 100 million years, a place to inhabit. Another gift created when farmers, foresters and ranchers conserve lands is the knowledge that these critical professions—these cherished ways of life—will continue to have a valued role in American society for many generations to come.

In giving lands over to the committed purpose of conservation, people receive bountiful rewards. As a government official, I believe in the transformative and restorative qualities of conservation easements. I will work to ensure vital conservation programs continue to work for Pennsylvanians and partner organizations, such as the Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board.

Furthermore, more than half of Pennsylvania and most all of Lancaster County lies within the Chesapeake Bay watershed—and approximately 3 million people live in this area. The challenges of farming in this region are significant. Thus efficient, effective and relevant Federal conservation programs are critical to farmers' success. In advance of the Senate agriculture committee's consideration of the 2012 farm bill, I introduced the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Fairness Act, legislation aimed at helping farmers to better implement beneficial conservation practices and to meet water quality goals in the watershed. The 2013 Senate bill contains portions of this legislation and features additional improvements that better ensure that the remodeled conservation programs will serve the needs of farmers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

As we move forward with the farm bill, providing farmers in the watershed with the conservation tools included in the Senate bill is extremely important. Federal farm land conservation programs must remain strong. The voluntary conservation programs in the farm bill provide important tools to help farmers comply with Federal and State regulations while keeping farmers in business. Of particular importance to Pennsylvanians are programs like the proposed Agricultural Land Easements program, designed to take over the current Farmland Protection Program, which helps to preserve working farm lands from development. These conservation programs must continue to work for Pennsylvanians and those across the Nation who desire to perform the sacred act of preserving farmland so our future generations can continue to provide us with food, fiber and fuel for the benefit of all.

REMEMBERING ALBERT HENRY HAAS

Mrs. McCASKILL. Madam President, I ask that the Senate join me in honoring the life of Albert Henry Haas. Albert was killed November 29 in a mortar attack at Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, where he was serving as a civilian aircraft mechanic.

Albert had a long career in service to our country, dating back to his service in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war and continuing in the Army Reserves during the conflict in Bosnia. Following 30 years of military service, Albert retired and began a 30-year career in aircraft maintenance for companies such as TWA and American Airlines.

Albert had a passion for life that he shared with those around him. He especially enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren and learning about different cultures. He was fascinated with and very knowledgeable about all mechanical things that move like trains, helicopters, and planes. Those around him will remember him as a comical person who was able to make all around him feel comfortable and welcomed.

As the daughter of a caring, loving father who always told me I could achieve anything, and that there were no jobs too tough for me, I was especially happy to hear about Albert's advice for his two daughters. He instilled in them from an early age that they could do anything they put their mind to, without regard to their gender. This resulted in them helping rewire the entire house and working on roof repairs with Albert. Just as I am thankful on a daily basis for the lessons my father taught me, I know Albert's children are thankful for the memories and teachings of their father.

On behalf of the Senate, I wish to offer my condolences to Albert's wife of 41 years, Bay Thi, their three adult children, Thao Haas of Texas, Tina V. Smith of Belleville, IL, and Lisa R. Carnahan of St. Louis, MO, and his eight grandchildren. Albert's life was an example to those around him and I hope his family can take comfort in the memories they shared with him.

TRIBUTE TO MAJOR BOBBY J. COX

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Madam President, I wish to pay tribute to MAJ Bobby James Cox for his exemplary dedication to duty and his service to the U.S. Army and to the United States of America. Major Cox has spent the last year serving in my office as a U.S. Army congressional fellow, and it is my distinct pleasure to congratulate him as he concludes an exemplary tour of duty in the Senate.

Major Cox was born in Spartanburg, SC. He commissioned into the infantry in 2002 upon graduation from the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, as a distinguished military graduate and the cadet regimental

commander of the South Carolina Corps of Cadets.

Major Cox was first assigned as a platoon leader in A Company, 3-187 Infantry Regiment, Rakkasans, 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, KY, deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Upon return from Iraq, Major Cox was selected to be a Ranger platoon leader in A Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, at Fort Lewis, WA, deploying twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. After the Maneuver Captains' Career Course at Fort Benning, GA, Major Cox was assigned to 4th Ranger Training Battalion, Fort Benning, GA, to be a platoon Ranger instructor, Company Commander, and Battalion S-1.

Major Cox then moved to Fort Bragg, NC, to become the 3rd Brigade Combat Team air officer at the 82nd Airborne Division. He assumed command of A Company, 1-505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Following company command and battalion staff, he was selected to be an Army congressional fellow attending the George Washington University, where he earned a master's degree and subsequently joined my personal office on Capitol Hill.

Over the past year, Major Cox has distinguished himself among his fellowship peers as a leader in the Senate. From his legislative contributions supporting my role on the Senate Armed Services Committee to his dedication to constituent services, Major Cox has deftly applied his military expertise to elevate the performance of my personal office. Across my 19 years in office, Major Cox ranks among the very best of a select group of fellows.

The Army says that "Rangers Lead The Way!" Major Cox has served as an inspiration and model Airborne Ranger to me and my colleagues in the Senate. I am deeply grateful for his significant contributions and leadership over the past year. He has certainly lived up to the Ranger motto.

It is my great pleasure to congratulate Major Cox, his wife Joscelyn, and their two children, Reagan and Seth, as they leave the Senate and continue to serve our great Nation. I wish them the very best of luck.

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL KELLY MARIE LAUREL

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, today I wish to pay tribute to an exemplary leader, an accomplished Soldier, and an extraordinary American, as she retires from Active Duty with the U.S. Army. LTC Kelly Marie Laurel has dedicated nearly 25 years of service to our great Nation and has set the very standard of leadership, strategic thinking, and selfless service that we expect of our finest Army officers. Culminating her career as the hand-picked Deputy Chief of the Secretary of the Army's Strategic Initiatives Group,