

have faced repeated brutal acts at the hands of the Castro regime—no less violent than the regimes of any other terrorist state.

Finally, it is important to note that detentions, violence, and harassment are not reserved for political activists alone but also directed at labor rights activists as well. In early March of this year AFL-CIO President Trumka called on the Cuban Government to end its harassment of Mr. Cuesta Morua and all independent union activists advocating for labor rights to protect Cuban workers, such as Morua and Maria Elena Mir and her colleagues.

American workers are not turning a blind eye to what the Cuban regime is doing to limit worker rights, and we should not turn a blind eye either. We must support those such as Morua and Maria who are willing to step forward for labor rights in the face of a repressive regime that will not stop at anything to silence them.

As the people of Cuba look to cast off the shackles of five decades of dictatorial rule, we must stand with and speak out in support of all those who seek to reclaim their civil and political rights and promote political pluralism and democratic values. We cannot turn our back on Cuba's human rights violations record for decades simply because "enough time has passed." If that is the case, enough time has surely passed in places such as Syria, Sudan, Iran, and North Korea.

To me and to the thousands who have suffered at the hands of this regime, the clock has nothing to do with our policy options. Engagement and sanctions relief have to be earned. It can't be timed out. It must come through real change, not Xs on a calendar or the ticking of a clock. And the clock is ticking for Alan Gross.

On December 4, 2009, Alan Gross, a private subcontractor for the U.S. Government, working to bring information to the Jewish community inside of Cuba, was arrested in Cuba. Mr. Gross, a 64-year-old development professional who worked in dozens of countries around the world with programs to help people get access to basic information, was doing nothing different. That is why I am amazed with this uproar which exists by some who want to paint this picture that, my God, we actually were trying to assist the Cuban people to have greater access to the Internet through a Twitter program. That is what we do throughout the world. Even the foreign operations legislation talks about tens of millions of dollars—not several hundred million dollars—to be promoting Internet access in closed societies.

It seems to me that freedom of information is one of the most fundamental elements, and yet we have this bit of a firestorm going on over simply creating the possibility for people to have access to information so they can speak for themselves and hear unfettered what is happening in the outside world. We all condemned what is hap-

pening in Turkey when the head of Turkey ultimately tried to shut down Twitter, but somehow it is OK to shut down the people of Cuba.

Since 2009, Alan Gross has been detained in Villa Marista, a prison in Havana notorious for its treatment of political prisoners by the Cuban National Security Agency. This is not a minimum-security prison where foreigners are routinely held. It is a harsh, repressive prison reserved for Cuban dissidents. He is still being held at Villa Marista, and it is time for the Castro regime to let this American be released. He did nothing wrong. After serving 4 years now of a 15-year sentence, this 64-year-old American's mental health is reported to be deteriorating and his life may well be in danger.

The case of Alan Gross is only one example of why we cannot let up until the dead weight of this oppressive regime is lifted once and for all.

We have supported democracy movements around the world. I have been a big advocate of that in my 21 years in the Congress, in the House and the Senate, serving on both foreign policy committees. I am a big advocate because freedom and democracy and human rights, when they are observed, mean we deal with countries in which we will have less conflict and more opportunity. It is the idea upon which this Nation was founded, and it is who we are as a people and what we stand for in the eyes of the world.

We can no longer condone, through inaction and outright support—in some cases even from some of my colleagues in this Chamber—the actions of a repressive regime 90 miles from our own shores simply because of the passage of time or because of some romantic idea of what the Castro regime is all about.

So to my colleagues, let me say, I know I have come to this floor on many occasions demanding action. I have come to this floor demanding that we live up to our rhetoric and our values. I ask that we hold the Castro brothers accountable for the suffering of the Cuban people—not only the years of brutality and oppression which have deprived the Cuban people of the basic human rights we so proudly proclaim to support around the world, but also for the continuing reality of the suppression of those human rights today. I will come to the floor again and again to ask for nothing less, to ask that we never allow the Castro regime to profit from increased trade which would benefit the regime and will use these dollars for repression but not put one ounce of food on the plates of Cuban families.

I will end with this photograph of a man being arrested in Havana and flashing a sign recognized across Cuba and throughout the world. The sign is "L" for liberty. Libertad. That is all we ask for the people of Cuba, and I won't rest until we achieve it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LAS VEGAS VALLEY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to honor and recognize the 50th anniversary for the League of Women Voters of the Las Vegas Valley. On May 7, 1964, the league held their first meeting, which was attended by just a handful of women in Las Vegas. Fifty years later, because of the hard work and relentless service of its founding members and their predecessors, the league today continues to be a resounding voice for Southern Nevadans on issues that matter most to women, families, and communities.

Upon the league's inception and formal recognition from the National League of Women Voters in 1965, the group began organizing around issues such as school integration, open housing, environmental conservation, and education. By coming together, league members found great success on many of the issues they championed. Today, the league remains a vital force in the Las Vegas Valley around similar, important social causes. Some of the league's earliest members included distinguished Southern Nevadans, many of whom are personal role models of mine, like Flora Duncan, Margaret Quinn, and Jean Ford. Over the years, countless others began their path to leadership with the League.

As I stand to honor the league on this special occasion, it is also important to recognize that this year we celebrate the 100th anniversary of women having the right to vote in Nevada. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed to prohibit any United States citizen from being denied the right to vote on the basis of sex. I am proud that in my home State, we had already recognized women's right to vote 6 years earlier.

Nevada was a leader among States in the fight for women's suffrage—undoubtedly, this achievement was due to the remarkable and pioneer-like spirit of those Nevadans behind the movement. This spirit still exists today among organizations like the league and its members.

Across the U.S. and in every State, women have had the constitutional

right to vote for just short of a century. It is important that citizens, both women and men, do not take for granted their right to be heard. For this reason, it is fitting that we honor the League of Women Voters of Las Vegas Valley as their work offers each new generation the reminder that civic engagement has been, and continues to be, one of the most important rights we have as we strive to make our community and our country a better place to live. I applaud and celebrate with the League of Women Voters of Las Vegas Valley on their 50th anniversary.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN VERMONT

MR. LEAHY. Mr. President, today I am particularly proud of my home State, as we commemorate the fifth anniversary of the passage of Vermont's law guaranteeing marriage equality.

Throughout history, Vermont has taken a leadership role in America's journey to build a more just society. Vermont was the first State in the Union to outlaw slavery, and Vermonters offered shelter to runaway slaves seeking refuge while in transit to Canada—serving as one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad. Vermont was also the first to adopt universal manhood suffrage, regardless of property ownership.

It is because of this history that it is not surprising that Vermont has been at the forefront of our Nation's march toward marriage equality: Vermont was the first State to provide civil unions to same-sex couples back in 2000. On April 7, 2009, Vermont took the next step, overriding a veto to pass legislation affording marriage equality to all Vermonters in loving relationships who wanted their commitment recognized by the State. Once again Vermont led the Nation by granting marriage equality for the first time through democratically elected officials on a bipartisan basis, instead of through the courts.

This is not to say that it was easy. The initial move toward civil unions fomented heated debate among Vermonters and throughout the Nation. Several courageous leaders, such as the late Republican U.S. Senator from Vermont Bob Stafford, and State Representatives Bill Lippert and Marion Milne, among others, showed us the way, and their advocacy for equality was powerfully moving. Like many Vermonters, I listened to advocates, friends, and neighbors who reminded us that love and commitment are values to encourage and not to fear. I continue to be inspired by the inclusive example set by Vermont.

Now, 5 years later, 3,766 same-sex couples have married in the State of Vermont, 17 States and the District of Columbia have marriage equality, and the Supreme Court has decided a landmark case on the issue of same-sex marriage. In that case—United States

v. Windsor—the Court struck down Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage for purposes of Federal law as “only a legal union between one man and one woman.” The Court reasoned that the law deprived couples of equal liberty as protected by our Fifth Amendment. All Americans deserve equal justice under the law, and Marcelle and I, married for more than 50 years, celebrated this important decision, which pushed the Nation farther on its path toward equality.

As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I have long worked to make civil rights a focal point of our committee's agenda and a priority in the Senate. I often hear from those who think that the struggle for civil rights is over—that this issue is one for the history books. I remind them that this is our recent history and that while we have made great strides, there is still much work to be done. The march toward equality must continue until all individuals—regardless of sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, or disability—are protected and respected, equally, under our laws. I am confident that Vermont will continue to lead the way, and I am proud of all that we have already accomplished.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MONTH

MR. LEAHY. Mr. President, April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, and it is an important reminder of the ongoing problem of sexual assault in our nation.

The Violence Against Women Act, VAWA, which first passed in 1994, has had an astounding impact on reducing sexual and domestic assault in our country. The annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50 percent since VAWA became law. This groundbreaking bipartisan legislation included many provisions critical to supporting and improving services for all victims of sexual assault and ensuring that law enforcement has the tools it needs to find and prosecute perpetrators. I was proud to author the Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which was signed into law by President Obama last year.

The Leahy-Crapo Violence Against Women Act built upon past successes and expanded its protections to more inclusive to the victims most at risk of domestic violence and sexual assault, including LGBT, Native American, and immigrant victims. One aspect of this important effort that did not receive much attention is how it increased focus on sexual assault prevention, enforcement, and services to encourage reporting. It also increased support for programs that improve law enforcement and forensic responses to sexual assault and to address backlogs of untested rape kits. These improvements, along with the many others made in

the reauthorization, will continue to advance the national response to sexual assault.

Our bipartisan effort last year is making lives better today, but there is much more we must do. The National Network to End Domestic Violence, in their annual National Domestic Violence Counts Census, found that every day 9,000 service requests go unmet because of a lack of resources. This is not acceptable. Every day tens of thousands of victims turn to domestic and sexual violence services providers for support through emergency safe shelters, legal assistance, and child support groups, and we must do all we can to ensure these needs are met.

We cannot stop by simply supporting a strong VAWA law. That is why I was proud to support the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, which included historic reforms to sexual assault prevention and response within the military. I was also heartened last month when the Senate came together to pass the Victims Protection Act of 2014 by a vote of 97 to 0. This legislation takes even greater steps to encourage military servicemembers to come forward and report sexual assault. As I have said many times, a victim, is a victim, is a victim. We must protect all victims, including our Nation's service men and women, and that means working to decrease the fear of stigma or inaction that can often deter reporting.

Following the reauthorization of VAWA, the passage of the NDAA, and the Victims Protection Act, I hope the Senate will soon approve the bipartisan Justice for All Act reauthorization that I authored with Senator JOHN CORNYN. I was proud to author the original legislation, and our reauthorization includes many critical provisions for victims. Importantly, our bill reauthorizes the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program, which seeks to reduce the backlog of untested rape kits and other DNA evidence. This program is named after Debbie Smith, who waited years after being attacked before her rape kit was tested and the perpetrator was caught. Every Senate Democrat has cleared the way for passage the bipartisan Justice For All Act reauthorization, and I hope Senate Republicans will act quickly so we can pass this measure that means so much to rape survivors and all victims of crime.

I applaud the tireless work of the many advocates who work on behalf of victims each day and thank them for their dedication to this critical problem. Together we have taken significant steps to ensure victims of sexual assault have access to the services they need to rebuild their lives, that law enforcement have the tools they need to prosecute those who commit these horrific crimes, and to reduce future incidences of sexual assault through education and prevention efforts. Last year, the Senate stood up for the survivors of rape by passing the Leahy-