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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us, molding and making us according to Your will. Thank You for the favor You show us, because we belong to You and have been chosen to fulfill Your purposes. Lord, help us to grasp the significance of Your unfolding providence as You continue to sustain us with the many acts of Your faithful love.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to work to the best of their ability, striving always to do what is right for our Nation and world. Give them the wisdom in their labors to depend upon Your mercy, power, and grace, believing that You can do for them more than they can ask or imagine.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PAUL). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Mitchell Zais, of South Carolina, to be Deputy Secretary of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF PASTOR ANDREW BRUNSON

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, this is my third occasion on a speech that I wish that I didn't have to give on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but I promise that I am going to give a speech on this subject every week that the Senate is open for as long as I am a U.S. Senator and there is a man in a Turkish prison who I don't believe should be.

This man's name is Andrew Brunson, Pastor Brunson. He is a Presbyterian minister from Black Mountain, NC, who has been in Turkey for about the last 20 years with his wife. He raised his family there. He is a Presbyterian minister who at first just did ministry work. He didn't have a church to actually open up to the community. He just did ministry work—preached the Word and delivered the Word for the people in Turkey who wanted to hear it. It was a small church with only about 50 full-time members. It was a church that was just outside of Izmir. It was actually in Izmir proper, which is one of the larger cities in Turkey.

As of today, this man has been in prison for 586 days. He was actually taken to prison, without charges, under the emergency order after the coup in 2016. He was put in prison on October 4, 2016. For almost 17 months, he was held in a prison cell that was designed for 8 prisoners but had 21 in it. None of the other ones were Amer-

ican. None of the other ones were English speaking. Many of them were charged on either ISIS or terrorist charges or for plotting a coup attempt. He was in that prison for almost 17 months. He lost 50 pounds. His health diminished. His mental state, as anyone would expect, diminished. Yet he is a strong man of faith, and hopefully he will continue to have the strength to go through this horrible process.

We have been handling this. We have what we call casework. If somebody in North Carolina needs help, whatever that may be, we encourage them to call our office, and we open a case. We do any number of things for veterans, for military families, for seniors—anybody. If you need help in getting through to the Federal Government, you call our office. So we opened a case on Pastor Brunson about a year ago, and we have been trying to work through diplomatic channels to get him released.

About 3 months ago or 4 months ago, we heard that the indictment was going to be served on Pastor Brunson. I received word from some of the family members and people in the faith-based community that they were concerned that the American people were going to read the indictment and really judge him as guilty and turn their backs on him and have him languish in prison for what would be, essentially, a life sentence. He is 50 years old, and the charges would be up to 35 years.

It was so important for me to have him know that we cared about him that I traveled to Turkey. I got a visa to go to Turkey and made a request to go to that Turkish prison and look Pastor Brunson eye to eye and tell him that we were not going to forget about him and that we were going to do everything we could to work for his release and the release of a number of other people who I genuinely believe, in Turkey, are subject to religious persecution.

I met with him in the prison for about an hour and a half. It turns out

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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that we had just found out that his first court date was going to be about 3 weeks later, so I decided to go back to Turkey 3 weeks later and be in that courtroom to hear the testimony for myself, to hear the 62-page indictment play out. I was in that courtroom from about 9 o'clock in the morning on Monday until about 10 o'clock that night. If you don't know what a kangaroo court is and you can't read it on this slide, just Google it quickly, because what I saw was a kangaroo court.

First off, you should think about the setting. It is unlike any setting you could ever imagine in the United States. It doesn't have a trial jury, but it has a three-judge panel up there, and the prosecutor is really elevated to almost being another judge. The prosecutor was up at the dais. We were in a room that was about half the size of this room. It was maybe about two-thirds the size. It was a big room. The defense attorney was off to the side about another 30 or 40 feet, and the defendant was right in front of this panel of judges and was being looked down upon. He had to testify for 6 hours on his own behalf. One doesn't have a choice in Turkey. Then they listed the charges.

Why do I say it was a kangaroo court? Let me give a summary. I am not going to cover all of the charges because my time is limited today, but let me give a summary of some of the charges.

In the time I was there, there were about a half dozen secret witnesses. The defendant didn't get to face his accusers. In Turkey, these secret witnesses can say what they want to say. The essence of one secret witness's testimony was that he knew that Pastor Brunson was involved in either plotting the coup or in working with the PKK, which is a terrorist organization fundamentally made up of Kurds, because he witnessed a light on in this church for 4 hours.

First off, in the U.S. system, I know you are probably not going to get prosecuted for 35 years for having a light on for 4 hours—at least I hope not. Yet what makes this even more challenging is that this is the church. This church only seats about 120 people. It has two very small upstairs' rooms. I know because I have been there. We took these pictures when I visited Turkey after the visit to the prison. This is the room that is alleged to have had a light on for 4 hours, but there is one problem—no window, no way to possibly see into this room. In fact, the windows downstairs are closed with storm—I am trying to think of the name—shutters, wooden shutters. There is no way you could even see in. Yet this witness had what they considered to be compelling testimony that a light had been on, and for that reason, the pastor had to have been involved in the terrorist plot or the coup.

Another of the charges that have been alleged by the prosecution is that all of the churches in America are con-

nected and that they actually work in unison in other countries to disrupt the governments of other countries. A Christian church may take the Word to people in other countries, but it is really kind of organized as an intelligence-gathering and destabilizing force on behalf of the American Government in order to disrupt other sovereign nations.

Literally, this is how they have been thinking, and this is what they have been using to prosecute him. It is a kangaroo court.

I maintain that what we have is a hostage situation here. We have President Erdogan saying: If we give him a pass, give us somebody we are trying to extradite from the United States. On the one hand, they say you have to work through the system, and we have to let justice be served. On the other hand, the President has said: If you give us somebody we are trying to extradite from the United States, then we will give you Pastor Brunson. This is a hostage situation. This is religious persecution.

I will finish with this. Turkey is a NATO ally. It is an important NATO ally. It has been in NATO since 1952. It is in a very dangerous part of the world. It has a lot of challenges that it has to deal with—the Syrian conflict and its own internal economic challenges. There are a number of challenges, and I understand that President Erdogan's job is difficult. I would like to make it easier. As a co-lead of the Senate's NATO Observer Group, I would like to actually strengthen our partnership and make safer and more secure its homeland and its threat from foreign adversaries.

Yet, today, I have a NATO ally that is behaving like no NATO ally ever has in the history of the alliance. These are the sorts of things we are supposed to be doing as members of the NATO alliance, not illegally imprisoning for 586 days a Presbyterian minister.

We will be doing the NDAA markup next week, which is the National Defense Authorization Act. I will be working with other Members and will have to put forth provisions in the NDAA, which is the last thing that I would like to do. I would like to put provisions forward that strengthen the alliance with NATO, that send a very clear signal that we want to help them secure their homeland, and that send a clear signal that we want to work together in the fight in Syria. But today I can't have that as a priority. Today my No. 1 priority is releasing Pastor Brunson. I hope everybody understands that this is something that everybody—whether you are from North Carolina, North Dakota, or any State in this Nation—should all stand as a nation saying: This is not how you treat an American citizen and certainly not a NATO ally.

I look forward, hopefully, to never doing this speech again. I hope that by next week Pastor Brunson is free and that we sent a very clear message to

all the other people in Turkey who are in prison because of their faith that this is unacceptable behavior.

Thank you, Mr. President.
I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF GINA HASPEL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate confirmed two more superbly qualified circuit court nominees. Joel Carson and John Nalbandian are the 20th and the 21st circuit judges we have confirmed this Congress.

This morning our colleagues on the Intelligence Committee finished their consideration of Gina Haspel to be CIA Director and reported her nomination favorably with bipartisan support. Ms. Haspel's testimony and record have showcased the poise, talent, and experience that make her an excellent selection.

Senators heard about her 30-plus years of CIA experience, spanning sensitive operations from the Cold War to the Global War on Terror. That background makes Ms. Haspel an ideal pick at this particular moment, when Secretary Mattis has explained that counterterrorism and a renewed great-power competition are two of the key challenges facing our Nation.

So it is no wonder that James Clapper, President Obama's Director of National Intelligence, said: "I think the world of Gina; she is capable, smart, very experienced, well-respected by the Agency rank and file, and a great person."

Just yesterday, our current DNI, Dan Coats, wrote in USA Today that "she is a person of high integrity with valuable frontline and executive experience . . . who is willing to speak truth to power when required on behalf of our nation."

Gina Haspel is the right woman at the right time. Her nomination has support from national security leaders and Senators in both parties. There is no reason why her confirmation should be delayed, and I look forward to advancing it expeditiously following the committee's action.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. President, on another matter, over the last 20 years, the internet has yielded progress that was the stuff of science fiction just a generation ago. In so many ways it has spawned a new economy and fostered new connections across the country and the world.

In large part these successes owe to a bipartisan consensus that Washington, DC, should be largely hands-off, but, of course, like every exciting new frontier of the economy, the internet attracted attention from the crowd that prefers to regulate first and ask questions later.

In 2015 President Obama's FCC set out to fix what wasn't broken. It imposed regulations designed for Depression-era telephones on new technologies that fit in our pockets. So