

There being no objection, the committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Giroir nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, freedom of the press is a fundamental human right, a foundational pillar of democracy, and an indispensable check on authoritarian overreach. Over the past months, as we have collectively come to appreciate a new understanding of "essential workers," we have witnessed once again how essential the work journalists do is to maintaining our democracy. From Wuhan, China, to conflict zones in Venezuela, to cities and towns in the United States, journalists are risking their lives to report, investigate, and keep people informed on the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, responses to this global crisis have also reminds us that press freedom is under assault across the globe, including in the United States. Fearful of negative coverage of their capacity to protect their citizens and address a global health crisis, autocrats and other governmental figures around the world have focused their attention on concealing information. As journalists fight to advance truth and objectivity under dire circumstances, far too many governments have responded with verbal attacks and prison sentences. Today, we applaud the work and the courage of all those involved in bringing stories from around the world to our fingertips.

Amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries across the world from Algeria to Zimbabwe have imposed restrictions and threatened journalists for their work. As they do when credible, reliable, and timely information is an essential commodity, journalists have persisted.

In China, in an effort to educate his community and the world about its po-

tential threat, Chen Qiushi documented the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, in dozens of videos online. On February 6, 2020, Chen's family and friends lost contact with him, and he is presumed to have been disappeared by the CCP.

In Niger, journalist Kaka Touda Mamne Goni reported on a suspected COVID-19 case, was arrested by police on March 5, 2020, and faces up to 3 years in prison on charges of "dissemination of data likely to disturb the public order."

In Venezuela, a group of masked police agents detained freelance journalist Darvinson Rojas on March 21, 2020, and interrogated Rojas about his reporting on COVID-19 cases in the state of Miranda. Rojas remains in detention.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred new restrictions and harassment, these stories of abuse and resilience are nothing new in the field of journalism. Since 1992, the Committee to Project Journalists has reported 1,369 journalists killed around the world, including at least 25 killed in 2019. Last year also represented the 14th year in a row that Freedom House has noted a global decline in press freedom. As of April 20, 2020, at least 299 journalists were imprisoned for their work worldwide.

Of course, the global decline in press freedom and access is not limited to foreign lands. In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the struggle of local news organizations to stay afloat. The shuttering of local print publications has left rural populations and marginalized communities without critical sources of information and has chipped away at the foundation of the U.S. free press.

From the White House, President Trump continues to target journalists and the media, referring to journalism as "an evil propaganda machine" and the free press as the "enemy of the people." Most recently and severely, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration restricted most on-the-record access to administration officials and reportedly instructed all officials, including scientific and medical experts, to have public statements cleared through Vice President PENCE.

This episode is unfortunately the latest in an ongoing saga. Countries around the world have followed President Trump's lead in attacking journalism as "fake news." Between January 2017 and May 2019, at least 26 countries have enacted or introduced laws restricting access and media in the name of "fake news." In attacking the media, President Trump not only undermines the hard-hitting work journalists in the United States do to hold our leaders accountable and keep the public informed, but provides foreign leaders with the permission and vocabulary to do the same.

In spite of the unprecedented assault on the free press, journalists continue to take significant risks in the pursuit

of truth and transparency. In January 2020, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists revealed how Isabel dos Santos amassed one of Africa's largest fortunes in Angola, one of the world's poorest countries, through embezzlement and corruption using a network of companies and subsidiaries. In May 2019, Caixin journalists reported on business and government actions that resulted in the 2019 Jiangsu Tianjiayi Chemical Plant explosion in China that killed 78 people and injured over 600. Journalists have also continued to report on the situation of Uyghurs and other minorities held in detention centers in China's Xinjiang region, including new revelations from hundreds of pages of leaked CCP documents published by the New York Times in November 2019.

I join the international community in honoring and defending the brave journalists seeking to report on the truth and tell the stories that deserve to be told. Over 200 years ago, our Founding Fathers had the foresight to recognize the importance of a free press to a democracy, enshrining it in our First Amendment. Today, that importance cannot be overstated. Recognizing that societies where informed citizens can hold their governments accountable are more stable, secure, and prosperous, we have a responsibility to stand up for the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and a free press.

This week, I introduced a resolution commemorating World Press Freedom Day. The resolution highlights increasing threats to freedoms of the press and expression worldwide, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, reaffirms the centrality of a free and independent press to the health of democracy, and reiterates freedom of the press as a priority of the United States in promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance. On this World Press Freedom Day, I call on the Trump administration and our world leaders to recommit to advancing press freedom, protecting journalists, and embracing the important role they play in a healthy and secure society.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I rise to commemorate World Press Freedom Day, which was this past Sunday, and to celebrate the brave journalists all over the world who safeguard the values of truth, democracy, transparency, and justice through their work. Every year, we set aside this day to reaffirm our commitment to the free press. This year, however, is a little bit different. This year, we are in the midst of a brutal global public health crisis. One of the reasons that the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked so much havoc—taking hundreds of thousands of lives and devastating the economy—is that people with power have propagated misinformation about the virus. In the words of the World Health Organization, we are witnessing an "info-demic." Now, more than ever, it is vital that the public receives the truth, and that means protecting the

free press. We are relying on the press to bring us crucial, often life-saving, information about testing sites, shelter-in-place orders, school closures, government aid, and how to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. That is why many States, Maryland among them, have designated local news outlets as “essential businesses” that are allowed to keep operating despite social distancing policies.

In a noble effort to keep the public informed, many local media outlets have removed their paywalls for COVID-19-related news, forfeiting desperately needed revenue. Meanwhile, COVID-19 continues to place immense economic pressure on local news outlets and jeopardize their ability to function at all. Dozens of local publications have had to furlough reporters, reduce their publication frequency, or drop their print editions completely. This financial nightmare comes on the heels of more than a decade of hardship for local news.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is not the only threat facing journalists today. All around the globe, reporters face harassment and persecution for their attempts to spread the truth and hold leaders accountable. Reporters Without Borders has determined that at least 229 journalists worldwide currently are imprisoned for their work. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 25 journalists were killed around the world in 2019, and at least six journalists and media professionals have been killed in the first 4 months of 2020 alone. Corrupt and powerful governments and individuals understand that free expression is a mighty tool against injustice, so they go to horrible lengths to stifle it.

One courageous reporter who was murdered for pursuing the truth was Washington Post journalist and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi. The Central Intelligence Agency concluded with high confidence and the Senate unanimously approved a resolution stating that Saudi Government officials executed and dismembered Mr. Khashoggi in 2018 at the behest of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman. To this day, however, justice for this crime remains elusive. The Global Magnitsky Act, which I authored with the late Senator John McCain to combat human rights violations like this one, requires the U.S. administration to declassify its findings regarding who was responsible for Mr. Khashoggi's death and to impose additional sanctions on the culpable parties. President Trump has refused to do so.

This failure to stand up for an American journalist an authoritarian regime silenced is just one example of how the Trump administration has turned its back on the freedom of the press. The President and his supporters have continuously tried to demonize and delegitimize news outlets whose reporting upsets them, to the point of labeling the media an “enemy of the Amer-

ican people.” As the illustrious journalist Edward R. Murrow so famously noted 66 years ago in responding to then-Senator Joe McCarthy's vile smear tactics and intimidation:

We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason, if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men—not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.

When the leader of the United States, a country devoted to principles of liberty and democracy, flouts the truth in this way, it reverberates all across the world to the detriment of free expression everywhere. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of journalists imprisoned on spurious charges of disseminating so-called fake news more than tripled globally.

We Americans feel the impact of this vilification of the press much closer to home, too. I will never forget learning about the fatal shooting at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, MD, almost 2 years ago. In the most deadly newsroom shooting in American history, a man who was angry that the newspaper accurately and merely reported his guilty plea in a criminal harassment case stormed into the Gazette office with a gun and killed five people. Those individuals—Gerald Fishman, Rob Hiaasen, John McNamara, Rebecca Smith, and Wendi Winters—died defending one of the most sacred institutions in our country. They died protecting every American's right to know the truth. But they and hundreds of other journalists worldwide should not have to die in the line of duty.

For the sake of our democracy and global human rights, we must do everything we can to eliminate the violence and repression news media face. The United States can help lead this effort by loudly voicing our support for the free press as a key component of an informed civil society and a government accountable to its people. That is why I am proud to cosponsor Senator MENENDEZ's resolution in honor of World Press Freedom Day declaring the need for a truly free press and condemning threats to the freedom of expression around the world. The resolution applauds the bravery of journalists and media workers and remembers those who have lost their lives in the course of their duties.

We can also demonstrate our commitment to a free press by remembering those journalists and media professionals who have lost their lives in the course of their duties. To that end, Senator PORTMAN and I have introduced a bill, S. 1969, to authorize a national memorial to fallen journalists. The National Capital Region has numerous monuments and memorials to honor those individuals who have helped make our country stronger

since its founding days. Currently missing from that honor roll is a memorial to reporters and other journalists, such as those at the Capital Gazette, who have sacrificed everything to protect the free, open, and transparent society that all people deserve. My hope is that Congress will pass the Fallen Journalists Memorial Act soon. Once we establish this memorial, we will have a visible reminder to pay tribute to these heroes not just once a year, but every day.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF EARTH DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, while the Senate was out of session, the American people celebrated the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that historic anniversary.

We first celebrated Earth Day in 1970 when then-Senator Gaylord Nelson brought more than 20 million Americans together to mobilize in defense of our planet. In the half-century since, our Nation has benefitted from a passionate environmental movement that has pushed lawmakers, businesses, and communities to foster a healthier Earth. While this movement has yielded significant progress, we nonetheless must do more to address the gravest threat to our environment: climate change.

I recognize that, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it might be difficult to wrap our heads around a second crisis, but we have an important opportunity here to learn from one global emergency about how to navigate another.

The first lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic: We must listen to experts. Public health experts have long forecast the risk of a viral pandemic. Still, our leaders failed to prepare for COVID-19 and even denied the magnitude of the threat we faced when it was at our doorstep. The novel coronavirus has now claimed over 72,000 lives in the United States, a death toll higher than any other country.

We are witnessing a parallel problem with climate change. For decades, experts have warned that human-caused climate change is heating the Earth. Ninety-seven percent of the world's scientists agree on this. Scientists are no longer just predicting the future implications of this crisis; they are pointing out the very real consequences of climate change that have already arrived.

These include the rise in extreme weather events like floods, hurricanes, and wildfires that we have experienced across the United States in recent years. In Maryland, we have seen communities like Ellicott City devastated by flash flooding from increased rainfall. Our State's many miles of low-lying coast make us particularly vulnerable to high tide flooding and storm surge. The longer we wait to address climate change, the more natural disasters we will face.