

and violence toward people of faith, while encouraging leaders to protect the rights of their religious communities and neighbors.

The United States has a strong history and commitment to religious freedom, but some throughout the world do not have that privilege. One-third of the world's countries have laws that prohibit expression deemed as blasphemous, heretical, apostate, or insulting to religion.

Depending on the country, punishment for individuals who participate in this type of expression that they call blasphemy range from fines to imprisonment, to even the death sentence in places like Pakistan.

These laws affect Christians, Muslims, Hindus, secularists, and all other groups. They scare people into hiding because of their faith. They punish people for changing their faith, and they remove the most basic dignity of the individual: the right to believe.

We should continue to expose those who take away that basic human freedom. That is who we are as Americans. That is what we stand for worldwide.

The independent and nonpartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has identified 84 countries that still have blasphemy laws on the books. That is why I joined Senator COONS in cosponsoring the bipartisan resolution to condemn blasphemy and apostasy laws around the world and called for the release of individuals who have been prosecuted or imprisoned for charges of blasphemy.

That proposal is ready to go and ready to be passed and has cleared everyone on the Republican side of the aisle and most everyone on the Democratic side of the aisle.

To ensure that religious liberty is a core pillar of our engagement with other countries, the President issued an Executive order on Advancing International Religious Freedom—the first of its kind. It is a recommitment of the United States to protecting the freedom to live out your faith, regardless of where you live.

Under this order, the United States places an even greater prioritization on religious freedom with our foreign assistance programs of the Department of State and with USAID.

It is interesting, in addition to religious liberty, this administration has also partnered with other countries to protect and uphold the sanctity of human life, while prioritizing the rights and safety of women worldwide.

Last month, the administration, along with the Governments of Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda, led a coalition of more than 30 government leaders representing 1.6 billion people from every part of the planet to sign the Geneva Consensus Declaration. The declaration reaffirms that “all are created equal before the law” and that the “human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

This historic document also strengthens our international commitment to the protection of the most basic human right, “the inherent ‘dignity and worth of the human person,’ that ‘every human being has the right to life.’” It seems like that would be just a natural thing to say. It seems like that would be apparent, that we as a nation and that people around the world would recognize this most basic right of an individual to live.

We believe in the right for people to be able to practice whatever faith they choose. We should at least agree before they choose whatever faith they are that they are allowed to live at all.

This document that was signed by the Governments of the United States, Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda has the simple statement, along with multiple others. It says: We “[r]eaffirm the inherent ‘dignity and worth of the human person,’ that ‘every human being has the inherent right to life,’ and the commitment ‘to enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.’”

I am proud of this administration and the 1.6 billion people who are represented by the other governments that have joined into this simple declaration to protect the rights of women, to stand up for the equal rights of those women, and to be able to stand up for the rights of every single child. The historic document strengthens our international commitment to this basic right.

This is a critical tool for the United States and like-minded countries to preserve equal rights for all families, for all individuals in every society. It has four pillars: better health for women, preservation of human life, strengthening of the family as the foundational unit of society, and protecting every nation's national sovereignty in global politics.

As I have said on this floor before, abortion takes a life; it doesn't preserve it. It is not a right, and we as a nation should not promote an action to the rest of the world that is antithetical to the most basic of all human rights—the right to live, to make your own decisions.

I am encouraged that we are partnering with other like-minded nations, that there are people all over the world who are standing up for the rights of women to have equality, the rights to be able to protect human life, to strengthen families, and the rights to be able to protect national sovereignty—something we should be able to stand up for.

In the days ahead, I pray we continue to stand up for that because every individual should have the right to live as they live, have the right to be able to have whatever faith they choose to have—to have that faith, live that faith, change that faith, or to have no faith at all.

But they don't even get to choose that if they are not even allowed to

live first. That is something I would hope that we, as Americans, could also stand for.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I come to the floor today in solidarity with ethnic Armenians all over the world who have experienced terrible losses in recent weeks. This is a tragic moment for Armenians everywhere.

Words cannot describe the devastation inflicted on the region by Azerbaijani President Aliyev with the full support of President Erdogan of Turkey. Thousands of ethnic Armenian civilians and soldiers have lost their lives due to Azerbaijan's aggression, with an unknown number more injured. More than half of the population has been driven from their longtime homes. Every day, more are forced to leave.

Every day, more are forced to leave. Azerbaijan's aggression has created a massive humanitarian crisis that will require a significant response, especially in light of the worsening pandemic. The historically and religiously significant city of Shushi now sits in Azerbaijani hands, and the security of many sacred Christian sites falls to President Aliyev and his backer Erdogan. The world will be watching if these holy sites are desecrated.

These are dark days, indeed, and it did not have to be this way. American leadership could have averted much of this tragedy. Unfortunately, after the conflict began in late September, the highest ranking Trump administration officials decided to remain largely absent and silent.

Certainly, other world leaders engaged. President Macron made calls and actively tried to reduce tensions, as one would expect from one of the leaders of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group cochair country.

Unfortunately, others with less noble goals were also at the table. President Erdogan fueled Azerbaijan's aggression, fanning the flames by providing devastating drone technology and Syrian mercenaries.

President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov worked the phones from the early days of the conflict. The result? Russia has a new foothold in the southern Caucasus. Evidently, Russia was never fully committed to the Minsk goals and now has what they wanted since the 1990s.

All of this happened while Donald Trump slept—yet another example of diplomatic malpractice at the highest levels of an administration which will, thankfully, conclude in January. President Trump's departure is little solace for the ethnic Armenians who have been driven from their homes and seen their livelihoods go up in flames.

So what is the region left with at the end of the day? The security of the Armenian people, who have already suffered brutal violence at the hands of

Presidents Aliyev and Erdogan, now rests with peacekeepers sent by Vladimir Putin—a flawed agreement that does nothing about the jihadis sent there by Turkey, who, if allowed to remain, could commit further atrocities against Christian Armenians.

Without any commitments to the status of Artsakh, there is no incentive for Azerbaijan to make peace with Armenia. Will we see another case of ethnic cleansing in the future? Do we sit silent?

We now have a trio of authoritarians running the show in the southern Caucasus. It should alarm anyone dedicated to a peaceful solution for this long-outstanding conflict. It should alarm anyone dedicated to democratic reform in the region. It should alarm anyone concerned about basic human rights and respect for international law.

We in the United States should be concerned about national security issues that would affect us in the Caucasus. So, my colleagues, we are witnessing the return of great power politics in this critical region. Yet the world's sole superpower is conspicuously absent. This needs to change.

First and most urgently, the United States must lead a response to the humanitarian needs created by this violence, particularly for the tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians forcibly displaced from their homes by the 6-week war.

Winter is fast approaching. The COVID-19 pandemic is raging. There is no time to waste. Congress and the Trump administration must act quickly to save these families. The United States must make a substantial investment in humanitarian and development assistance, along the lines of \$100 million, to make a difference for those on the ground. This includes funding for efforts to demine the affected area.

In April, I sent a letter cosigned by 30 other Senators calling for the Senate to appropriate \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2021 funds for demining, robust funding for rehabilitation services in Nagorno-Karabakh, and money for an independent assessment of remaining mine contamination to help inform future efforts.

Given the widespread use by Azerbaijan of cluster munitions, rockets, and other such weapons in this conflict, I again urge this body to include those provisions in the final appropriations bill.

Second, the United States must immediately—immediately—suspend the provision of defense articles to Turkey and Azerbaijan. We cannot and must not enable any future atrocities by either of those authoritarian countries.

Either we had a tremendous intelligence failure or the State Department lied when it issued the waiver to section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. Either way, we should be gravely concerned about reports that Azerbaijan has utilized U.S.-origin defense equipment in this conflict.

The administration must fully investigate these reports and respond appropriately to any violations of U.S. law. Indeed, Canada suspended arms sales to Turkey in response to the conflict for this very reason, and I applaud Prime Minister Trudeau for doing so.

The United States must do the same and work diplomatically to encourage others to join us in common cause.

To that end, I have introduced two resolutions that will require the State Department to report on human rights abuses by Azerbaijan and Turkey and on the role that U.S. security assistance and arms transfers may be playing in those abuses. I urge my colleagues to support those resolutions.

Third, the administration must follow the law. It should not waive section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, which states that Azerbaijan should “cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force” against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh as a condition to receive U.S. assistance.

The facts tell us that the Government of Azerbaijan has done the exact opposite. America has no business rewarding this kind of aggressive behavior.

I call on the administration to terminate the waiver of section 907. Congress can also address this injustice in the fiscal year 2021 appropriations bill by stripping the existing waiver authority so that this security relationship stops. It needs to stop, once and for all.

In addition, at my request, the Government Accountability Office is currently reviewing the impact of U.S. security assistance to Azerbaijan, which has skyrocketed under the Trump administration. The Pentagon alone has provided more than \$120 million in equipment to the Aliyev regime in recent years. This is simply unacceptable and must change. The GAO review will shed light on the impact of the repeated waivers of section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act.

Fourth and finally, Turkey's aggression in this conflict must be addressed. President Erdogan clearly aspires to be a modern-day Ottoman Sultan, putting down stakes in Libya, in Syria, across the Eastern Mediterranean, and now in the southern Caucasus.

Under Erdogan, Turkey has engaged in unbridled aggression outside of its borders, in violation of NATO's founding principles and international norms.

Here is what we know: This Turkey is proving to be an unreliable ally in NATO. It is not a democracy, and it is not a responsible actor on the world stage.

The aggression unfolding in Azerbaijan should make crystal clear what we have long known: Erdogan is, without a doubt, trying to claim the title of most destructive actor in the region today. Without a strong response, he will continue these advances and aggression.

I urge the incoming Biden administration to stop him, and Congress has a role to play as well. We must finally

sanction Turkey for its purchase of the S-400 from Russia, which is a clear violation of the CAATSA law.

I expect that the fiscal year 2021 NDAA will take this long overdue step and result in S-400 sanctions on Turkey.

I would also urge the incoming Biden administration to reassert American leadership in the region. The United States must join with Europe in solidarity against Turkey's violations of the sovereignty of Greece and Cyprus, which destabilize the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Sanctions against those conducting illegal exploration activities on behalf of Turkey would be a strong show of support for our European allies, not to mention for the rule of law. Indeed, I have every confidence that President-Elect Biden and his team will live up to America's responsibilities on the world stage by actually engaging on all of these issues.

And though the OSCE Minsk Group process appears to be on life support, we can and must reinvigorate it with senior-level engagement. We must send a clear message to Ankara, Baku, and Moscow that violence as a means to solve the conflict will not succeed and pressure on Armenia from its eastern and western borders will not be tolerated.

I would like to close with this. Above the road between Yerevan and Stepanakert lies the ancient monastery of Dadivank. Father Hovhannes, a priest at the monastery, has vowed to stay even though the area has fallen under Azerbaijani control. His neighbors have mostly fled, on their way to Yerevan, displaced by weeks of horrific fighting.

The courage of Father Hovhannes is hard for most of us to understand, to even comprehend. It comes from a place of deep connection to the land, deep connection to one's culture, and deep connection to one's faith. The world will be watching as to what happens to Father Hovhannes and the ancient monastery of Dadivank.

A neighbor of Father Hovhannes who also committed to stay in the area said:

We are here to stay until the end. This is our God. It's our church. Our cross bears a heavy weight. We are here to carry that weight.

Throughout this war, Armenians across the region have carried that weight under relentless assault from Azerbaijan and Turkey. The Trump administration let them down.

The horror of recent weeks will be very difficult to undo, but we must start the work. Yes, we must start the work. By taking the steps I have described here tonight, we can begin a new chapter of U.S. policy in the region and right past wrongs. And I am committed, as I have always been, alongside the Armenian-American community in New Jersey and across our country, to see this just work through to the end.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

NOMINATION OF TOBY CROUSE

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I rise this evening in support of the nomination of Toby Crouse to serve as a U.S. district judge for the District of Kansas. I am joined on the floor this evening by the senior Senator from Kansas, Senator ROBERTS, and we take our responsibility seriously in vetting judicial nominees, particularly true when the seat that is under consideration—when the seat that is vacant—is from our home State of Kansas. We need good, solid judges who interpret the Constitution in ways that enforce the law and provide justice and equity.

I can tell my colleagues that Toby Crouse is highly qualified, both professionally and personally, to fill this seat.

Toby has had a distinguished career since earning a law degree from the University of Kansas. He completed two Federal clerkships, including one that was with the Tenth Circuit. He then became a partner at Kansas's largest law firm, Foulston Siefkin, before he was appointed as the State's solicitor general in 2013, a position he currently holds while maintaining a solo law practice.

Throughout his career, Toby has come to possess extensive trial and appellate experience in both State and Federal courts. As the solicitor general, he has argued before the Supreme Court three times.

I have had the opportunity to have numerous conversations with Toby, with his law professors, with his colleagues, and members of the bar in Kansas, and he comes highly recommended. The bar in Kansas, as well as the bench, is anxious for this position to be filled so that justice will not be delayed. And the American Bar Association rates Toby as "well qualified."

I want to thank Chairman GRAHAM and the Judiciary Committee for approving this nomination and Leader MCCONNELL for bringing this nomination to the floor for our consideration this evening. I am confident that Mr. Crouse will serve on the Federal bench with distinction, and I encourage my colleagues to vote for his final confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about the work of my good friend and colleague, the junior Senator from Georgia, Senator KELLY LOEFFLER. Republicans, including the Senator from Georgia, continue to put forward solutions to address one of our country's most pressing problems, and that, of course, is healthcare. As a doctor, I recognize that healthcare remains a top priority for families all across this great country.

Senator LOEFFLER also knows how important healthcare is to families, not just across her State of Georgia but to families all around America. She has a proposal. It is called Modernizing Americans' Health Care. It is a plan, and this plan is another example of the important contribution that she is making here in the Senate to the well-being of the entire Nation.

Her plan emphasizes that Americans with preexisting conditions must be protected. My colleague is absolutely right: Everyone knows someone with a preexisting condition. My own wife Bobbi is a breast cancer survivor. She has had three operations. She has had chemotherapy twice, and she has now survived that cancer by over 15 years. That is a preexisting condition.

Let there be no doubt: Republicans will always make sure that patients are able to get insurance regardless of their medical condition.

Senator LOEFFLER's plan also recognizes the need for more insurance choices. Americans need the coverage that works for them and their families. It should be available, affordable, and appropriate for them—what they need, not what the government says they have to have. Families need more options.

Association health plans let small businesses and community organizations come together with the buying power of large corporations. This helps lower the cost of care. Main Street, I believe, deserves the same opportunity to buy insurance as Wall Street, and that is what Senator LOEFFLER is proposing.

Her plan also lets consumers save more of their own money to pay for healthcare. Right now, as a result of the Obama healthcare law, Americans can only use a health savings account when it is tied to a high deductible healthcare plan. My colleague from Georgia wants to expand these accounts for anyone with health insurance coverage regardless of their type of insurance plan.

Everyone knows over the last year—since the Obama healthcare law was passed—that deductibles have continued to keep climbing. We need to give families relief by letting them save more of their own money tax-free through a health savings account. That way, families could use their money to pay for deductibles and other kinds of healthcare expenses that right now they are not allowed to do.

As a doctor, one thing in particular that I strongly support, of course, is direct primary care. We have it running successfully in my home State of Wyoming. That is when someone pays your healthcare provider a flat monthly fee instead of a fee every time you visit the doctor or the nurse or the nurse practitioner.

Consumers like this arrangement. They like it because it takes the uncertainty out of a doctor's visit. They always know what they are going to pay month to month to month. Providers

like it because they get to focus on patients over all of the paperwork that is so often required by insurance companies.

I talk to doctors who are tired of practicing medicine and want to retire: What is it you don't like? They love taking care of patients, but they hate the paperwork that comes with it, so often related to the law, the mandates, and the things that happen with trying to comply with the insurance paperwork.

A lot more can be done, and we know this as a result of coronavirus in terms of providing healthcare using telemedicine. Especially, Madam President, in your home State and mine, where there are great distances and lots of rural communities, it is a great opportunity for people to receive healthcare from a distance, using the newest technology of the day.

I think we have seen much more about telemedicine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Patients have tried it. They like it. The providers I have talked to around the State of Wyoming like it a lot.

There have been issues in the past, though—the issues of how to reimburse and how many visits and the distance. And did they need to come into the office? Would it be covered by insurance? Would it be covered by Medicare? Would it be covered by Medicaid? All of these are issues—hassles—for the patient and the provider, but, to me, telemedicine is now here to stay.

These direct primary care practices truly have been on the leading edge of telemedicine because they didn't have to worry about insurance company reimbursements based on the number of face-to-face visits. They could just visit and talk to the patient using telemedicine.

Speaking of COVID-19, this plan also ensures that we continue fighting back against this virus. There is tremendous news today about the vaccines—two vaccines, one that is 90 percent effective and one that is 94 percent effective.

As a doctor, I will tell you, these are breakthroughs. These are modern-day miracles of medicine. If you think about it, not that long ago Dr. Fauci said that if we could get a vaccine that was 50 percent effective, that would be tremendous. But we are talking much, much higher rates of effectiveness than that.

My colleague in her proposal also calls for focus on something we can all support, and that is making drugs and personal protective equipment here in the United States—producing here at home in America. We need to bring the manufacturing of these critical supplies back to our own communities, certainly back to our country. Never again—never again—should our patients and healthcare workers be held hostage by China or any other nation.

Senator LOEFFLER knows that Americans should not be the sole payers for the innovation that supports the rest