

MORNING BUSINESS

PROTECTING STUDENT ATHLETES FROM CONCUSSIONS ACT OF 2021

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, as our students return to in-person instruction, they also will return to school sports. We encourage our students to be active and play school sports to promote healthy habits, team-building skills, and socialization, which are especially important after a year of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet every year, more than 140,000 estimated student athletes sustain a concussion, and that is just the reported count. We can be sure that many more go unreported and untreated.

The health benefits of competing in school sports are undermined if students are staying out on the field after an injury, especially concussions. Unfortunately, many student athletes return to play prematurely, and there is growing evidence that untreated concussions can have detrimental, long term effects on their health and academic performance.

That is why last week I reintroduced the Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act. My bill would direct states to develop concussion safety plans for public schools that include a concussion safety awareness component. Certain States, like Illinois, already have such procedures in place, but it is high time we make this true for all States. By equipping our schools and communities with evidence-based guidance for responding to concussions, we can keep our students and their futures safe.

The bill also would require States to adopt a “when in doubt, sit it out” policy. If there is even the possibility that a student athlete has suffered a concussion, their health and safety ought to be the No. 1 priority. That means, if an athlete is suspected of having sustained a concussion, they should sit out and not be allowed to return to play the same day. They should return to play only once evaluated and cleared by a qualified healthcare professional.

Let’s be clear: A concussion is a traumatic brain injury that affects brain function. It is, by no means, something we can simply shake or walk off. Getting your “bell rung,” like they used to say in my day, is a serious threat to a young person. The still-developing brains of students make them more susceptible to injury, making concussions all the more dangerous.

A “when in doubt, sit it out” policy, endorsed by the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Academy of Neurology, will put the decision to return to the game in the hands of qualified healthcare professionals. It will prevent student athletes from experiencing successive injuries by staying in the game when they are not fit. It will give student athletes time to heal and help ensure that short-term symptoms do not become long-term effects.

As we return to in-person instruction, we must use common-sense and evidence-based approaches to ensure student safety. For school sports, this means we have to put the necessary procedures for preventing, detecting, responding to, and treating concussions in place. This bill would help do that.

It is why my bill is endorsed by the American College of Sports Medicine; American Academy of Neurology; National Football League (NFL); National Basketball Association (NBA); Major League Baseball (MLB); National Hockey League (NHL); National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA); American Academy of Sports Physical Therapy; Academy of Neurologic Physical Therapy; American Physical Therapy Association; Easterseals; Illinois High School Association; National Association of School Psychologists; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Disability Rights Network; National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association; National Parent Teacher Association; Pop Warner Little Scholars; U.S. Soccer Federation; USA Cheer; USA Football; Safe Kids World Wide; and Sports & Fitness Industry Association.

I hope my colleagues will join me in this common-sense, evidence-based approach to protecting student athletes. Thank you.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, yesterday, in a hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ranking Member RISCH, called out the State Department for its apparent lack of action in helping those Americans and Afghan allies who are still stuck in Afghanistan.

It has been 2 months since the withdrawal of all American military and diplomatic presence in the country in the wake of the Taliban’s total takeover of that country.

In the past week or so, the number of Americans reportedly still in the country has grown, not shrunk.

We have gone from around 100 to over 400.

Now, I know Americans are not flocking to Taliban controlled Afghanistan, so why does this number keep going up?

I understand that Americans are not required to register with the State Department so it is understandable that they would not have a reliable, fixed list of Americans at the start of this crisis.

But I find it hard to believe that Americans waited 2 months after being abandoned in Afghanistan by their government to reach out and then, in the space of a week, suddenly found a way to get in touch.

The State Department set up special e-mail addresses and issued guidance on how to report Americans and Afghan allies who need to be evacuated.

My office heard from many Iowans concerned about those they knew in

Afghanistan, and my staff followed the directions from the State Department, forwarding the contact information.

For the most part, all I ever heard back was a confirmation that the message was received.

I am starting to wonder if these went into a black hole?

I did not expect that the State Department would devote time and effort to keeping me informed given that presumably it was all hands on deck to contact those in the country and make arrangements for them.

However, 2 months later, I don’t see much progress.

Then there are reports that efforts by brave former special forces and other Americans who picked up where their government left off to evacuate Americans and Afghan allies have not received the support they needed from the State Department. Is the State Department just washing their hands of this mess?

I shared with Senator RISCH information I passed on to the State Department about 98 Afghan allies known to Iowans to need help as their lives were in danger after the Taliban takeover.

I am only aware of one that has been evacuated.

I know that many have not even been contacted by the State Department.

I am glad that Ranking Member RISCH entered this information into the RECORD along with information from 24 other Senators, totaling 16,688 cases.

That is just one quarter of the Senate, so I know there are many more cases out there.

It is time to hear what the State Department is doing to get the remaining Americans home and to process the cases of Afghan allies so those who helped us and whose lives are at risk can get to safety.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I was absent for Senate vote No. 447, the vote on the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 471, Beth Robinson, of Vermont, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit. I would like the record to reflect that had I been present, I would have voted yes.

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF OSCE’S OFFICE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s—OSCE—Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights—ODIHR—one of the world’s most preeminent and comprehensive human rights protection bodies.

In 1990–1991, during the signing of the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* that created ODIHR, a spirit of “profound change and historic expectations” prevailed among the United States, nations of Europe, and the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary for their time, heads of state and governments resolved to “build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations.” Further, by affirming that government’s first responsibility is to ensure the “protection and promotion of human rights,” they explicitly linked the full attainment of those rights with “the foundation of freedom, justice and peace” and set the standard for relations and security within and among nations.

Now, 30 years later, I am deeply concerned that the fundamental freedoms that ODIHR was founded to safeguard are in peril.

Authoritarianism is on the rise in Europe. Credible reports allege there are more than 750 political prisoners in Belarus, many detained for participating peacefully in protest of the fraudulent elections of August 2020 and the brutal government crackdown that followed. In Hungary, Viktor Orban’s administration continues its unprecedented consolidation of Hungary’s media, even as opposition figures organize to resist him. In many countries across the OSCE area, we have witnessed an alarming rise in anti-Semitism, racism, religious and other intolerance, and violence against women. These scourges have worsened the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in our communities.

With these and other challenges in mind, ODIHR’s valuable work to assist nations to live up to their commitments is more relevant and more needed than ever.

ODIHR is empowered by states to ensure respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, and to promote and strengthen democratic institutions and tolerance. ODIHR actively partners with OSCE’s 57 participating states, civil society, and international organizations to support human rights defenders, enhance the independence of judiciaries, and promote human-rights-based policing. It offers legislative reviews and develops tools to support local government officials, including the Words into Action project, which enhances social inclusion within local communities and for which I proudly help secure funding.

The most visible demonstration of ODIHR’s collaboration with the United States is perhaps in the field of election observation, where its methodology is rightly seen as the gold standard in international election observation. Since its founding, ODIHR, the Department of State, and the U.S. Congress, through the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, have deployed thousands of American citizens and legislators to observe the conduct of elections across the OSCE area, including in the United States. Since OSCE states pledged in 1990 to hold free and fair elections, elections observation has been recognized as one of the most

transparent and methodical ways to encourage states’ commitment to democratic standards and is a hallmark of ODIHR’s work.

For nearly 30 years, ODIHR has organized Europe’s largest human rights review conference, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting—HDIM—gathering thousands of representatives of governments, parliaments, and civil society for 2 weeks around the same table to review progress on human rights commitments. Unfortunately, the HDIM did not take place this September. Russia blocked consensus to hold the meeting, thereby denying the OSCE region’s nearly 1 billion citizens of a meaningful and sustained opportunity to hold their governments to account.

In September, Russia also prevented ODIHR from deploying a full and independent election observation mission to observe its Duma elections. Likewise, Russia was responsible for the closure of OSCE’s border observation mission, which provided valuable insight into the personnel and materiel flowing across Russia’s border into the temporarily occupied areas of eastern Ukraine.

ODIHR’s work is more important and relevant than at any time since its founding at the end of the Cold War. I would like to take a moment to extend my heartfelt appreciation to ODIHR’s 180 staff from 35 countries, upon whose dedication and professionalism we rely as we strive to realize an equitable and just future for all.

ODIHR is not only the human rights arm of the world’s largest regional security organization; it is also the independent body endowed to assist us as we pursue this important goal.

The phrase “Vancouver to Vladivostok” is routinely invoked to describe the organization’s broad geographical reach. However, it is perhaps ODIHR—and OSCE’s—revolutionary and comprehensive concept of “security,” which includes military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights, that is its defining characteristic and most important contribution to world peace and the reason why we should all be celebrating ODIHR’s 30th anniversary this year and take steps to ensure its success for years to come.

GENEVA CONSENSUS DECLARATION

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, this month marks the first anniversary of the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women’s Health and Strengthening the Family. The historic coalition that issued this declaration was formed by a diverse group of countries committed to advancing women’s health, protecting life at every stage while affirming that there is no international right to abortion, upholding the importance of the family as foundational to society, and defending the sovereign right of Nations to

make their own laws to advance these core values, without external pressure. The Geneva Consensus Declaration was signed on October 22, 2020, by 32 countries from every region of the world, representing more than 1,600,000,000 people, which committed to working together on the core pillars enshrined in the declaration, and five countries have subsequently signed. Although President Biden removed the United States as a signatory to the Geneva Consensus Declaration earlier this year, at least temporarily, the coalition is alive and growing, currently consisting of 36 countries.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the text of this landmark document and the names of the 36 signatory countries.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

GENEVA CONSENSUS DECLARATION ON PROMOTING WOMEN’S HEALTH AND STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY

We, ministers and high representatives of Governments,

Having intended to gather on the margins of the 2020 World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland to review progress made and challenges to uphold the right to the highest attainable standards of health for women; to promote women’s essential contribution to health, and strength of the family and of a successful and flourishing society; and to express the essential priority of protecting the right to life, committing to coordinated efforts in multilateral fora; despite our inability to meet in Geneva due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, in solidarity, we

1. Reaffirm “all are equal before the law,” and “human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”;

2. Emphasize “the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights,” as well as economic, social, and cultural rights; and the “equal rights, opportunities and access to resources and equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their wellbeing and that of their families”; and that “women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources, and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels”;

3. Reaffirm 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”;

4. Emphasize that “in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning” and that “any measures or changes related to abortion within the health system can only be determined at the national or local level according to the national legislative process”;

5. Reaffirm that “the child . . . needs special safeguards and care . . . before as well as after birth” and “special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children,” based on the principle of the best interest of the child; Reaffirm that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”; that “motherhood and childhood are entitled to