

“(1) has been found to have been engaged in espionage activities or a terrorist activity (as defined in section 212(a)(3)(B)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(3)(B)(iii)))”; and

(2) by striking “allies and may pose” and inserting the following: “allies; and  
“(2) may pose”.

The amendment (No. 2961) was agreed to, as follows:

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to deny admission to the United States to any representative to the United Nations who has been found to have been engaged in espionage activities or a terrorist activity against the United States and poses a threat to United States national security interests.”.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I know my colleagues and good friends are waiting. I will be very brief. I agree with the Senator from Texas that it was totally inappropriate that Mr. Aboutalebi was nominated in the first place. He was a member of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, the group that seized the embassy on November 4, 1979, and held American staff hostage until 1981. There were New Yorkers I knew among that group.

While I believe that Mr. Aboutalebi's actions certainly would have made him ineligible for a visa under the Immigration and Nationality Act, I believe it is worth it to clear up all doubt about our ability to deny him a visa under U.S. law by passing this bill.

I am fully aware that now is a sensitive time in our negotiations with Iran regarding the future of the nuclear program. Nevertheless, it is exactly for this reason that Iran's leadership should not have unnecessarily escalated tensions with the United States by seeking to appoint an ambassador to the United Nations who materially aided terrorists who abducted American citizens. We should not further aggravate the pain of the individuals and families who suffered through the hostage crisis by allowing this individual to have a visa and diplomatic immunity within the United States.

So I support this legislation. I am glad it has moved forward in a bipartisan way. I thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle for supporting this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I wish to recognize that this is a very important moment for the Senate to speak with one voice at a time when I think it matters to former hostages and their families. We heard you, Senator CRUZ heard you, I heard you, and our friends on the other side heard you. So it is good to know that the Senate is listening to people who have suffered in the past from this regime and Iran.

To Senators LEAHY, MENENDEZ, and SCHUMER, thank you very much for working with Senator CRUZ so we could reach this moment. I will do everything I can to get the House to act accordingly.

At the end of the day, it is very important that the Iranians not mistake how we view them. We have had our differences about Syria. We have had foreign policy disputes between the administration and Republicans, and sometimes Democrats, regarding how to move forward in the world. But this is a unique moment when all 100 Senators support the following statement to the Iranians: We remember who you are. We remember what you have done to our country and to our fellow citizens, and we are not going to forget. If you are listening in Iran, we have a very clear-eyed view in the Senate of who we are dealing with. So this is a very appropriate time to speak with one voice. I hope the Iranians will understand that we are resolved, Republicans and Democrats, to make sure they never possess a nuclear weapon.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, as a cosponsor of this legislation, I applaud my colleagues who are here tonight. I think this is the right message to send. It is a sensitive time, so therefore we need to stand and be counted. I hope the House will act swiftly on this legislation.

#### PAYCHECK FAIRNESS ACT— MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

##### JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I rise tonight at a time when we face a quiet crisis in this country. President Obama and many on the other side of the aisle tell us the economy has improved, we have turned a corner, we are out of the woods, but I can tell my colleagues too many Americans are being left behind. In fact, historic numbers of Americans are disconnected from work. It is a quiet crisis. It is affecting them and their families. It is affecting our economy in very fundamental ways. It is one of the reasons we haven't seen the economic growth we had hoped for because not enough Americans are involved in active work because so many are out of work. The unemployment numbers, by the way, don't show the degree of the problem. An unemployment number around 7 percent doesn't show the fact that a lot of folks have left the work force all together.

This crisis includes also 3.7 million long-term unemployed. These are people who have been out of work for 6 months or more. This is also at historic levels. During this recent recession and during this weak recovery over the last 5 years, we have had numbers of long-term unemployed, over 6 months, at historic levels. In fact, the number of long-term unemployed right now is higher than it has been during any recession in our Nation's history, except for the most recent one 5 years ago.

Second, we have a lot of people who have left looking for work all together. So a lot of these folks were long-term

unemployed, and they have now given up looking for work. Some 10.5 million Americans aren't even counted in the unemployment numbers because they have given up looking for work. The economists call this the labor participation rate. It is at historic lows for men, going back to the 1940s. In other words, more men are out of work—and that means not working or not even looking for a job—than we have ever had as a percentage of our population since we started keeping track of these statistics in the 1940s.

For men and women combined, we can go back to the 1970s—the numbers are so low for the participation rate in work. That goes back to the Carter era, when we had double-digit unemployment, double-digit inflation, and double-digit interest rates. We have to go back to that economy that was cratering in order to see the numbers of people who are out of work, not looking for work, and not even trying.

So we have a real problem in this country, and we are not addressing it. To make matters worse, people are saying: Well, Rob, this is actually the baby boomers, and it is people retiring early, so it is not that bad. That is not true. To make matters worse, it is a lot of young people. There was a recent Brookings study that came out a couple weeks ago which indicates that actually a lot of the problem is young men, single men, who are choosing not to work or cannot find a job and, therefore, they drop out of the workforce altogether. Again, this is not reflected in the unemployment numbers. This is not even reflected in the long-term unemployment numbers.

Disappointment after disappointment for many of these workers leads them to give up looking for work altogether. These Americans feel as if what we are doing here in Washington does not really affect them and their lives. They feel as if we are not dealing with this issue, so the underemployed, the unemployed, the long-term unemployed—the folks who are so disconnected from work that they are not even looking for a job—they are looking at us in Washington saying: What are you going to do to help?

They are the reason I supported tonight this extension of unemployment insurance. Now, this was not exactly the legislation I wanted. But, also, it is not exactly the legislation that was brought to the floor. The other side of the aisle, the Democrats, brought legislation to the floor that was a long-term extension on an emergency basis. This is for people who have been out of work for over 26 weeks. This is the Federal addition to the State unemployment insurance that generally is in place for people for up to 26 weeks. The Democratic version was long-term—over a year. It also was not paid for, which would take us further into debt and deficit, which would hurt the economy. It also did not have any reforms.

The legislation that passed tonight with my vote—and some other Republicans—had three things. No. 1, it is

short term—5 months instead of a year. No. 2, it is paid for, so it does not take us further into debt and deficit. No. 3, it does have some reforms to try to make the unemployment system work better to help these people who are long-term unemployed who otherwise have very little prospect of getting gainful employment, being productive members of our economy.

In fact, there are some studies out there saying that only 10 to 15 percent of them would normally be likely to get a job once they are out of work for 6 months or more because of the resume gap, because of the skills gap. So we have in this legislation—that I will talk about later in more detail—some reforms that add some skills training for the long-term unemployed. The notion here is that there are jobs available out there, and there are a lot of people, as we talked about, who are out of work—or the long-term unemployed, in this case—but they do not have the skills to match the jobs that are out there. So the notion is to bring the skills and the jobs together to deal with the skills gap.

Most on my side of the aisle—all but, I think, six of us—were against this unemployment extension because they argued that, instead, we need progrowth policies to get this economy moving. I totally agree with them about the progrowth policies. The ultimate solution here is not another extension of unemployment insurance; it is to reform the program rather than just have another check, to add the skills training, which we will talk about in a second. We need to do more there, but we also have to do what Jack Kennedy used to talk about. President Kennedy said, famously: A rising tide lifts all boats.

We need a rising tide. We need to create more economic growth and opportunity, and there is a plan to do this. It is called the Jobs for America Plan. The Senate Republicans have all signed off on it. It has seven elements, all of which make a lot of sense.

One is to ensure, on health care, we actually reduce the cost, increase choice. The economy is hurting now because the costs are going up, not down, and sometimes dramatically.

Another is an all-of-the-above energy strategy, to use the energy here in the ground; having an all-of-the-above energy strategy to get America's economy going, moving our economy forward. We can do a lot more there.

Another is living within our means. The reason this unemployment insurance extension was paid for is because we Republicans insisted on it. Why? Because the debt and deficit are like a wet blanket over the economy. We do have to keep ourselves from going further into debt with our \$17 trillion debt.

Another is having Tax Code reforms that are necessary to spur economic growth. Both on the individual side and the business side our Tax Code is antiquated and inefficient. It will help to

give the economy a shot in the arm if we can reform the Tax Code.

Another deals with regulations, unshackling job creators, helping to ensure that regulations are sensible, that they are not making it more difficult for small businesses to create jobs and opportunity. This is something we should be doing on a bipartisan basis.

Another is increasing exports. That means jobs. This President, this administration, has not been able to move forward with any export agreements because the President has not been able to get trade promotion authority. In fact, some on the other side of the aisle have said he will not get it. That would be tragic for America's workers, for America's farmers, for the people who provide services, who want to push for more exports because they create good-paying jobs and good benefits.

Then, finally, and significantly, part of this Republican plan for jobs is to create a competitive workforce to close the skills gap. That is what we are talking about here with the unemployment insurance issue. We need to ensure that our workforce is meeting the needs of the 21st century—meaning a lot of technology jobs, even in manufacturing, advanced manufacturing, bioscience jobs, information technology jobs. Those jobs are out there, as I said earlier. But, unfortunately, the Federal Government has not done a good job in providing the skills, giving people the tools to access those jobs.

So we have made some steps in this legislation. The legislation we passed tonight ensures that job training reforms are part of long-term unemployment insurance. The reforms require officials to connect with the unemployed early in the process and provide important information they are now not getting about the skills and credentials that businesses in their area, in their region, are looking for.

We have also included provisions to strengthen the skills assessment process to ensure that the long-term unemployed have a better idea of the specific skills necessary to become more competitive in the job market. That assessment is really important. A lot of these folks are starting to give up hope. The assessment is important for them to understand where they are and where they can be.

These measures are intended to give the unemployed the opportunity to attain critical skills and credentials that are regionally relevant and nationally portable so they can access not only available jobs in their area but so that they can find other jobs around the country. There are some States, as you know, where you have unemployment as low as 3 percent, and other States where unemployment is as high as 9 percent. So people do need to know what the opportunities are, should they be able and willing to move.

So that is part of this unemployment extension we did tonight, and that is something that was put in place be-

cause of negotiations between Republicans and Democrats alike to ensure that, yes, it was paid for, and, yes, it was not long term—it was short term—and, third, that we did put some skills training in place. I want to thank Senator JACK REED, Senator DEAN HELLER, and others who worked with us to ensure that was part of this package.

But, folks, that is just the beginning. We have to do a lot more in terms of ensuring that our workforce programs in the Federal Government are meeting the needs of the 21st century.

So part of the Republican jobs plan is to say: Let's take the next step. By the way, there is a commitment from both sides of the aisle, from the people who worked this out, to work during this short-term extension to try to increase the opportunities to provide people the tools they need.

We have big problems, as I said. We have a lot of people who are long-term unemployed. It is at historic levels. We have historic levels of people who are disconnected from work altogether, and yet we have jobs that are out there and available.

They say there are 3.9 million jobs around the country currently available and unfilled—3.9 million jobs. That means about 25 percent of those who are out of the workforce could have an opportunity for a job if they had the skills and had the ability to meet the requirements for those jobs.

In Ohio, we have over 100,000 jobs available. You can go on the Web site and see them. These are not just part-time or minimum-wage positions. According to a recent study, Ohio is third—behind only California and Texas—in skilled factory job openings, full-time jobs with benefits that often turn into long-term careers.

The problem of chronic unemployment is holding back our economy. By not having the people to fill those jobs, the economy is not reaching its potential. In fact, some of those jobs are going overseas to find those skilled workers. The Manufacturing Institute recently concluded that 74 percent of manufacturers are experiencing workforce shortages or skills deficiency that keeps them from expanding their operations; 74 percent of manufacturers are not expanding plants and equipment and creating more jobs, as they could, because they do not have the workforce.

So I view this unemployment insurance debate as an opportunity—an opportunity to talk about this issue, an opportunity to put in place some initial reforms, some first steps for more skills assessment, more training, to encourage people to get the credentials they need to get a job. But it is only the first step. We should do much, much more.

The Federal Government is already very involved, by the way, in work retraining—not in a very productive way but very involved. There are 47 different Federal workforce training programs spread over 7, 8 or 9 departments

and agencies, often overlapping. Often the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. It costs us, by the way, as taxpayers about \$15 billion a year. So about \$15 billion a year is going into worker retraining. Yet look at the results—again, record numbers of the long-term unemployed, record numbers of men disconnected from work. Something is not working.

The Government Accountability Office found that very little is known about the effectiveness of these 47 programs. They have said, unbelievably, that only five of these Federal programs have conducted an impact study of their efforts since 2004. So 47 programs and only 5 have conducted the kind of performance measures you would expect the government to do to be sure the taxpayers' money is being spent right and that you certainly would be doing in the private sector.

The GAO is kind of generous in its assessment because those millions of unfilled jobs and millions more struggling workers are as incriminating an indictment of our worker training programs as any impact study could ever be.

This is the story I hear all the time. Back home in Ohio, when I talk to workers, when I talk to businesses, when I talk to educators, people are frustrated. People are seeing these Federal dollars being spent but not for actual training. What is unbelievable to me is recent data shows us that the number of credentials people are getting through these Federal workforce training programs is actually going down, not up—at a time when it is clear that credentials are a key way to get a job.

It is unfair to employers who have open positions that they cannot find qualified candidates to fill them. It is unfair to taxpayers who send money to Washington believing the government is going to be a good steward of those funds, and it is not. And, of course, it is unfair to the millions of Americans who want to build a better life for themselves and for their families, but they need the tools.

A lot of jobs were lost in this last recession. Unfortunately, I believe a lot of them are not coming back. But other jobs are being created. But, again, they are jobs that require a higher level of skill. We have to be sure we are doing a better job providing people with those tools to get the skills they need. It is part of the plan that Senate Republicans are talking about.

A small step was taken tonight with the unemployment insurance extension. I do not think we necessarily explained it very well to all of our colleagues, but it was part of what happened tonight on the floor of the Senate. I am hopeful over the next few months we will take the next important step, which is actually to change the way these Federal programs work so they are more effective at dealing with this crisis.

I have a specific proposal that I like. It is called the CAREER Act. The CA-

REER Act—you can look at it on line. Go to [portman.senate.gov](http://portman.senate.gov). My cosponsor is MICHAEL BENNET, who spoke here earlier tonight. He is a Democrat from Colorado. He is a former education superintendent. He understands we need to change these programs to make them more efficient. To incentivize success, we have performance measures in our proposal, for instance. We do need to streamline and consolidate these programs. We also need to be sure we are rewarding job training providers that produce measurable results in actual job placement. It seems it is a pretty simple concept, but it is not happening now, as the GAO told us.

The unemployment extension, in my view, buys us a couple more months. But that is time where we ought to be doing the hard work to ensure that workers have the skills they need to compete in this global economy. Again, companies look globally for workers these days—particularly larger companies. If we are not providing the skilled workforce here, our economy is not as productive as it could be, not meeting its potential, the rising tide is not lifting all boats because it is not rising. But we are also going to lose jobs overseas where there is more focus on the STEM disciplines, on engineering and math, on skills training.

We have to do a much better job at the Federal Government level, working with the States, working with the private sector. One thing we do in the CAREER Act is we connect the Federal funds with the actual private-sector jobs that out there to ensure we are getting a better result—not training people for jobs that are not even available.

So let's spend these next few months working on more strategies to help folks get jobs. Let's work on all of this because we need to have a growing economy. But with regard to the training part, let's fix a system that is not serving the unemployed. It is not serving the taxpayer. Let's deal with this crisis. Let's restore hope and opportunity to America's workers.

With that, I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

#### WAGE DISCRIMINATION

Mrs. HAGAN. Mr. President, I rise to join with my colleagues in addressing an issue that affects women and families across America every day; that is, wage discrimination. Over 50 years have passed since the Equal Pay Act was signed into law to require that men and women earn equal pay for equal work. Yet the wage gap between men and women remains persistently wide.

Tomorrow, April 8, is Equal Pay Day, the day that women's earnings finally catch up to what men earned during the previous calendar year. Women across our country have had to work more than 3 months into this year to match what their male colleagues made in 2013. It is time to end gender discrimination in pay.

That is why I am proud to again stand on the Senate floor as a cosponsor and strong supporter of the Paycheck Fairness Act. This important bill would close loopholes in our existing equal pay laws and ensure that gender-based pay discrimination cannot happen in the first place.

Some still question why we need this legislation. The numbers make it pretty clear. More than 50 years after the Equal Pay Act was passed women in America still earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men. In North Carolina it is a little better but still far from equal. Women earn 82 cents for every dollar earned by men doing the same work. To be sure, we have seen remarkable progress among women in North Carolina over the last 20 years.

Women have higher levels of education than men of the same age, and the share of employed women in my State who work in managerial and professional occupations has increased from 26 to 40 percent. While increased education has improved women's pay, it has not reduced the pay gap. Men are earning more money than women across all major sectors of the economy and at every educational level.

In fact, women in North Carolina who have some college education or an associates degree still earn less on average than men who have only received a high school diploma. In 2014, that is simply unacceptable.

I will never forget a constituent whom I met at an event back home in North Carolina. A woman had her young son with her. They both had T-shirts on that had a number on the front. The mother's shirt said "94." The son's shirt said "50." If earnings continue at the slow pace at which they are growing now, those numbers, the 94 and the 50, signify the ages those two individuals will be when pay equality is finally achieved.

Sadly, at the rate we are progressing, most of us in the Senate will not live to see that day. We cannot afford to wait another few decades for this change. This wage gap has real consequences, not just for women but for their families too. In North Carolina alone, women head over 500,000 households. Women and families' economic security is put at risk when they are paid less than men for performing the same job.

In North Carolina women who are employed full time lose approximately \$9.8 billion each year due to the wage gap. Once again, just in North Carolina, these women, employed full time, lose approximately \$9.8 billion. That is real money. That is money that could be spent on a downpayment or a mortgage for a home, put away for their child's college savings or invested in a secure retirement.

Also in North Carolina there are 108,000 households with incomes below the poverty line headed by women. Closing the wage gap would help put food on the table for them, gas in their

car, and pay basic necessities such as rent and utilities. In fact, closing the wage gap would allow a working woman in North Carolina to afford 63 more weeks of food, 6 more months of mortgage and utility payments, 10 more months of rent or 2,200 additional gallons of gas by changing that wage gap.

Addressing those disparities is critical to promoting the well-being of local economies across North Carolina and nationwide. When women thrive at work, their families and communities prosper as well. Later this week I will be voting for equal pay and to end wage discrimination. I am hopeful that partisan gamesmanship does not get in the way of a bipartisan issue that Democrats and Republicans, women and men across the country, overwhelmingly support. Congress needs to come together and pass the Paycheck Fairness Act because we need a stronger equal pay law to prohibit employers from retaliating against employees who discuss salary information with their coworkers. We need a stronger equal pay law to empower women to better negotiate their salaries and wages. We need a stronger equal pay law to provide businesses, especially small ones, assistance with equal pay practices.

On this eve of the anniversary of the Equal Pay Act, we need to close the loophole that allows pay discrimination to happen in the first place. The Paycheck Fairness Act would do just that by helping women successfully fight for the equal pay they have earned. In today's tough economic landscape, equal pay is about more than just principle, it is about ensuring an economically sound future for all of our families.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

COLOMBIA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak to two issues, both in the Western Hemisphere, that I think are incredibly important. I come to the floor to speak about labor rights in Colombia and labor rights of workers around the world.

Three years ago today the U.S. and Colombian Governments announced the creation of a Labor Action Plan that identified concrete steps to address the challenges faced by Colombian workers—threats, deadly violence, and widespread informality that opens the door to worker abuse.

Both governments said that the implementation of the plan would be a precondition to enacting the free-trade agreement between our two countries. At the time I advocated that the standards laid out in the Labor Action Plan should have been part of the formal

free-trade agreement and should have included provisions for monitoring the plan's implementation.

It is true that the Colombian Government initially made impressive steps, but unfortunately other aspects of the plan have not been fulfilled. Today the AFL-CIO and Colombia's National Union School have released reports evaluating the Labor Action Plan and identifying key areas where implementation has fallen short. I come to the floor to share these key findings.

In February I traveled to Colombia and met with Colombian union leaders and representatives of the National Labor School. I had a chance to meet with President Santos and Minister of Labor Rafael Pardo. We had the opportunity to review the important steps the Colombian Government has taken and what still needs to be done.

Shortly after the Labor Action Plan was established in April of 2011, nearly overnight Colombia established an independent Ministry of Labor. To date, the Ministry has hired more than 480 new labor inspectors and created a formal complaint mechanism for workers and unionists.

The Colombian Government reformed its penal code to strengthen sanctions against employers violating rights to free association. The Ministry of Labor has opened nearly 400 investigations of violations and issued nearly 70 sanctions. The government has directed its protection units to concentrate efforts on labor activists who are under threat. As a result of these steps, Colombia has made progress. According to the Colombian Government's own statistics, more than 530,000 jobs have been formalized in accordance with government standards.

While it is important to acknowledge the progress that has been made, the reports released today by the AFL-CIO and Colombia's National Union School remind us that much more needs to be done. Aspects of the Labor Action Plan remain unfinished and risks to Colombian workers continue, specifically in the palm oil industry, sugar sector, oil industry, and ports sector.

Both reports point out, while some trade unionists have seen better protection from the government, others continue to face threats and violence. In 2013, 26 trade unionists were murdered. Equally troubling was the fact that in the cases of murdered trade unionists, 86.8 percent go unresolved in terms of the cases. The two reports recognize that in response to the Labor Action Plan, the Colombian Government took steps to address irregular contracting practices, specifically focusing on associated work cooperatives or CTAs as they are known.

But given the loopholes in new labor regulations that have come to light, the government has been unable to stem the rise of alternate hiring, such as simplified joint stock companies that keep workers from being directly hired and being entitled to benefits and collective bargaining rights. So there has been progress but clearly more needs to be done.

The report rightfully applauds the creation of the Ministry of Labor but also notes that the hiring of labor inspectors did not comply with international labor organization standards, severely affecting these inspectors' autonomy and technical capacity. As further evidence of the challenges of informal labor arrangements, a majority of labor inspectors are provisional hires.

When it comes to finding those guilty of violations, the Colombian Government has levied millions of dollars in fines against companies violating labor standards, but both the AFL-CIO and the National Labor School point out that not a single dollar of those millions of fines has been collected—not one.

Fines hardly constitute a deterrent if companies know they will never have to pay the bill. As the U.S. and Colombian Governments along with organized labor in the United States and Colombia look forward, it is important that everyone come to the table, identify targeted goals, and establish benchmarks that will bring the kind of change we are all looking for, lasting change that protects workers and worker rights.

Given that the United States and Colombia renewed the Labor Action Plan through the end of 2014, now is the time to renew political commitment. Now is the time for collective action. Having met with Minister Pardo and knowing our colleagues in the Department of Labor, I know the political will is there. Now is the time for swift action.

Lessons from Colombia should be lessons for all of us, as the United States continues to engage in trade negotiations around the world. Our trade agreements must include the highest labor standards, concrete benchmarks for guaranteeing compliance with these standards, and a clear plan to monitor implementation. Anything less will leave the most vulnerable around the world at risk.

We are moving in the right direction when it comes to protecting workers and workers' rights in Colombia and around the world. Let's keep moving forward and aspire to the highest labor standards in every nation.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CUBA

Mr. MENENDEZ. As the attention of the world has been focused on the pre-1991 Soviet behavior of President Putin in Crimea, I come to the floor to remind the American public and Members of this body that there is also a full-fledged humanitarian rights crisis ongoing in our own hemisphere, just 90 miles away from our shores in Cuba.

As Ukrainians courageously fight to protect the democracy they won when the Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago this summer, the Cuban people continue to suffer from the oppression of a Soviet-style dictatorship that denies them the most basic rights. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, millions of people—from Kiev to Budapest to Africa to Asia—were given their first chances in decades to build their own governments, a first chance to organize democratic elections, the chance to begin to determine their own futures.

Since the end of the Cold War, peace, prosperity and progress has largely been the order of the day for hundreds of millions of people but not for the people of Cuba. Not one of those core principles of democracy can be found on the island. Fidel and Raul Castro have been the only names on any ballot in over 50 years. Not one free election has been held, not one Cuban has been allowed to own their own company, not one legitimate trade union has been allowed to be organized, and not one peaceful protest has occurred without being brutally squashed by the regime.

No, this is the reality of Cuba today. It was the reality when the Berlin Wall fell, and it has been Cuba's reality for almost 60 years since Fidel Castro began taking control of every aspect of Cuban life. This reality in Cuba, a decades-long brutal oppression of simple human democratic rights, with total disdain for the aspirations of a people by the Castro regime, its military and communist lackey thugs who penetrate and control people's lives at all levels, should not be overlooked, should not be romanticized and it can never be explained away.

But, unlike Ukraine, where we have watched in horror as people have been ruthlessly beaten and killed for simply aspiring to democratic and transparent government, the Castro regime does not allow images of its oppression to be broadcast around the globe, let alone at home. Just because we do not see those images streaming across television sets and in the newspapers does not mean the world should not be watching. It does not mean we have turned the other way, and it does not mean we have overlooked the brutal and oftentimes lethal oppression of the Castro regime.

The number of people the regime has murdered or abducted is in the tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands of children have been separated from their parents, maybe hundreds of thousands of families have been torn apart. We don't even know how many have died in the Florida straits in search of freedom.

Millions of men, women, and young people have been forced into fields to cut sugarcane and perform other hard labor against their will. The average human worker lives on an income of less than \$1 a day. The Castro regime has been most adept—not at spreading education and prosperity—I listened to some of my colleagues recently on the

floor and, oh my God, what a paradise, a paradise that people are willing to take to makeshift rafts to flee from and die on the high seas, a paradise that has long lines at the U.S. interests section waiting to be able to come to the United States, such a paradise that there are well over 1 million Cuban Americans in the United States and others in Spain and throughout the world.

It is not a paradise that I think people flee from. But they are great—not at spreading education and prosperity, but at instilling a penetrating fear and terror in the style of a Stalinist police state. It has been going on since 1959. Unfortunately, these are all of the realities. It is not a thing of the past.

Let us not overlook the fact that arbitrary and politically motivated arrests in Cuba reportedly topped 1,000 for a third straight month this February, according to the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, a group inside of Cuba, formed and founded by Elizardo Sanchez Santa-Cruz—whose mission is to bring change and freedom—to report to the world. The commission reported that:

... arrests in the past three months have nearly doubled from the monthly averages of the previous 2 years.

We must remind ourselves every day of the continued oppression and human suffering that is happening, not halfway around the world but 90 miles from our own shores. The ongoing oppressive behavior of the Cuban regime we saw for the last half of the 20th century still haunts our hemisphere today.

While Putin has annexed Crimea, while one wonders what is next, while Assad continues to kill his own people in Syria, while the world is watching the Taliban in Afghanistan, and violence continues in the Central African Republic taking countless lives, the oppression of the Castro regime keeps rolling along unabated.

If there is a single symbol of that oppression, of the longing for freedom in Cuba, it is the Ladies in White, Damas de Blanco, and their leader Berta Soler.

This is a picture of Berta. The courage she has displayed, along with all the other women, to promote democracy and political freedom in Cuba has served as an extraordinary example for all of us and everyone around the world who longs to be free. Every Sunday they protest the jailing of their relatives by attending mass and quietly marching through the streets of Havana, praying for nothing more than the freedom of their relatives and respect for the human rights of all Cubans.

But, as we see in this picture, often arrested, roughed-up—let's go to the previous picture. These are some of the of the Ladies in White. All they do is dress up in white, they march with a gladiola—quietly—toward church. The response of the state regime is to detain them, beat them, jail them, and hold them for days, maybe weeks. They are released, then jailed again.

The Ladies in White are the symbol of freedom, and women such as Laura Pollan represent the story of thousands. She was a schoolteacher living with her husband Hector, the leader of the outlawed Cuban Liberal Party. They were living a normal life in a small house on Neptune Street in Havana.

Early one morning there was a pounding on the front door. The police came in, searched everything. There was a sham trial held in Cuba. Hector was imprisoned, sentenced to 20 years in jail, and accused of acting against national security. His crime was dreaming of a free Cuba and putting that dream in writing.

Since I last came to the floor to speak about Cuba, I met Rosa Maria Paya, the daughter of the long-time political activist Oswaldo Paya. He was a Catholic and head of the Christian Liberation Movement who collected 25,000 signatures under a project called the Varela Project, a peaceful effort to petition the regime under the existing Cuban Constitution for freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. For his peaceful efforts he was awarded the Sakharov prize by the European Parliament.

His peaceful efforts were seen as a danger to the regime, a threat for which he was detained and arrested many times. Many times he suffered at the hands of the regime, and last year he died in Cuba, killed as Cuban state security rammed his car off the road.

What we know is that the car, driven by a Spanish politician from Spain, Angel Carronero, a citizen of Spain, and Jens Aron Modig, a party activist in Sweden, was involved in the fatal automobile accident that killed Paya and his Cuban colleague Harold Cepero. The circumstances surrounding Paya's death lead any reasonable person to conclude what really happened on that road in eastern Cuba that took the life of Oswaldo was an assassination. His daughter Rosa Maria immediately challenged the regime's version of events, stating that the family had received information from the survivors that their car was repeatedly rammed by another vehicle. She said:

So we think it's not an accident. They wanted to do harm and then ended up killing my father.

Ms. Paya was in Washington not long ago accepting a posthumous award from the National Endowment for Democracy on behalf of another Cuban activist who died alongside her father. At the time the U.N. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power had come before the Foreign Relations Committee during the nominations process and assured me she would reach out to Ms. Paya when confirmed. Since then, she has not only met with Rosa Maria but also to directly challenge Cuba's Foreign Minister to permit an independent international investigation into Mr. Paya's death.

I want to commend Ambassador Power for standing with those still suffering in Cuba and with the family of

Oswaldo Paya who died for advocating peaceful, democratic change and Christian values.

But Cuba's reach doesn't end with the detention or the death of dissidents such as Paya. It doesn't end at the water's edge. It goes much farther.

Cuba is the head of a new and dire crisis in our hemisphere that we cannot ignore, and now we see the same oppression of peaceful activists in Cuba on the streets of Caracas.

Venezuela's political crisis is growing: 40 dead, hundreds injured, the nation's economy deteriorating, inflation at record levels, and a scarcity of basic food and goods. It sounds like Cuba to me.

But behind Venezuela's economic crisis we can see Cuba's failed policies, expropriation, and nationalization of various sectors of the economy, fixed prices in the consumer economy, criminalization of business leaders and their companies, currency manipulation, and rationing of basic foodstuffs. Behind Venezuela's political crisis we can clearly see familiar Cuban tactics—the demonization of the dissent, intolerance, and oppression of any form of opposition, politicizing of the military and judiciary, the silencing of independent television and radio stations, the shutting down of newspapers, and the arrests of political opponents doing nothing more than exercising basic rights to freedom of assembly.

We see Cuba's destabilizing presence is deeply intertwined in Venezuela's crisis, not simply because of the actions but because of these facts. It started with the discovery of 29 Cuban spies on Margarita Island in Venezuela.

It grew steadily and insidiously throughout the Chavez years with the Cuban presence and key advisers from Havana in almost every institution of national government in Venezuela, from the military, to intelligence agencies, to the health sector, to industrial policy. And the result? Democracy subverted and innocent people dying from bullets fired by the government and its thugs, just like in Cuba.

Yet knowing the instability the Cuban regime continues to spread, amazing, amazing European nations, nations in Latin America, then the Caribbean, some of my colleagues in this Chamber are seeking new opportunities to engage the Cuban regime by easing sanctions at a critical moment and fundamentally redefining our relationship with Cuba.

I couldn't disagree more. We can never turn our back on what has happened and continues to happen inside of Cuba. We can never have a wink and a nod and say, well, it has been almost 50 years, that is long enough. Things are changing for the better in Cuba so we should ease sanctions when, in fact, that is not the case at all.

As I listen to these human rights activists who finally have been able to come from Cuba and visit with us, to a person, they have said to me when I have asked them, is there change?

They laugh and say: Senator, no, of course, there is no change. Is there a change in the economic system? No, there is no change. Is there change in your ability to organize? No, there is no change.

They call for some of the most significant measures that I could imagine—based upon them being in the belly of the beast, not some romanticism from outside. So, no, we should not ease sanctions. That is not what they are calling for. We should not let up and we should not reward the Castro regime for its human rights violations, for the suffering it continues to cause the people of Cuba. We should not reward the regime of the long dark years that have been brought to the island. And we should not ease tourism restrictions simply because the clock is ticking. Those who wish to pursue that type of engagement with Cuba must not forget Cuba's history. It is also its present state of torture and oppression, its systemic curtailment of freedom.

Recent events tell us a different story than those who have the sense of romanticism about the Castro regime. It is the story of two terrorist states: Cuba and North Korea.

There is unshakable, undeniable, incontrovertible proof that the Cuban Government, colluding with North Korea, violated United Nations security sanctions regimes.

In July of last year, a North Korean ship was docked in Cuba's new Mariel Port facility. The North Korean ship—suspicious even to the most untrained observer—left the dock, and it wasn't long afterward it was seized by the Panamanian Government when it attempted to enter the Panama Canal. Panamanian authorities boarded the ship and what did they find? There in the cargo bays, under some 200,000 bags of sugar, authorities discovered 240 tons of weapons—bound for where? For where? North Korea, another terrorist state.

Apparently this evidence, to some of my colleagues, is not of concern, but that is not the end of the story. When authorities inventoried the 240 tons of weapons hidden beneath the 200,000 bags of sugar they found on the North Korean ship, they found 2 MiG aircraft, several SA-2, SA-3 surface-to-air missile systems, missile and radar components, and a cache of small arms and rocket-propelled grenades.

This is a depiction from the U.N. sources of what was found. I ask my colleagues, is this the behavior of a tired and old, benign regime, one that deserves our sympathy? Is there a misunderstanding that does not check enough terrorist boxes? Is this something we should justifiably ignore, falling under the category of Castro will be Castro or is this, at its core, the active and dangerous play of a terrorist state that we would not tolerate from any other Nation?

It seems to me that supplying a rogue nation such as North Korea with a secret cache of weapons demands

something more than the loosening of travel restrictions and the opening of trade. It demands exactly the opposite. We should treat Cuba and the Castro regime as we would treat any other state sponsor of terrorism, because it is. Yet here I am once again forced to come to the floor of the Senate to point to pictures of a North Korean ship in a Cuban port smuggling MiG aircraft and surface-to-air missiles and ask: Why should we turn a blind eye to what we clearly would not accept from Iran, Syria or Sudan? And why in God's name would we want to take this opportunity to reward the regime with cashflow so they can continue to oppress their people and subvert neighboring countries? Why should we accept the lame excuses given by the Cuban regime that somehow—despite the fact that many of the arms were still in their original packaging, despite the fact that others had been recently calibrated, despite the fact there was a fresh coat of paint over the insignia of the Cuban Air Force on the side of the MiGs to hide their origin, despite the fact that the entire shipment was covered with 200,000 bags of sugar to deceive—this was a purely innocent business transaction, an innocent business transaction, and that the arms were being sent to North Korea for maintenance and would have been returned to the island?

Does anyone actually believe such a ludicrous claim? Can we and should we simply ignore it and move on, even though U.N. weapons inspectors found that the shipment was a clear violation—a clear violation—of U.N. sanctions, that Cuba was the first country in the Western Hemisphere to violate international sanctions related to North Korea and that the shipment constituted the largest amount of arms shipped to or from North Korea since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1874 in 2009 and resolution 2094 in 2013? I repeat, the largest amount of arms shipped to or from North Korea. If that is not food for thought when it comes to easing restrictions against a terrorist state to our south, I don't know what is.

In recent years some would have us believe—and I have listened to some of my colleagues—that reforms led by Raul Castro placed Cuba on a path to economic progress, but if we look at the new law on foreign investment Cuba just passed last week, we get a clearer picture of the truth behind Cuba's economic model.

Let's be clear about this economic model. Under Cuba's new foreign investment law, investment projects will be allowed to be fully funded by foreign capital, business taxes on profits would be cut by 50 percent, foreign companies would be exempt from paying taxes for the first 8 years of operations in Cuba, and many foreigners living in Cuba would be let off the hook from paying income taxes at all. Think about it. The question is, Who wins? Who wins? Not the people of Cuba.

The most glaring omission in this law is any benefit at all to the Cuban people. Instead of receiving a new investment opportunity or benefiting from tax cuts—although Cubans don't make enough to benefit from any tax cuts—they will continue to live under restrictive laws and regulations, unable to start their own business, unable to follow a dream or build a better life. They are left to live under the most restrictive laws preventing them from ever realizing their dreams for themselves and their families.

In fact, the Cuban regime has permitted people to work for themselves but only in 200 types of jobs the government officially sanctions. They have a list of authorized jobs that include sewing buttons, filling cigarette lighters, street performing—not exactly lucrative startups that can build an economy. These authorized jobs bear more resemblance to a feudal economy than anything we would recognize as economic opportunity.

At the same time the government has moved aggressively to close inhome movie theaters, secondhand clothing markets, and fledgling private restaurants that it considers too large or too successful. Why? Because anything that allows Cubans to meet legally, lawfully, and as a group is seen as a threat to the regime. Simply allowing people to come together for what we take for granted in our country and most countries in the world is seen as a threat to the regime because God knows what those Cubans would do if they started talking to each other in a place where they had no fear.

While the Cuban Government offers new incentives to foreign investors and continues to clamp down on self-employed workers, the real economic change in Cuba is the growing role of the Cuban Armed Forces in the country's economy. Under the watchful eye of Raul Castro's son-in-law, a general in the Cuban Armed Forces, the military holding company, GAESA, has amassed control of more than 40 percent of Cuba's economy. Through companies such as GAESA, the government and the Armed Forces—those most loyal to the Castros—are laying a foundation for its future control of Cuba and the Cuban economy.

On the economic front, I think it is important to make the point that when people argue for travel and trade with Cuba, they are arguing to do so with who—with Castro's monopolies. Let us be clear: Regular Cubans are prohibited from engaging in foreign trade and commerce. So do we want to trade with Castro's state-owned monopolies—monopolies that are largely controlled by the Armed Forces of Cuba? Do we? Do we truly want to reward a regime that sends the biggest amount of weapons to North Korea in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions?

The U.S. Government's own report of agricultural sales to Cuba states how every single transaction with Cuba, by hundreds of American agricultural

companies, has only one counterpart—Castro's food monopoly through a state-owned company named Alimport. That hasn't helped the people one bit. So do we truly want to unleash billions to Castro's monopolies?

Also, every single foreign people-to-people traveler who currently stays at a hotel or resort owned by whom? By the Cuban military. No exceptions. No exceptions. So how does that promote independence of the Cuban people from the regime as President Obama's policy statement upon release of this regulation states? At the very least they should be compelled to stay at what we call a casa particular, which means a private home that used to be able to take in a visitor, but staying at the military facilities owned by the military or copartnering by the military with some foreign private sector contravenes the President's own policy statement.

This hardly constitutes an economic opening for the people of Cuba. By the way, if you are an individual Cuban, you can't go to a foreign company. You can't even go to the hotels in your own country unless you are invited in by a foreigner. You work there if the state sends you there. Those of us who get to work here, we actually would only be here because the state would send us here, not because through our abilities and competency we would have earned the opportunity to be employed here or anywhere else in this country or in the private sector. That is not possible for the average Cuban. So in their own country they cannot go to a hotel unless they are invited in by a foreigner. Imagine visiting throughout our country and not being able to go into a hotel unless somebody from some other country tells you you can go into it.

However, if there is one positive trend to be found in Cuba today it is that after decades of fear and self-imposed silence there is a growing and growing number of Cuban citizens beginning to speak out critically, increasingly in public.

In June of 2012, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez—known as Antunez—testified at my invitation before the Foreign Relations Committee via Skype from the U.S. intrasection, as you can see in this photograph. After he testified he was beaten and detained for his testimony on human rights abuses on the island, but that didn't stop him. It didn't stop the bloggers from the Cuban diaspora from getting the word out.

After decades of being manipulated by the Castros, the people of Cuba no longer identify with the government. While the government still holds power through its security operations, its legitimacy is plummeting in the opinions of its people. So after 55 years of dictatorship, it is our responsibility in the international community to encourage this independence and help the people of Cuba reclaim their rights—rights to freedom of expression, rights to organize unions, rights to freedom of

assembly, rights to freedom of the press, rights to freedom of religion—universal human rights, the rights and freedoms that will be the building blocks of a new and Democratic Cuba of the future.

But let us not be misled. Although Berto Soler—the ladies in white that I showed earlier—is now allowed by the regime to visit the United States and Europe after an enormous amount of international pressure, when she returns to Cuba there is no change in the status of the ladies in white. The pictures I showed of the beatings and the arrests is still their reality. Every move she and her courageous partners make is monitored by the Castro regime. They are physically harassed intimidated and arrested. Why? For simply wanting what any mother in any country on the face of the Earth wants—to learn the fate of her husband, her son or daughter who has been harassed, beaten and jailed by an aging, illegitimate regime.

According to the Cuban Commissioner for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, there were more than 15,000 cases of arbitrarily, politically motivated detentions since the start of 2012. In January of this year, when 30 heads of State from Latin America and the Caribbean came together, as well as the Secretary General of the United Nations and the Secretary General of the OAS, at a summit in Havana, there were more than 1,050 detentions over the course of 1 month.

In one prominent case, a leading Afro-Cuban political activist, intellectual, and known leftist Manuel Cuesta Morua was arrested after attempting—to do what? To organize a parallel civil society summit during the visit by the heads of state.

This simple practice—a practice not uncommon and, in fact ubiquitous throughout Latin America and the world—is not tolerated by the Castro regime.

Instead, Mr. Cuesta Morua faced 5 days of intensive interrogation and has been charged with “disseminating false news against international peace,” joining prominent activists Jorge Luis Garcia Perez Antunez and Guillermo Farinas—who was awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament—simply because they knew there were heads of state throughout Latin America and of major international organizations wanting to hold a parallel meeting, peacefully doing so to promote their vision of what human rights and democracy should be inside of their country. Their result was to ultimately be jailed and face the charges which can leave them for many years in jail.

Unfortunately, except for one or two, most of the leaders of the hemisphere who went to that meeting didn't even try to meet with the human rights activists, political dissidents, or independent journalists because they did not want to insult the Castro regime.

Here is Farinas shown being taken away by the police. These activists

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