

Independence in 1948. This day of celebration is always immediately preceded by Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day.

This timing is no accident. The people of Israel know that their freedom comes at a high price. Today I am humbled to join them in remembering more than 23,000 soldiers and victims of terrorist attacks who have paid this price, including 68 soldiers and police officers and 32 civilians over the past year alone.

The strong relationship between the United States and Israel dates back more than six decades. On May 14, 1948, just 11 minutes after the provisional government of Israel, led by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, proclaimed a new state, President Harry S. Truman announced: "This government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel."

This year, Israelis will celebrate their independence as they always have, gathering for public shows, performing Israeli folk dances, singing Israeli songs, and spending the day with families at picnics or on hikes. The holiday will conclude with the awarding of the Israeli Prize to men and women who have made unique contributions to culture, science, the arts, and humanities.

For American Jews, the celebration of Israel's independence has always been a way to express solidarity with the State of Israel. In many communities, it is a special occasion for Jewish organizations and synagogues of different denominations to come together for a single, united celebration of Israel's creation and existence, both of which have defied great odds.

Just one day after President Truman recognized the new Jewish state's existence, five neighboring Arab countries amassed their armies and invaded, determined to remove the dream of Israel from the pages of history. But after months of fighting, Israel emerged stronger than it was before, with more territory under its control.

Since then, the people of Israel have lived under the threat of violence for nearly seven decades. They survived the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and insurgencies that targeted soldiers and civilians alike. Through it all, the friendship between the United States and Israel has remained strong. We stood together to oppose Soviet aggression during the cold war, and we continue to stand together today, united in the fight against terrorism and global extremism.

This friendship is rooted in much more than strategic interests. The United States and Israel have always shared common values. As the most stable and successful democracy in the

Middle East, Israel is committed to the values of equality and freedom, including a free press, freedom of religion, and the right to self-determination through democratic elections.

Today, at a pivotal moment in the history of the world, it is more important than ever for the United States to stand with the people of Israel. I have been proud to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on legislation to strengthen the ties between our two countries. The United States-Israel Cybersecurity Cooperation Act, which I introduced earlier this year, will establish a joint Cybersecurity Center of Excellence where the leaders from our two countries can work together on cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure. In the House Foreign Affairs Committee, we have worked to advance legislation that condemns efforts to inflame anti-Semitic sentiments by the Palestinian Authority. These are critical issues we must continue to work on in the pursuit of our common objectives and our shared values.

I congratulate the State of Israel on the anniversary of its independence, and I look forward to continuing to work to strengthen the relationship between our two countries even further.

THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA: A DEMOCRACY IN A ROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, as the world leader in freedom and democracy, it is in our national interest to see the same freedoms we enjoy spread to people throughout the world.

The Republic of Georgia is a small and young democracy in an area that is more known for its authoritarian rule than freedom. Georgia formally declared its independence in 1918, but 4 years later, the Soviet bear invaded and declared Georgia a Soviet Socialist Republic. But the Georgian people are resilient, and with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia again declared its independence from Russia.

Over the past 25 years, Georgia has become the freest country in its region. It sets up a stark contrast to the dictatorship of Putin in the north. However, the Russians never gave up on their ambitions to control Georgia.

I was in Georgia in 2008 when Russian troops invaded and took one-third of Georgia. I saw the Russian tanks up on the hill. And, Mr. Speaker, the Russians still illegally occupy one-third of the nation of Georgia.

The Russians want to impose tyranny upon Georgia precisely because of Georgia's quest for democracy and liberty. Georgia has made good governance a cornerstone of its reforms, grown the economy, and made significant progress toward creating a democratic society.

The world witnessed Georgia's first peaceful democratic transition of

power from one party to another in 2013, and it has improved media freedom for 4 consecutive years, according to Reporters Without Borders. In fact, Freedom House ranks Georgia number one in the region for its freedom of the press.

Georgia has also made significant strides when it comes to corruption. It even ranks higher than some European Union countries and other U.S. allies according to Transparency International.

When it comes to business and free markets, Georgia makes it to the top of the pack. The World Bank ranked Georgia among the top 25 countries easiest to do business in.

The fact is that the Georgian people and their government share our Western values. A recent poll found that more than three-quarters of the Georgian people support their government's goal to join the European Union. Nearly 70 percent of Georgians also support Georgia's joining NATO. The United States should be vocal and support Georgia's quest to be in NATO.

For the past 25 years of independence, Georgia has been a valuable ally of the United States. Due to Georgia's free market system, low corruption, and simplified tax system, many American companies have invested in Georgia, especially in the energy sector.

The U.S. should negotiate a free trade agreement with Georgia to add jobs to both of our economies and send a message that Georgia is an important friend of the United States.

Georgia is also a vital partner in the battle against international terrorism. It has provided more troops to the effort in Afghanistan than any other non-NATO member. Thirty-three Georgian troops have fought and died on the battlefield with American troops, and 900 Georgian troops still remain in Afghanistan.

The Georgians are now preparing to hold elections in October. To ensure that these parliamentary elections are free and fair, the Georgians have invited international, independent election observers to monitor those elections in October.

The United States and our NATO allies must remain firm in our support for Georgia. Georgia is a sovereign country whose boundaries should be respected—even by Putin. Russia knows Georgia is a symbol of democracy in the region. That is why Putin continues to rattle his sabres in the entire neighborhood. Dictator Putin knows if Georgia is a successful democracy, then Georgia's neighbors are going to want to follow that lead and become more democratic. It is in our national interest to support Georgia and their democratic aspirations in their journey for liberty.

Fifty years ago, our President John F. Kennedy talked about liberty. He stated what the American policy is regarding liberty. I hope and believe it is still our policy today. Here is what he said, Mr. Speaker: "Let every nation

know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

That applies to Georgia, Mr. Speaker. And that is just the way it is.

EPIDEMIC OF OVERDOSE DEATHS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, next to me is a map of the United States which shows the sickening increase in overdose deaths in this country due to heroin and opioid use over the last decade or so.

The first map is a map from the Centers for Disease Control statistics in 2004, when roughly 7,000 Americans lost their lives to opioid overdose. Again, the red color shows the intensity of regions where deaths occurred in excess of 20 per 100,000. The blue is 10 per 100,000 or less.

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In 2014, over 28,000 Americans lost their lives to heroin and opioid overdose deaths. As you can see, the red portions of the country are increasing at an alarming rate. We have not gotten the 2015 statistics yet from the Centers for Disease Control, but by all indication from State numbers that are coming out, this map is actually going to get worse for the 2015 numbers.

Mr. Speaker, we have an epidemic in this country which far surpasses any challenge that is presented by any natural disaster. If we had an attack on the homeland that took the number of lives that these maps represent, this Congress would be on fire in terms of trying to move resources and help to communities all across the country.

Again, it is indiscriminate. It hits rural America, it hits suburban America, it hits urban America, and it hits age groups and ethnic groups across the board.

Today we are going to be taking up some legislation, H.R. 4641 and H.R. 5046. The first bill has 2 cosponsors; the second has 10 cosponsors. The first provides for establishment of an interagency task force to talk about pain medication, and the second is to authorize, not appropriate, different programs for heroin and opioid reduction. They are benign bills. It would be impossible for anyone to object to them.

But to be very clear, there is not a penny in either of these measures to help law enforcement. The police and fire who are responding to these crises day in and day out back home in eastern Connecticut are burning out because of the frequency of these calls. There is not a penny in these measures for treatment beds, for detox, or for long-term care treatment. In the State of Connecticut, it takes 4 to 6 months to get treatment.

These are addicts who are at points in their lives where to talk about a 4-

to 6-month time span is to talk about an eternity. If you talk to the families who are dealing with their loved ones who are ensnared in these addictions, 4 to 6 months is really basically being told that there is no treatment available.

There is not a penny for prevention and education. If we go upstream, that is how we solve this problem in terms of better practices for opioid and heroin prescription.

It is not a coincidence that the White House last night issued a statement on this legislation, which basically points out the fact that they “do little to help the thousands of Americans struggling with addiction.”

The statement goes on to say that these alarming trends which are represented on this map “will not change by simply authorizing new grant programs, studies and reports. Congressional action is needed to fund the tools communities need to confront this epidemic and accelerate important policies like training health care providers on appropriate opioid prescribing, an essential component of this effort.”

The President submitted a budget with \$1 billion of new funding paid for offset for 2017 that would put money into those three buckets: prevention and education, law enforcement, and treatment, again, no action by the majority in terms of dealing with actual funding to help people out there desperate for help.

There is a bill also to provide emergency supplemental funding of \$600 million for this year to get that help out now. We presented it to the Rules Committee last night, and it was rejected.

If we had a hurricane or a tornado or a forest fire that was ravaging parts of this country or an attack on the homeland, this place would not hesitate about getting resources out there to help the folks that would respond to that type of a crisis; yet, somehow we have turned a blind eye to the thousands of Americans who are suffering from addiction and to the thousands of law enforcement fire and police who are responding to these calls literally as we are sitting here today.

There are hundreds of people per day who are dying because of this problem, and we, again, are providing no resources about better opioid prescription practices and getting better education, particularly to our young people, that clearly this map shows we must do if we are going to get our arms around this conflict and this problem.

Today there will be votes. There will be a lot of self-congratulatory rhetoric about the fact that we are moving on this. But, remember, there is not a penny for law enforcement, for treatment, or for prevention and education. Until we do that, we are kidding ourselves that we are going to turn this alarming, disturbing trend around.

SOUTH DADE VETERANS AFFAIRS CLINIC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the long-overdue south Dade Veterans Affairs clinic adjacent to Homestead Air Reserve Base, part of my congressional district.

Community-based outpatient clinic facilities in Homestead and Key Largo are extremely limited in the amount of services that they provide. This project, therefore, can no longer be ignored, Mr. Speaker. Currently, these local military personnel, retired servicemembers, and veterans are not getting the proper support that they have so rightfully earned.

As the wife of a Vietnam veteran and a stepmother of two marine aviators, I am passionate about safeguarding our Nation’s military members and their families and fighting for the services they need in order for them to live healthy and fulfilling lives. Our military does not quit on us, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly will continue fighting for them.

It is estimated that there are more than 22,500 veterans, Active-Duty military, and recently deployed reservists eligible for VA medical services within a 20-mile radius of Homestead Air Reserve Base. Currently, those living in Homestead who require more than the limited services offered at Homestead Outpatient Clinic must travel about 70 miles roundtrip to the VA Medical Center in order to get the proper care that they desperately need. Veterans living in the Upper Keys have to travel even further, oftentimes more than 160 miles roundtrip.

This is completely unacceptable. It is a huge burden for our servicemen and -women and their families who have already sacrificed so much for us and our Nation. This new clinic would not only improve access to care for veterans in Homestead and the Upper Keys, but it would also enhance the quality of care throughout the region by reducing pressure on the Miami VA Medical Center.

Mr. Speaker, the south Dade VA clinic is a project that has a great deal of support throughout my district, including the Department of Defense personnel at Homestead Air Reserve Base and the Military Affairs Committee of the south Dade Chamber of Commerce.

I have also received thousands of constituent support cards, many of which I have here with me today. Here is a bunch, and here is a bunch. There are just thousands, Mr. Speaker.

Once again I would like to express my strong support for the long-overdue south Dade Veterans Affairs clinic adjacent to the Homestead Air Reserve Base. These local veterans have waited too long already, and they deserve nothing less than the successful completion of a new facility as soon as possible.