

under the control of the minority; further, that the debate time until 9 p.m. on Wednesday be divided in 1-hour alternating blocks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ORDERS FOR WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, April 5; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; finally, that following leader remarks, the Senate resume executive session to consider the nomination of Neil Gorsuch as under the previous order.

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

#### ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senators RUBIO and MERKLEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

#### EGYPT

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the issue of human rights as part of my office's ongoing effort on what we call the Expression Not Oppression Campaign, where we highlight human rights abuses around the world and tell the stories of political prisoners and other brave leaders who are being repressed, jailed, beaten, or even worse, simply for criticizing the government of a nation in which they live.

This is an important week for human rights. Two nations with concerning records regarding human rights—Egypt and China—have sent their heads of state to meet with our President. And I will have, I hope, a chance later on this week to discuss the issues we confront in China, and they are many.

Today, I want to discuss the state of human rights and our general relationship with Egypt.

Over the past 2 days, the President of Egypt, President Elsis, has been visiting our Nation's Capital. He had the opportunity to meet with the President and other officials in the administration. Earlier today, I had the opportunity to visit with him as part of a meeting with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Before entering my remarks, I want to make abundantly clear that we are

incredibly impressed and grateful and supportive of the efforts that President Elsis and Egypt are undertaking in battling radicalism and in particular ISIS. They are undertaking this effort, for example, in the Sinai, and it is quite a challenge.

I also understand that the ongoing ability to defeat radicalism in the world depends on the stability of our partners internally. That is why the human rights situation in Egypt is concerning. I believe it is fair to say it is at its worst in decades, and that is saying something. It is important.

Some may ask "Why does America care about that?" beyond, obviously, our moral calling to defend the rights of all people. It is that it is counter-productive behavior. These abuses—the conditions that exist in Egypt and in other places around the world—are actually conducive to jihadi ideology, which is the ability to recruit people who feel vulnerable, who feel oppressed. They become more vulnerable to those campaigns when they feel they are being mistreated.

The current Government of Egypt, under the leadership of President Elsis, has cracked down on civil society. On that, there can be no debate. They have jailed thousands of political prisoners, including, sadly, some Americans, and it has responded with brute force to those who oppose that government.

Again, I reiterate that a strong U.S.-Egypt relationship is important to America—to advancing our interests in the Middle East. I am here to speak on behalf of American interests and why this is so important in our relationship with Egypt and in the stability of the region, but I must do so by describing the situation on the ground.

In the national interest of our country, we cannot turn a blind eye to the ongoing repression of Egyptian citizens by their government. It weakens our moral standing in the world, and, as I have already said numerous times, it makes Egypt less secure. If Egypt is less secure, ultimately America will be less secure. Today, I said that to President Elsis.

Over the last decades, the American people have provided Egypt with more than \$77 billion in foreign aid. This includes what is currently \$1.3 billion per year in military aid. But as the human rights situation in Egypt continues to deteriorate and the government refuses to take the serious and necessary steps of reform and respecting the rule of law, then this Congress, on behalf of the American people—who are giving \$1.3 billion of their hard-earned taxpayer money—must continue to pursue the reform of our assistance to Egypt to make sure that not only is it allowing them to confront the challenges that are posed by radicalism today but that it also promotes progress in a way that does not leave Egypt unstable and ultimately vulnerable in the future.

It is in the interest of both our country and Egypt and the Egyptian people

to implement reforms and to release all of its jailed political prisoners, including all jailed Americans. Nations cannot thrive and they cannot prosper if their citizens are oppressed or are unable to express themselves freely without fear of being jailed, tortured, or killed.

Inevitably, if these conditions continue, there will be a street uprising in Egypt once again, and it could very well be led by radical elements who seek to overthrow the government and create a space for terrorism.

Human rights abuses in Egypt take on many forms. An example is the lack of press freedom. In 2016, Egypt joined other nations in rising to the top of the rankings as the world's third highest jailer of journalists. According to the Reporters Without Borders' 2016 World Press Freedom Index, Egypt currently ranks 159th out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom. The media, including journalists, bloggers, and those active on social media, are regularly harassed and arrested. There are currently 24 journalists who are jailed on trumped-up and politically motivated charges. Their "crimes" have included publishing false information and inciting terrorism. Censorship has grown as they continue to interfere in the publication and circulation of news—although, by the way, a lot of Egyptian news coverage is very anti-American. These are just a few examples of the ongoing repression of press freedom in Egypt.

There are also human rights abuses the Egyptian Government continues to commit with regard to freedom of association and of assembly. In November of 2016, the Egyptian Parliament passed a draconian law that, if signed by President Elsis, would ban non-governmental organizations from operating freely in Egypt. The law would essentially eliminate all independent human rights groups. It would make it nearly impossible for charities to function by imposing strict regulations and registration processes. Individuals who violate this law could face jail time simply for speaking out and fighting to defend human rights. Passing laws like these has a chilling effect on dissent.

Here is the good news: President Elsis has not signed it over 4 months later, and I truly hope it is because he is having second thoughts about it, because he recognizes the terrible impact it will have on his country's future, on their perception around the world, on their ability to make progress and reform, and ultimately because he also recognizes the impact it will have on free nations, like the United States, which desires to work with Egypt on many issues of common interest. I strongly encourage President Elsis to reject that anti-NGO law.

There is the issue of political prisoners. According to the Project on Middle East Democracy, since 2013 at least 60,000 political prisoners have been arrested in Egypt and 1,800 people have received death sentences in what many