employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

AMENDMENT NO. 2276

At the request of Mr. PAUL, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 2276 intended to be proposed to H.R. 22, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

AMENDMENT NO. 2281

At the request of Mr. LEE, the names of the Senator from Georgia (Mr. PERDUE) and the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 2281 intended to be proposed to H.R. 22, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

## STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. HOEVEN (for himself, Ms. STABENOW, Ms. HEITKAMP, Mr. GRASSLEY, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. THUNE, Mr. BROWN, Mr. ENZI, and Mr. ROUNDS):

S. 1844. A bill to amend the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 to provide for voluntary country of origin labeling for beef, pork, and chicken; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, today I filed, along with a bipartisan group of cosponsors, the Voluntary Country of Origin Labeling and Trade Enhancement Act of 2015. I wish to thank the cosponsors on the legislation. The lead cosponsor on the Democratic side is Senator DEBBIE STABENOW, ranking member on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Also joining us in this bipartisan group are Senator JOHN THUNE from South Dakota, another member of the agriculture committee, Senator AMY KLOBUCHAR, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, Senator HEIDI HEITKAMP, Senator MIKE ENZI, and Senator SHERROD BROWN. With the exception of Senator ENZI, all of the cosponsors are members of our agriculture committee.

What we are trying to do is come up with a solution to the country-of-origin labeling issue. This is an issue that has been in a WTO court for some time and involves the United States, Canada, and Mexico, our very good trading partners. Essentially what we are working to do is to find a solution that addresses the WTO issues as far as country-of-origin labeling in a way that makes sure that we are WTO compliant so that there are no duties or tariffs that can be levied against any of our agricultural exports or any other exports. At the same time, for those who want to use country-of-origin labeling on a voluntary basis, they are able to do so. That would preserve what is known as the ''Grade A'' label, which simply means born, raised, and slaughtered or processed in the United States. So for beef, pork, and chicken, if it is born and raised and processed in the United States, one can still use that ''Grade A'' label, but it is a voluntary program, it is not a mandatory program. We do that purposely so that we meet the WTO requirements. I have spoken with the U.S. Trade Representative's office about that issue, which I will go into in just a minute.

What we have done is we have simply taken the House legislation—sponsored by the Agriculture Committee chairman in the House, Representative MIKE CONAWAY, which passed in the House—essentially, we take the same bill, the same language as far as repealing mandatory COOL. So we repeal mandatory COOL, which puts us in compliance with what the WTO is asking for, then we simply add some language that allows for a voluntary program, so that for processors, marketers, and producers that want to participate in a voluntary program, they can. If they believe consumers want to know, then they have that opportunity to provide their product with the ''Grade A'' label on a voluntary basis. That is reasonable because that is what Canada does. Canada has a voluntary program. It is called their ''Product of Canada'' label. So all we are doing is what Canada does. We repeal the mandatory program and we put in place a voluntary program just as our good friends and neighbors do in Canada.

When I spoke with the U.S. Trade Representative about this issue, essentially what they said is whether we repeal mandatory COOL by itself or repeal mandatory COOL and have a voluntary program, essentially we are in the same position vis-a-vis meeting the WTO requirements.

So this is really an effort to build bipartisan support for a solution to the COOL issue, which has been a challenging issue. This is an issue we worked on on the farm bill. I was one of the conferees on the conference committee, and COOL and some of the other issues were some of the last—dairy, for example—issues we were able to resolve in finally getting an agreement on a farm bill.

Again, this is an effort in a practical way to bring people together on both sides of the issue to solve the problem. We make sure we are WTO compliant. Then, on a voluntary basis, there is the option for people to label as they want to. We work to create enough bipartisan support in this body so we can deal with the issue now, so we can resolve the issue now and pass this legislation and then get it to conference with the House and have a resolution before the end of this month and before the August recess so that this issue is taken care of.

I look forward to working with everybody involved on both sides of the aisle, including our esteemed chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Senator ROBERTS. I appreciate all the time we have spent working together on this issue. I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle, both on the Agriculture Committee and everyone else, to craft a solution, advance it through this body, and get it to conference with the House.

As I said, I have spoken with Chairman CONAWAY, the Agriculture Committee chairman in the House. We have a good relationship, and we had a good dialogue about the sooner we get to work together to resolve this, the better, and we look forward to that.

Again, I ask my colleagues to join with us, our bipartisan group, in a bipartisan way. Let's get this done and make sure we not only have addressed the issue with the World Trade Organization court so there are no duties but also make sure we have put forward a solution that works for the American consumer and for the American agriculture industry, that on a voluntary basis gives them the opportunity to provide country-of-origin labeling as well as solving the WTO challenge.

By Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. BROWN, Mr. TESTER, and Ms. HIRONO):

S. 1856. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for suspension and removal of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs for performance or misconduct that is a threat to public health or safety and to improve accountability of employees of the Department, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, going back to my colleagues who have appeared to talk about issues of accountability for the Department of Veterans Affairs, I want to say how grateful I am for the spirit of collaboration that prevailed yesterday in our meeting.

Very generously and responsibly, the chairman of that committee, Senator ISAKSON—my good friend and distinguished colleague from Georgia—offered and committed to continue the effort to improve the measures we approved yesterday in our committee to hold accountable the Department of Veterans Affairs and all of its employees—just as we do any other agency of government—to make sure we keep faith with our veterans and leave no veteran behind.

Our Nation needs to make sure we provide the robust resources and the prompt delivery of health care services

and other measures to our veterans with the honest and efficient management our veterans deserve.

So many of us were repulsed and outraged by the revelation just a little more than 1 year ago about delays in health care, irresponsible and reprehensible and, indeed, criminal obstruction of justice in cooking the books that prevailed at health care facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs around the country, and the ramifications were sweeping. There were indeed changes in management, beginning at the very top, with a new Secretary. There were also measures approved by this Congress in the last session, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, to make sure no veteran suffering 30 days or more in delays in health care be denied a private provider if he or she chooses one or is living more than 40 miles from any facility.

We are working on additional measures, constructive and positive measures, to make sure this Nation fulfills its promise of prompt, world-class, first-class health care to every veteran who needs it, regardless of what that need is, the specialty or the illness, and to make sure we also cure the other deficiencies, such as the delays in disability claims, homelessness, joblessness, the need for job training and skills among our veterans.

Part of our task is accountability to make sure members of the Department of Veterans Affairs are held accountable. That is one reason why I insisted and urged from the very beginning of those revelations of wrongdoing and criminality in the Department of Veterans Affairs that there be a Department of Justice investigation. I called on the Attorney General of the United States to investigate, not the inspector general of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Attorney General of the United States because only the Department of Justice has the resources and expertise, direction, and leadership to successfully pursue the wide-ranging criminality and wrongdoing that I thought was revealed.

For all of us who hope there is honesty and fair dealing in our government, regrettably there has now been a criminal indictment. The indications are that more should follow, that there was and is reason for a Department of Justice investigation, that there are and need to be continued reports and results of the IG investigation. I have called in hearing after hearing that we be given those reports and results of the ongoing inspector general investigation, and we still are lacking in the full work product from that office. There is clearly more work to be done on the wrongdoing that has been committed in the past, and there is clearly more work to be done to prevent it in the future.

Part of what needs to be done is to protect the whistleblowers. Indeed, those revelations of wrongdoing came in part from whistleblowers who had the courage and fortitude to step forward and who were intimidated and ostracized and sometimes persecuted within the VA. They need protection. One part of what we need to do is to make sure they are protected.

There ought to be accountability going forward in disciplining employees within the VA when there is malfeasance or waste or fraud. That involves eliminating some of the redtape and rigaramole that in the past have hampered the VA Secretary or other managers in making sure that there is accountability. That is why I welcome the focus of our committee on assuring accountability and transparency.

Those changes in the law are necessary to enable the VA Secretary and his team to make sure that there is not only accurate and effective prompt discipline but also the appearance of it so that employees at the VA will know that there is a standard of conduct and it will be enforced and it will be upheld in the courts when it is challenged. That is true not only in the VA but of every department of the U.S. Government. There needs to be that perception and reality of the enforcement of codes of conduct and ethics.

There needs to be a recognition that it is in the interest not only of the American taxpayer but the employees of the U.S. Government themselves. The majority of them are honest and hard-working. Those nurses, counselors, therapists, doctors, and administrators at the VA who are doing their job—in fact, working overtime often without additional pay—who are serving valiantly and responsibly, their clients deserve that wrongdoers be rooted out and held accountable. They are the vast majority of those honest and hard-working employees, and we owe them thanks for what they do to serve our veterans, but the wrongdoers need to be disciplined.

The idea that they should receive bonuses is absolutely abhorrent. I welcome legislation that stops bonuses for employees who fail the most basic notions of effective and honest service. They deserve that those bonuses be stopped.

My colleague Senator ISAKSON has spoken about S. 627, the bill that has been sponsored by Senator AYOTTE and was approved yesterday. I want to make sure in the improvements I am going to offer to it and that my colleague Senator BROWN offered yesterday—that we actually make it more effective. That is the nature of this deliberative process, that we try to improve on what we are doing to make enforcement more effective.

I know as an enforcer, as a former U.S. attorney and a Federal and State official, enforcement is key to making the law work. The same is true of S. 1082, sponsored by our colleague Senator RUBIO, which also was approved yesterday by our committee. I have offered a bill that will improve the measure we approved yesterday in a number of different respects.

First of all, there are serious questions about the constitutionality of the provision approved yesterday. I think in fairness to all of the American taxpayers as well as this body, we should face whatever deficiencies there are constitutionally in the law before that law becomes unenforceable.

The importance of making sure a law is constitutional goes to enforcement. A law that is unconstitutional, that fails to provide sufficient notice, a statement of causes, a right to be heard, an opportunity to achieve basic constitutional protection that the U.S. Security Court has repeatedly said is necessary, those deficiencies can make law unenforceable.

As I said yesterday in our committee meeting, as a former attorney general, and there are others in this body, we know how difficult the task is to defend a law or defend State action that is based on a constitutional and firm statute.

A law that is unenforceable is worse than no law at all because it creates a false sense of security, an expectation that never can be fulfilled because a law that is unenforceable will never be effective in preventing the wrong that it is designed to do.

I want to improve S. 1082—in fact, to make it more effective—but to make sure it is done in a way that can be upheld, also to protect those whistleblowers, and to make sure that if there are firings and disciplines, it is done on the merits, that it is done on the basis of real cause and evidence, not as part of a political witch hunt.

We have been through the spoils system. This Nation has lived through a time when, in effect, offices were bought and sold. That certainly is nobody's intention here, and I am sure my colleagues and I can work together to move toward a measure that fulfills our common shared objective in making sure that merit and effective action is rewarded with bonuses and through other means and that wrongdoing is punished and deterred.

There can be no enforcement unless the law is framed as well as possible, and there can be no deterrence unless there is enforcement. That is what we want to do: prevent this kind of wrongdoing going forward, not just looking backward and pursuing and prosecuting the wrongdoers, which I hope will be done. There is more than ample evidence to support it but also to prevent it going forward.

I am tremendously heartened by our committee chairman's commitment to work with me and others on that committee. He said to me very explicitly, and it is on the record, that he will, in fact, work with us. We will engage in collaboration.

I think we are going to improve these measures. They may not be huge or sweeping changes in what we approved yesterday, but we all know that words can sometimes lead to courts concluding that there are defects in the law that were never intended by the

Framers. That is a consequence, an unintended result that we should avoid if possible. It may seem like lawyer talk, but it has ramifications in the courts. That is the reason we heard from the DAV at our June 24 hearing that it is ''vitally important to VA's long-term future to create an environment in which the best and brightest professionals choose VA over other Federal or private employers.''

We need those best of the best in the VA, not working in the private sector alone. Fairness and due process in our workplace will encourage talented doctors, lawyers, nurses, and other professionals to come to the VA, which is where we need them, for the strength of that system.

As the independent U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board stated in its statement for the record in the committee's June 24th hearing, there is a need to follow and respect constitutional due process. The Partnership for Public Service said much of the same thing in this letter of July 21, 2015.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the letter be printed in the RECORD.

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

PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE,
*Washington DC, July 21, 2015.*

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS,
*U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE: On behalf of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the effectiveness of our federal government, I am writing to express my views on S. 1082, the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability Act of 2015, and a substitute amendment to be offered by Senator Blumenthal, which would address employee accountability and broader management challenges at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

As members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, you have a unique opportunity to fix serious problems at the Department and improve the ability of the Department to deliver on its mission to provide high-quality services to veterans. Unfortunately, the reforms promoted in S. 1082 will not accomplish these objectives. As drafted, the bill eliminates due process protections for employees—which will silence the very whistleblowers we rely on to sound the alarm—and could lead to removals for partisan or discriminatory reasons. The bill will also have an adverse impact on the ability of VA to recruit and retain top talent, as seasoned reformers may be less inclined to pursue VA leadership positions without due process protections. In addition, the bill expedites the appeals process without providing additional resources, which, according to a statement for the record from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), could overwhelm MSPB's capacity to manage its workload.

The Partnership strongly agrees that poor performance is a real problem at VA and that federal employees at all agencies must be held accountable for their performance and conduct. We have recommended dozens of reforms to the current civil service system that, we believe, will lead to a better managed government and a higher performing workforce. However, moving to at-will employment will have many unintended consequences and will not solve the critical management challenges that are hobbling VA and jeopardizing the care of our veterans. We believe a better solution lies in Sen. Blumenthal's substitute amendment that would give the Secretary an additional tool to remove individuals who are a threat to public health or safety, and improve the management of the Department.

Among other things, the substitute amendment would do the following:

Hold senior political leaders accountable in performance plans for recruiting and selecting the right people for employment at the agency, engaging and motivating employees, training and developing employees and holding managers accountable for making difficult performance decisions. Accountability for management in government starts at the very top and this provision will ensure all leaders, career and political, are held accountable.

Ensure managers are fully using the probationary period to develop high-potential employees and to remove someone if they are not the right fit for the position. The amendment would require managers to make an affirmative decision as to whether an individual who serves in a probationary period has demonstrated successful performance and should continue past the probationary period. It also requires new supervisors to demonstrate management competencies, in addition to technical skills, in order to remain in a management position.

Require periodic training for managers on the rights of whistleblowers and how to address an employee allegation of a hostile work environment, reprisal or harassment; how to effectively motivate, manage and reward employees; and how to effectively manage employees who are performing at an unacceptable level.

Hold VA managers accountable in performance plans for taking action to address poor performance and misconduct and for taking steps to improve or sustain high levels of employee engagement.

Create a separate promotion track for technical experts so they can advance in their careers without having to go into management positions for which they are ill-suited. Too often we hear that supervisors promote their employees to management positions because they want to pay them more, even when the employees are technical experts who may be uninterested or unskilled in managing people.

Require GAO to study the implementation of Section 707 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, which was enacted last year, to understand its impact on performance, accountability, recruitment and retention at VA, particularly at the executive level. The provision would also require GAO to review VA's internal policies for dealing with performance issues and make recommendations for how the Department could expedite the process for addressing performance and misconduct administratively.

The challenges at VA are critical and must be addressed. We encourage the Committee to adopt the substitute amendment and ensure these critical management provisions are included as the bill moves to the floor. Our veterans deserve the very best care and this is the time for real reform, not simple expediency.

Very best wishes,

MAX STIER,
*President and CEO.*

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I ask that my colleagues join in this collaboration because I know how deeply you and I feel, how we share that common goal, not just in our committee. I ask that we work to incorporate the measure I have introduced today, S. 1856, with the cosponsorship Senators MURRAY, SANDERS, BROWN, TESTER, and HIRONO, my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, the Department of Veterans Affairs Equitable Employee Accountability Act. This measure is introduced today, and it will help us improve and enhance S. 1082 and the supremely important objectives that motivate it.

I thank my colleagues for our work together, and I look forward to pursuing it.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

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By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. BENNET, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. BROWN, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. CARPER, Mr. COONS, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. FRANKEN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. HEINRICH, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. KAINE, Mr. KING, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MARKEY, Mrs. MCCASKILL, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. MURPHY, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. PETERS, Mr. REED, Mr. REID, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. SCHATZ, Mr. SCHUMER, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. UDALL, Mr. WARNER, Ms. WARREN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. WYDEN):

S. 1858. A bill to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Equality Act of 2015—comprehensive civil rights legislation for our LGBT community.

There are few concepts as fundamentally American as equality. We were founded on this principle with these simple words:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For more than two centuries, we have been working to fulfill that vision of equality. We have taken direct action as a nation so that our laws align more closely with these founding ideals. We have challenged unjust rules and destructive prejudices and chosen to advance basic civil rights.

Martin Luther King put forth the vision that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. He knew that in the 1950s and 1960s Americans were hard at work making that moral arc of the universe bend towards justice. That is the work we continue here in the Senate, here on Capitol Hill, here in the House of Representatives just 100 yards away.

Step by step, stride by stride, the barriers that once prevented people from enjoying the full measure of liberty, the full measure of opportunity, the full measure of equality have broken down.

At the same time, we recognize there is much more to be done to secure that reality for each and every American. In cities and towns across our Nation, many of our citizens do not receive equal treatment, not because of anything they have done but because of who they are—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, whom they love, and who they are.

Yes, we have made progress in advancing rights for the LGBT community. We passed the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act after I came to the Senate in 2009. We repealed don't ask, don't tell, which prevented all Americans from serving openly in the U.S. military. We reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA, with protections for services for the LGBT community. We passed the Affordable Care Act so that no one could be denied health care because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. And we have seen landmark victories in the Supreme Court, first in the Edith Windsor case when the Court ruled it was unconstitutional for the Federal Government to discriminate and just last month when the Court reaffirmed that ''love is love'' and ensured that marriage equality would come to all 50 States.

That is a significant number of steps, a significant number of strides on the path toward full equality, and it happened in a relatively short period of time. But we are far from where we need to be—full equality for every American. As long as people are afraid to put their spouse's photo on their desk at work, as long as they are worried about being evicted from their apartment if they do not pretend to be just roommates, we have a lot of work to do.

The harsh reality remains that in far too many States there are still no laws specifically prohibiting discrimination against LGBT Americans. Nearly two-thirds of the LGBT community reports they have faced discrimination in their lives. In Pennsylvania, a transgender woman can be denied service and kicked out of a restaurant just for being who she is and it would be perfectly legal. In Michigan, a newly married couple can be denied the chance to buy their first house just because they are both women and that would be perfectly legal. In North Carolina, a gay man can be fired from his job today just for being gay and that would be perfectly legal.

Only 22 States and the District of Columbia have passed legislation that prevents workers from being fired because they are gay. Only 19 of those States and the District of Columbia include language protecting against gender identity bias.

The time has come to right this wrong. The time has come for us as a nation to be bolder and better at ensuring full rights and full equality for the LGBT community. Not only is it within our power, it is something America must work to lead. And the most powerful form of leadership is the example we set.

In 1962, Bobby Kennedy said:

Nations around the world look to us for leadership not merely by strength of arms, but by the strength of our convictions. We not only want, but we need, the free exercise of rights by every American.

Our commitment to the vision of equality and fairness is a significant part of America's soul. It makes us strong. It makes us who we are as a people. And we should settle for nothing less. These fundamental principles served as the guiding force behind the comprehensive legislation—the Equality Act of 2015—we are introducing today here in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

I thank my lead cosponsors in the Senate, CORY BOOKER and TAMMY BALDWIN, who have done enormous good work in setting the stage for today's introduction.

I thank four staff members who worked very hard on this on my team, including my chief of staff, Michael Zamore; my legislative director, Jeremiah Baumann; my legislative assistant, Adrian Snead; and my legislative correspondent, Elizabeth Eickelberg. There are many other members of the team who pitched in, but they have worked day and night to help make this moment arrive.

We have had support, such critical support and involvement from numerous outside groups.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a list of dozens of groups endorsing this legislation.

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

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT ENDORSE THE LEGISLATION:

9to5, National Association of Working Women, Advocates for Youth, Aids United, American Civil Liberties Union, American Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Teachers, Anti-Defamation League, Athlete Ally, Bend the Arc Jewish Action, CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Family Equality Council, Family Equality Council, Freedom to Work, Generation Progress, GLSEN, Hindu American Foundation, Human Rights Campaign, Interfaith Alliance, JWI.

Lambda Legal, NARAL Pro-Choice America, National Black Justice Coalition, National Center for Lesbian Rights, National Center for Transgender Equality, National Council of La Raza (NCLR), National Education Association, National Education Association, National Employment Law Project, National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund, National Organization for Women, National Partnership for Women & Families, National Women's Law Center, People For the American Way, PFLAG National, PFLAG National, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Secular Coalition for America, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), The Trevor Project, Union for Reform Judaism.

STATE ORGANIZATIONS THAT ENDORSE THE LEGISLATION:

9to5 California, CA; 9to5 Colorado, CO; 9to5 Georgia, GA; 9to5 Wisconsin, WI; Equality Michigan, MI; Equality Michigan, MI; Gender Justice, MN and Upper Midwest; Gender Rights Maryland, MD; PROMO (Missouri), MO; Southwest Women's Law Center, NM.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I particularly want to draw attention to several organizations that played a leading role, and I apologize to others that were also very involved. The Human Rights Campaign played a central role in organizing today's introduction. I also thank the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Council of La Raza, the National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund, the National Women's Law Center, and so many others.

The Equality Act will create uniform Federal standards to protect all LGBT Americans from discrimination in housing, in workplaces, in schools, in public accommodations, and in financial transactions. It is a vision of equality deeply rooted in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It is setting the same foundation to end discrimination for the LGBT community that was set for ethnicity and set for gender and set for race. That is the foundation for the vision of eliminating discrimination in area after area, and it is time we place LGBT nondiscrimination on that same foundation. That is what we are doing today—comprehensively taking on discrimination.

The bill also addresses gaps in legal protections against sex discrimination—ensuring women are treated equally in all aspects of their lives. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and a steadily increasing number of courts have recognized that sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination are properly understood as forms of sex discrimination in light of multiple controlling sex discrimination cases. The EEOC has done this through several decisions, most notably Macy v. Holder in 2012, which held that transgender discrimination is sex discrimination, and Baldwin v. Foxx very recently, which held that sexual orientation discrimination is sex discrimination.

The bill we are introducing today, the Equality Act, codifies this understanding, making it clear that sexual orientation and gender identity are correctly understood as sex discrimination.

In addition, the bill adds the terms ''sexual orientation'' and ''gender identity'' to the list of protected characteristics throughout the code. This change should not be read to mean that sexual orientation and gender identity are not correctly understood as sex discrimination. These additions were made so covered entities as well as LGBT people can clearly see that these protections exist. Employers, businesses, and institutions are often not aware of the decisions by the EEOC and the courts holding that sexual orientation or gender identity are protected.

This bill represents a paradigm shift in two ways. First, our civil rights community has worked incredibly hard

to defend the principles established in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and today we are asking for their engagement to not simply defend this act but to expand this act. Second, we have worked very hard to take on pieces of discrimination, whether it be don't ask, don't tell, whether it be Federal benefits for same-sex partners. But today we are saying we need a vision of comprehensive nondiscrimination. That is the expression of full opportunity. You cannot access full opportunity if the door is closed in financial transactions or jury selection or public accommodations if you can still be turned away from a restaurant because of whom you love or whom you are. Every American deserves equality in every basic function of our society. Discrimination has no place in our Nation's laws.

If it is wrong in marriage, as the Court has held, as numerous States have established, it is wrong also in employment. If it is wrong in employment, it is wrong in housing. If it is wrong in housing, it is wrong, too, in education.

Overwhelmingly, Americans believe discrimination is wrong. Overwhelmingly, they believe it is already illegal, and they believe it has no place in our society and no place being condoned by our laws.

Even though the Equality Act addresses multiple dimensions of discrimination, it is quite simple. It says that people deserve to live free from fear, free from violence, and free from discrimination, regardless of who they are or whom they love.

Writing these protections into law will bring us another stride forward in our Nation's long march toward inclusion and equality. It will extend the full promise of America to every American. I will keep fighting until this bill is on the President's desk. I will not be satisfied until everyone in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community is guaranteed the dignity and the freedom they deserve, the whole sense of opportunity provided through participation in American society. A full measure of equality: equal citizen.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in this fight. I thank the 40 Senators who stood up today to be original cosponsors of the Equality Act of 2015. Let's make our democracy more inclusive and our freedom more perfect by bringing our laws and our actions in line with the founding principle that all are created equal.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last month, the Supreme Court took a significant step towards a more perfect union when it ruled that every American has the right to marry the person they love and have that lawful marriage recognized. It was a victory for love and justice over bigotry and intolerance. This historic milestone should be celebrated, but we must remember that the journey is not complete. The Fourteenth Amendment's principles of liberty and equality safeguard all couples' right to marry, and also serves as a bulwark against discriminatory treatment in the other aspects of everyday life, including where we live, where we work, and our interactions with the government.

While LGBT Americans are now able to marry the person they love, they continue to experience discrimination in many other aspects of their lives. Achieving full equality means that LGBT individuals should be able to provide security for their families without fear that they will be fired from their jobs or denied housing. It means that a restaurant cannot refuse to serve an LGBT couple because the owner disapproves of that couple's relationship.

These are not abstract concepts. In our country today, LGBT Americans continue to experience discrimination, and it must end. In a June 27 article in the New York Times, entitled ''Next Fight for Gay Rights: Bias in Jobs and Housing,'' the author Erik Eckholm provides clear documentation of such discrimination. A landlord in East Nashville, TN, refused to rent his apartment to two women in a loving relationship after he learned of their partnership because it made him ''uncomfortable.'' He refused their rental application even after they offered to raise the rent by $150. A transgender individual was fired from her job as an industrial electrician because, according to her boss, her identity was becoming ''too much of a distraction,'' in spite of the fact that she was doing ''great work.''

If such discrimination were based on race, religion, sex, or national origin, these individuals would be protected under Federal law. But because Federal civil rights law, as well as many state and local laws, do not provide explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity, these individuals continue to experience discrimination without any legal protection. Their stories show us that LGBT Americans continue to be treated as second class citizens in their daily lives.

That is why I am an original cosponsor of the Equality Act. The bill would amend existing Federal law to provide explicit civil rights protections for LGBT individuals. This non-discrimination bill would ensure that sexual orientation and gender identity are protected under Federal law in the same way that race, sex, religion, national origin, and disability are also protected classes. The result would be to protect LGBT individuals against discrimination in public accommodations, federally-funded programs, employment, housing, education, credit, and other aspects of daily life. This is the kind of equality and security that all American families should enjoy.

I am proud that Vermont was one of the first States to pass a comprehensive law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in 1992, and also passed a law explicitly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity in 2007. All Vermonters are protected from discrimination in employment, places of public accommodation, housing, credit, and other services. This is what we need on the Federal level as well.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the New York Times article referenced above be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the New York Times, June 27, 2015]

NEXT FIGHT FOR GAY RIGHTS: BIAS IN JOBS AND HOUSING

(By Erik Eckholm)

Exhilarated by the Supreme Court's endorsement of same-sex marriage, gay rights leaders have turned their sights to what they see as the next big battle: obtaining federal, state and local legal protections in employment, housing, commerce and other arenas, just like those barring discrimination based on race, religion, sex and national origin.

The proposals pit advocates against many of the same religious conservatives who opposed legalizing same-sex marriage, and who now see the protection of what they call religious liberty as their most urgent task. These opponents argue that antidiscrimination laws will inevitably be used to force religious people and institutions to violate their beliefs, whether by providing services for same-sex weddings or by employing gay men and lesbians in church-related jobs.

Nationally, antidiscrimination laws for gay people are a patchwork with major geographic inequities, said Brad Sears, executive director of the Williams Institute at the School of Law of the University of California, Los Angeles. ''Those who don't live on the two coasts or in the Northeast have been left behind in terms of legal protection,'' he said.

At least 22 states bar discrimination based on sexual orientation, and most of them also offer protections to transgender people.

Tennessee is one of the majority of states that do not bar such discrimination. There, in East Nashville, Tiffany Cannon and Lauren Horbal thought they had found the perfect house to share with a friend, and the landlord seemed ready to rent when they applied in April.

Then he called them to ask what their relationship with each other was, Ms. Horbal, 26, recalled.

She said that when the landlord learned that she and Ms. Cannon, 25, were partners, he said, ''I'm not comfortable with that.'' He refused to process their application, even after they offered to raise their rent by $150, to $700 a month, Ms. Horbal said.

The women, both restaurant workers, are still looking for a place to live.

In many states, some local governments have antidiscrimination laws, but they are often weak or poorly enforced, said Ruth Colker, an expert on discrimination law at Moritz College of Law at Ohio State University.

''Typically, the penalty for violating a city ordinance is more akin to a traffic violation,'' she said. ''State-level penalties can be much more significant.''

As they push for more state and local safeguards, rights advocates are also starting a long-term campaign for a broad federal shield that would give sexual orientation and gender identity protected status under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The goal is to achieve overlapping local, state and federal laws, an approach that has proved effective in curbing other kinds of discrimination, said Sarah Warbelow, legal

director at the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights advocacy group. Visible laws can not only permit lawsuits, she said, but also deter employers and others from biased behavior.

Although a majority of states lack such protections, federal orders and court decisions, especially in employment, are gradually offering more safeguards.

With executive orders last year, President Obama barred discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity by federal agencies and federal contractors, including companies employing about one in five American workers, Mr. Sears said.

At the same time, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, charged with enforcing federal law in the workplace, has determined that discrimination against gay men, lesbians and transgender people amounts to illegal sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and it is bringing or endorsing lawsuits under that provision.

That application of existing law is still being tested in court and is more established for transgender workers than for gay and lesbian workers. In the past two years, the agency has successfully pursued 223 cases involving gay or transgender people who faced workplace harassment or other discrimination, gaining settlements or court orders, said Chai R. Feldblum, one of the agency's five commissioners.

Patricia Dawson of Pangburn, Ark., 46, hopes to join that list. Ms. Dawson, who grew up as Steven, had more than 15 years' experience as an industrial electrician and had been a rising employee at H & H Electric, an industrial contractor, for four years when she informed her boss in 2012 that she was transitioning to female and had changed her name.

The boss, she said in a Title VII-based lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, told her to keep her plans secret and not to ''rock the boat'' with clients.

When her identity became obvious and gossip raged at the work site, she said, the boss said to her, ''I'm sorry, Steve, you do great work, but you are too much of a distraction, and I am going to have to let you go.''

Ms. Dawson said she was devastated by her treatment. ''I love what I do; I get the greatest joy out of fixing things,'' she said in an interview. ''Treating us as second-class citizens, it's hurtful.''

Civil rights groups worked for years for an employment antidiscrimination act, an effort that was blocked by House Republicans and collapsed this year over discord about religious exemptions. Buoyed by the rapid advance of same-sex marriage, these groups are now determined to seek a far wider law.

''I think there's a very strong consensus now among advocacy groups that we need a broader bill that puts discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity on the same footing as race, religion and gender,'' said Shannon P. Minter, legal director at the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

''No court decision could accomplish all of that,'' Mr. Minter said.

Senator Jeff Merkley, Democrat of Oregon, said he planned to introduce a bill within the next few months to add protections for gays and transgender people to the Civil Rights Act.

''People are going to realize that you can get married in the morning and be fired from your job or refused entry to a restaurant in the afternoon,'' Mr. Merkley said. ''That is unacceptable.''

But the effort will take years, he said, because it appears unlikely that Republican committee heads in Congress will advance such a bill.

In the emerging state-by-state battles for antidiscrimination laws, the strongest opposition has come from conservative religious groups that have been alarmed by a few well-publicized cases, like that of a florist in Washington State who was fined for refusing to provide flowers for a same-sex wedding.

''We've got good reason to be concerned about these laws, because they've been found to be coercive where they've been enacted,'' said Greg Scott, vice president of communications at Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian legal group.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, said that it was wrong to equate religious objections to homosexual behavior with racism, and that proposed antidiscrimination laws could ''do more harm than good.''

''Some have suggested that we work out a compromise, addressing housing and employment discrimination and protecting religious freedom for those who dissent from the ideas of the sexual revolution,'' he said. ''But I have yet to see any proposal that would do both of those things well.''

There is some common ground. For example, under the Civil Rights Act, religious organizations have the right to give preference in hiring to those of their faith, Ms. Warbelow of the Human Rights Campaign noted. In housing, federal rules exempt owner-occupied rentals with four or fewer units from discrimination provisions.

''We wouldn't expect these things to change,'' Ms. Warbelow said. ''We really want L.G.B.T. people to be protected the same as those in other protected categories.''

But some disagreements, especially involving private businesses, may be unbridgeable. The major gay and civil rights groups are united in their opposition to ''religious liberty'' bills, a priority of conservative Christian advocates, which would allow religious vendors to refuse to serve gay couples or wedding celebrations.

''Religious liberty does not authorize discrimination,'' said James D. Esseks, the director of gay rights issues at the American Civil Liberties Union.

''It's profoundly harmful to walk into a business open to the public and be told, 'No, we don't actually serve your kind here,''' he said. ''That's not how America works.''

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am proud to join in sponsoring the Equality Act.

Last month, the Supreme Court ruled on the right side of history by deciding that loving and committed same-sex couples have the right to be married. While same-sex couples now can be legally wed, Federal law still does not protect them from being fired or evicted from their homes on the basis of their sexual identity or gender identity. The Equality Act addresses this issue and represents a major step forward in protecting the civil rights of all Americans.

At the same time we celebrate this historic bill, we must ensure that religious institutions have the right to their own views of marriage. As the Supreme Court noted in its decision, ''it must be emphasized that religions, and those who adhere to religious doctrines, may continue to advocate with utmost, sincere conviction that, by divine precepts, same-sex marriage should not be condoned.'' I look forward to working with colleagues to address these issues as the bill advances through the legislative process.

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By Mr. DURBIN (for himself and Mr. LEAHY):

S. 1860. A bill to protect and promote international religious freedom; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

S. 1860

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the ''Further Independence of Religion for Security and Tolerance Freedom Act of 2015'' or the ''FIRST Freedom Act''.

**SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Many of our Nation's founders fled religious persecution and placed great importance on religious freedom. President George Washington summed up the prevailing view of our founders when he wrote, in 1793, ''in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the Laws''.

(2) In 1791, the First Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, enshrining freedom of religion as the ''First Freedom'' of all Americans and becoming an inspiration to people all over the world who struggle to throw off the yoke of religious persecution.

(3) Throughout our Nation's history, the United States has sought to protect and promote fundamental human rights, including religious freedom, in the United States and throughout the world.

(4) After World War II, under Eleanor Roosevelt's leadership, the United States spearheaded the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted at Paris December 10, 1948, which recognized freedom of religion as a fundamental right of all people. Article 18 of that treaty states ''Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.''.

(5) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted at New York December 16, 1966, and which was ratified by the United States in 1992, states, ''Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.''.

(6) Since the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Public Law 105–292), referred to in this section as ''IRFA'', which established the Department of State's Office on International Religious Freedom, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (referred to in this section as ''USCIRF''), the state of religious freedom throughout the world has significantly worsened.

(7) In section 2(a)(4) of IRFA (2 U.S.C. 6401(a)(4)), Congress stated, ''More than one-half of the world's population lives under regimes that severely restrict of prohibit the freedom of their citizens to study, believe, observe, and freely practice the religious faith of their choice.''.

(8) According to ''Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion,'' the most recent report of

the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, three-quarters of the world's population lives in countries in which restrictions on religion were high or very high.

(9) According to the 2014 USCIRF Annual Report, ''The past 10 years have seen a worsening of the already-poor religious freedom environment in Pakistan, a continued dearth of religious freedom in Turkmenistan, backsliding in Vietnam, rising violations in Egypt before and after the Arab Spring, and Syria's decent [sic] into sectarian civil war with all sides perpetrating egregious religious freedom violations.''.

(10) Under section 402 of IRFA (22 U.S.C. 6442), the President is required to designate a country as a country of particular concern (referred to in this section as ''CPC'') if the government of the country has engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.

(11) According to the 2015 USCIRF Annual Report, since October 1999, when the first countries were designated as CPCs, ''the list has been largely unchanged. Of the nine countries designated as CPCs in July 2014, most had been named as CPCs for over a decade . . . Since IRFA's inception, only one country has been removed from the State Department's CPC list due to diplomatic activity.'' This track record calls into serious question the utility of the CPC mechanism and the utility of IRFA to improve the state of religious freedom throughout the world.

(12) The United States has a long tradition of providing safe haven to refugees, including members of religious minority groups and those fleeing religious persecution. Following the international community's tragic failure to shelter Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi genocide, the United States played a leadership role in establishing the international legal regime for the protection of refugees. Since that time, the American people have generously welcomed millions of refugees fleeing war and totalitarian regimes, and the United States traditionally accepts at least 50 percent of resettlement cases handled by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (referred to in this section as ''UNHCR'').

(13) According to the 2014 UNHCR Global Trends Report, more than 59,500,000 people were forcibly displaced in 2014—

(A) which is equal to 1 displacement for every 122 people worldwide;

(B) which is the most displacements in a year in recorded history;

(C) including—

(i) 38,200,000 individuals who were internally displaced within their own country;

(ii) 19,500,000 refugees; and

(iii) 1,800,000 asylum-seekers;

(D) many of whom were victims of serious human rights violations, including religious persecution; and

(E) many are whom are members of vulnerable populations, including religious minorities.

(14) The ongoing conflict in Syria has led to the world's worst ongoing humanitarian crisis and worst refugee crisis since World War II. More than 50 percent of Syria's 23,000,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their homes and, as of 2015, 20 percent of the world's refugees are Syrians. UNHCR is seeking to resettle 130,000 Syrian refugees during 2015 and 2016, with a particular focus on vulnerable individuals such as religious minorities. Although the United States traditionally accepts at least 50 percent of UNHCR resettlement cases, the United States has only accepted approximately 800 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, which is an unacceptably low number.

(15) There are several steps that would facilitate the efforts of the United States Government to protect and provide safe haven to refugees from religious persecution. The 2015 USCIRF Annual Report recommends that Congress ''work to provide the President with permanent authority to designate as refugees specifically-defined groups based on shared characteristics identifying them as targets for persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion''.

(16) The United States Government has limited tools to hold accountable the perpetrators of religious freedom violations. Section 604 of IRFA added section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)), which made foreign government officials who commit particularly severe violations of religious freedom inadmissible to the United States, but it has only been applied once, to deny entry to Narendra Modi, who was Chief Minister of Gujarat, India. In its 2015 Annual Report, USCIRF recommends that the State Department: ''Make greater efforts to ensure foreign government officials are denied entry into the United States due to their inadmissibility under U.S. law for their responsibility for religious freedom violations abroad.'' The effectiveness of this law is also limited because it does not apply to non-state actors, such as international terrorists, and it can only be used to deny entry to a perpetrator who has not yet arrived in the United States, not to deport a perpetrator who has already entered the country.

(17) In the 2015 USCIRF Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that the United States Government ''should call for or support a referral by the UN Security Council to the International Criminal Court to investigate ISIL violations in Iraq and Syria against religious and ethnic minorities, following the models used in Sudan and Libya, or encourage the Iraqi government to accept ICC jurisdiction to investigate ISIL violations in Iraq after June 2014''. Given the weakness of the international criminal justice system, particularly that an ICC referral is subject to a UN Security Council veto, the United States Government should have the ability to prosecute members of ISIL in United States courts for crimes against humanity, including religious persecution.

(18) Under United States law, it is a crime for a non-United States national to commit genocide, torture, terrorism, or several other violations of the law of nations, but it is not a crime under United States law to commit crimes against humanity, including religious persecution. Since the United States Government is unable to prosecute perpetrators of these crimes, many foreign war criminals have found safe haven in this country.

(19) In 2006, the United States Government learned that Marko Boskic, a man who participated in the Srebrenica massacre in the Bosnian conflict, was living in Massachusetts. Rather than charging him with crimes against humanity, or religious persecution, Mr. Boskic was charged with visa fraud and sentenced to only 5 years in prison.

(20) There is bipartisan agreement about the need for the United States Government to promote and protect international human rights, including religious freedom. USCIRF is, by design, a bipartisan organization, with Commissioners appointed by the President and Congressional leaders. USCIRF can most effectively promote religious freedom on a bipartisan basis.

(21) In its 2014 Annual Report entitled ''Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits'', which identifies unnecessary duplication in the Federal government, the Government Accountability Office (referred to in this section as ''GAO'')—

(A) highlighted the lack of coordination and overlapping missions of USCIRF and the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Department of State;

(B) found that ''the lack of a definition regarding how State and the Commission are to interact has sometimes created foreign policy tensions that State has had to mitigate.''; and

(C) concluded that the lack of coordination between the USCIRF and the Department of State may undermine the efforts of the United States Government to promote international religious freedom by sending mixed messages to foreign governments and human-rights activists who are fighting to defend religious freedom in their countries.

(22) Congress, which is responsible for overseeing the work of USCIRF and ensuring that it is effectively pursuing its mission, should provide greater oversight of USCIRF's practices, including addressing concerns regarding financial irregularities and the work environment for religious minorities.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) the protection and promotion of international human rights, including religious freedom, should be an important priority for the United States Government; and

(2) the United States Government should pursue new strategies for protecting and promoting religious freedom throughout the world, including—

(A) the creation of new tools—

(i) to deter and punish the perpetrators of particularly severe violations of religious freedom, including non-state actors; and

(ii) to protect the victims of such violations; and

(B) increased diplomatic engagement that does not focus primarily on CPC designations.

**SEC. 3. ENHANCED PROTECTIONS FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLEES FLEEING RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION.**

(a) AUTHORITY TO DESIGNATE CERTAIN GROUPS OF REFUGEES FOR CONSIDERATION.—Section 207(c)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1157(c)(1)) is amended—

(1) by inserting ''(A)'' before ''Subject to the numerical limitations''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

''(B)(i) The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, may designate specifically defined groups of aliens—

''(I) whose resettlement in the United States is justified by humanitarian concerns or is otherwise in the national interest; and

''(II) who—

''(aa) share common characteristics that identify them as targets of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion; or

''(bb) having been identified as targets under item (aa), share a common need for resettlement due to a specific vulnerability.

''(ii) An alien who establishes membership in a group designated under clause (i) to the satisfaction of the Secretary of Homeland Security shall be considered a refugee for purposes of admission as a refugee under this section unless the Secretary of Homeland Security determines that such alien ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

''(iii) A designation under clause (i) is for purposes of adjudicatory efficiency and may be revoked by the Secretary of State at any time after notification to Congress.

''(iv) Categories of aliens established under section 599D(b) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1990 (Public Law 101–167; 8 U.S.C. 1157 note)—

''(I) shall be designated under clause (i) until the end of the first fiscal year commencing after the date of the enactment of the FIRST Freedom Act; and

''(II) shall be eligible for designation thereafter at the discretion of the Secretary of State, considering, among other factors, whether a country under consideration has been designated as a country of particular concern under section 402 of International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6442) for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

''(v) A designation under clause (i) shall not influence decisions to grant, to any alien, asylum under section 208, protection under section 241(b)(3), or protection under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, done at New York December 10, 1984.

''(vi) A decision to deny admission under this section to an alien who establishes to the satisfaction of the Secretary of Homeland Security that the alien is a member of a group designated under clause (i) shall—

''(I) be in writing; and

''(II) state, to the maximum extent feasible, the reason for the denial.

''(vii) Refugees admitted pursuant to a designation under clause (i)—

''(I) shall be subject to the numerical limitations under subsection (a); and

''(II) shall be admissible under this section.''.

(b) TIME LIMITS FOR FILING FOR ASYLUM.—Section 208(a)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1158(a)(2)) is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (A), by inserting ''or the Secretary of Homeland Security'' after ''Attorney General'' both places such term appears;

(2) by striking subparagraphs (B) and (D);

(3) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (B);

(4) in subparagraph (B), as redesignated, by striking ''subparagraph (D)'' and inserting ''subparagraphs (C) and (D)''; and

(5) by inserting after subparagraph (B), as redesignated, the following:

''(C) CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES.—Notwithstanding subparagraph (B), an application for asylum of an alien may be considered if the alien demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the Attorney General or the Secretary of Homeland Security, the existence of changed circumstances that materially affect the applicant's eligibility for asylum.

''(D) MOTION TO REOPEN CERTAIN MERITORIOUS CLAIMS.—Notwithstanding subparagraph (B) or section 240(c)(7), an alien may file a motion to reopen an asylum claim during the 2-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of the FIRST Freedom Act if the alien—

''(i) was denied asylum based solely upon a failure to meet the 1-year application filing deadline in effect on the date on which the application was filed;

''(ii) was granted withholding of removal pursuant to section 241(b)(3) and has not obtained lawful permanent residence in the United States pursuant to any other provision of law;

''(iii) is not subject to the safe third country exception under subparagraph (A) or a bar to asylum under subsection (b)(2) and should not be denied asylum as a matter of discretion; and

''(iv) is physically present in the United States when the motion is filed.''.

(c) CONDITIONS FOR GRANTING ASYLUM.—Section 208(b)(1)(B)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1158(b)(1)(B)(i)) is amended by striking ''at least one central reason for persecuting the applicant'' and inserting ''a factor in the applicant's persecution or fear of persecution''.

(d) STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF EXPEDITED REMOVAL AND PROCESSING DELAYS ON ASYLUM CLAIMS.—

(1) STUDY.—

(A) DEFINITIONS.—In this paragraph—

(i) the term ''immigration officer'' means an officer of the Department of Homeland Security performing duties under section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1225(b)) with respect to aliens who—

(I) are apprehended after entering the United States; and

(II) may be eligible to apply for asylum under section 208 or 235 of such Act; and

(ii) the term ''improper conduct'' means conduct whereby an immigration officer—

(I) improperly encourages an alien described in clause (i) to withdraw or retract claims for asylum;

(II) incorrectly fails to refer such an alien for an interview by an immigration officer to determine whether the alien has a credible fear of persecution (as defined in section 235(b)(1)(B)(v) of such Act (8 U.S.C. 1225(b)(1)(B)(v)));

(III) incorrectly removes such an alien to a country in which the alien may be persecuted; or

(IV) detains such an alien improperly or under inappropriate conditions.

(B) AUTHORIZATION.—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (referred to in this section as the ''Commission'') is authorized to conduct a study to determine—

(i) whether immigration officers are engaging in improper conduct; and

(ii) the impact of delays in interviews by immigration officers and immigration court hearings on asylum claims.

(2) REPORT.—Not later than 2 years after the date on which the Commission initiates the study under subsection (a), the Commission shall submit a report containing the results of the study to—

(A) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate;

(B) the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate;

(C) the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate;

(D) the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives;

(E) the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives; and

(F) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives.

(3) STAFF.—

(A) FROM OTHER AGENCIES.—

(i) IDENTIFICATION.—The Commission may identify employees of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Government Accountability Office who have significant expertise and knowledge of refugee and asylum issues.

(ii) DESIGNATION.—At the request of the Commission, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Attorney General, and the Comptroller General of the United States shall authorize staff identified under subparagraph (A) to assist the Commission in conducting the study under paragraph (1).

(B) ADDITIONAL STAFF.—The Commission may hire additional staff and consultants to conduct the study under paragraph (1).

(C) ACCESS TO PROCEEDINGS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clause (ii), the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General shall provide staff designated under subparagraph (A) or hired under subparagraph (B) with unrestricted access to all stages of all proceedings conducted under section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1225(b)).

(ii) EXCEPTIONS.—The Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General may not permit unrestricted access under clause (i) if—

(I) the alien subject to a proceeding under such section 235(b) objects to such access; or

(II) the Secretary or Attorney General determines that the security of a particular proceeding would be threatened by such access.

**SEC. 4. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.**

(a) PARTICULARLY SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.—

(1) INADMISSIBILITY.—Section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) is amended to read as follows:

''(G) ALIENS WHO HAVE COMMITTED PARTICULARLY SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.—Any alien who was responsible for, or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom (as defined in section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6402)) is inadmissible.''.

(2) REMOVABILITY.—Section 237(a)(4)(E) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1227(a)(4)(E)) is amended to read as follows:

''(E) ALIENS WHO HAVE COMMITTED PARTICULARLY SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.—Any alien who was responsible for, or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom (as defined in section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6402)) is deportable.''.

(b) RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION.—Chapter 118 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

**''§ 2443. Religious persecution**

''(a) OFFENSE.—Any person who outside the United States commits, or attempts or conspires to commit, religious persecution—

''(1) shall be fined under this title, imprisoned for not more than 20 years, or both; and

''(2) if the death of any person results from the violation of this subsection, shall be fined under this title and imprisoned for any term of years or for life.

''(b) JURISDICTION.—There is jurisdiction over an offense under subsection (a), and any attempt or conspiracy to commit such an offense, if—

''(1) the victim is a United States person;

''(2) the offender is a United States person or an alien residing in the United States, regardless of whether the alien is lawfully admitted for permanent residence;

''(3) the offender is a stateless person whose habitual residence is in the United States; or

''(4) after the conduct required for the offense occurs, the offender is brought into or found in the United States, even if the conduct required for the offense occurs outside the United States.

''(c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

''(1) ADMISSION TO THE UNITED STATES; ALIEN; IMMIGRANT; LAWFULLY ADMITTED FOR PERMANENT RESIDENCE; NONIMMIGRANT.—The terms 'admission to the United States', 'alien', 'immigrant', 'lawfully admitted for permanent residence', and 'nonimmigrant' have the meanings given such terms in section 101(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)).

''(2) RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION.—The term 'religious persecution' means conduct that—

''(A) is intended—

''(i) to obstruct any person in the free exercise of religious belief or practice; or

''(ii) to terrorize or coerce any person because of the actual or perceived religion of any person; and

''(B) if the conduct described in subparagraph (A) occurred in the United States or in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States, would violate—

''(i) section 81 (relating to arson);

''(ii) section 1111 (relating to murder);

''(iii) section 1201(a) (relating to kidnapping), regardless of whether the offender is the parent of the victim;

''(iv) section 1203 (relating to hostage taking), notwithstanding any exception under subsection (b) of such section;

''(v) section 1581(a) (relating to peonage);

''(vi) section 1583(a)(1) (relating to kidnapping or carrying away individuals for involuntary servitude or slavery);

''(vii) section 1584(a) (relating to sale into involuntary servitude);

''(viii) section 1589(a) (relating to forced labor);

''(ix) section 1590(a) (relating to trafficking with respect to peonage, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor);

''(x) section 1591(a) (relating to sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion);

''(xi) section 2241(a) (relating to aggravated sexual abuse by force or threat);

''(xii) section 2242 (relating to sexual abuse); or

''(xiii) section 2340A (relating to torture), regardless of whether the offender is acting under color of law.

''(3) UNITED STATES PERSON.—The term 'United States person' has the meaning given such term in section 3077.''.

(c) STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS.—Chapter 213 of title 18, United States Code is amended by adding at the end the following:

**''§ 3302. Religious persecution**

''No person may be prosecuted, tried, or punished for a violation of section 2443 unless the indictment or the information is filed not later than 10 years after the commission of the offense.''.

(d) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—Title 18, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in the table of sections for chapter 118, by adding at the end the following:

''2443. Religious persecution.''.

(2) in the table of sections for chapter 213, by adding at the end the following:

''3302. Religious persecution.''.

**SEC. 5. REFORM AND REAUTHORIZATION OF UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.**

(a) ESTABLISHMENT AND COMPOSITION.—

(1) LEADERSHIP.—Section 201(d) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6431(d)) is amended to read as follows:

''(d) ELECTION OF CHAIR.—At the first meeting of the Commission after May 30 of each year, a majority of the members of the Commission present and voting shall elect the Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission, subject to the following requirements:

''(1) INITIAL ELECTIONS.—At the first meeting of the Commission after May 30, 2016, the members of the Commission shall elect—

''(A) as Chair, a member of the Commission who was appointed by an elected official of the political party that is not the political party of the President; and

''(B) as Vice Chair, a member of the Commission who was appointed by an elected official of the political party of the President.

''(2) FUTURE ELECTIONS.—

''(A) NEXT ELECTION.—At the first meeting of the Commission after May 30, 2017, the members of the Commission shall elect—

''(i) as Chair, a member of the Commission who was appointed by an elected official of the political party of the President; and

''(ii) as Vice Chair, a member of the Commission who was appointed by an elected official of the political party that is not the political party of the President.

''(B) SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS.—After the election described in subparagraph (A), the positions of Chair and Vice Chair shall continue to rotate on an annual basis between members of the Commission appointed by elected officials of each political party.

''(3) TERM LIMITS.—No member of the Commission is eligible to be elected as—

''(A) Chair of the Commission for a second term; or

''(B) Vice Chair of the Commission for a second term.''.

(2) ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.—Section 201(f) of such Act (22 U.S.C. 6431(f)) is amended by adding at the end the following: ''The Ambassador at Large shall be given advance notice of all Commission meetings and may attend all Commission meetings as a nonvoting member of the Commission.''.

(3) APPOINTMENTS IN CASES OF VACANCIES.—Section 201(g) of such Act (22 U.S.C. 6431(g)) is amended by striking the second sentence.

(b) POWERS OF THE COMMISSION.—Section 203(e) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6432a(e)) is amended to read as follows:

''(e) VIEWS OF THE COMMISSION.—

''(1) PRIVATE SPEECH.—Members of the Commission may speak in their capacity as private citizens. A member of the Commission may be identified as a member of the Commission when making oral or written statements in their private or other professional capacity if the member states clearly that the statement—

''(A) is not on behalf of the Commission; and

''(B) does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission.

''(2) OFFICIAL STATEMENTS.—

''(A) WRITTEN STATEMENTS.—All statements on behalf of the Commission shall be issued in writing over the names of the members of the Commission.

''(B) STATUTORY AUTHORITY.—In its written statements, the Commission shall clearly describe its statutory authority, distinguishing that authority from that of appointed or elected officials of the United States Government. Oral statements of the Commission shall include a similar description, to the extent practicable.

''(C) CONSENSUS.—Members of the Commission shall make every effort to reach consensus on all oral or written statements on behalf of the Commission.

''(D) APPROVAL.—All views of the Commission on pending legislation or any other matter under the jurisdiction of the Commission shall be approved by an affirmative vote of at least 6 of the 9 members of the Commission. Each member of the Commission may include the individual or dissenting views of the member.

''(E) ACCURACY.—All oral or written statements by members or staff of the Commission on behalf of the Commission, including testimony, press releases, articles, and public or private correspondence, shall accurately reflect approved views of the Commission in accordance with subparagraph (D).''.

(c) COMMISSION PERSONNEL MATTERS.—Section 204 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C.6432b) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) by striking ''or terminate an Executive Director'' and inserting ''an Executive Director and additional personnel''; and

(B) by adding at the end the following: ''The decision to terminate an Executive Director and additional personnel shall be made by an affirmative vote of at least 5 of the 9 members of the Commission.'';

(2) by redesignating subsections (b) through (g) as subsections (c) through (h);

(3) by inserting after subsection (a) the following:

''(b) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.—

''(1) APPOINTMENT.—Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of the FIRST Freedom Act, the Commission shall appoint an Executive Director by an affirmative vote of at least 6 of the 9 members of the Commission.

''(2) TERM OF SERVICE.—Each Executive Director—

''(A) may serve for a 4-year term; and

''(B) may serve an additional, consecutive 4-year term if reappointed by the Commission by an affirmative vote of at least 6 of the 9 members of the Commission.''.

(4) in subsection (d), as redesignated, by striking ''and the Executive Director'';

(5) in subsection (g), as redesignated, by striking ''the commission, for the executive director,'' and inserting ''the Commission, for the Executive Director,''; and

(6) in subsection (h), as redesignated—

(A) by striking ''For purposes'' and inserting the following:

''(1) IN GENERAL.—For purposes'';

(B) by inserting ''(including discrimination on the bases of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or disability)'' after ''employment discrimination''; and

(C) by adding at the end the following:

''(2) TREATMENT OF DISCRIMINATION ON BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY.—In applying paragraph (1) to rights and protections that pertain to employment discrimination on the basis of sex, and the remedies and procedures available to address alleged violations of such rights and protections, the laws, rules, and regulations that provide such rights and protections to employees whose pay is disbursed by the Secretary of the Senate or the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives shall be deemed to recognize discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity as forms of discrimination on the basis of sex and shall treat such discrimination in the same manner as discrimination on the basis of sex.''.

(d) REPORT OF COMMISSION.—Section 205 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6433) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking ''Not later than May 1 of each year,'' and inserting ''Each year, between 30 and 90 days after the publication of the Department of State's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom,''; and

(2) by amending subsection (c) to read as follows:

''(c) INDIVIDUAL OR DISSENTING VIEWS.—Members of the Commission shall make every effort to reach consensus on the report under this section. When such consensus is not possible, the report shall be approved by an affirmative vote of at least 6 of the 9 members of the Commission. Each member of the Commission may include the individual or dissenting views of the member in the report.''.

(e) APPLICABILITY OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.—

(1) Section 206 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6434) is amended—

(A) by inserting ''(a) FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT'' before ''The''; and

(B) by adding at the end the following:

''(b) FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.—Notwithstanding section 551 of title 5, United

States Code, the Commission shall be considered to be an agency for purposes of section 552 of such title.''.

(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 207(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6435(a)) is amended by striking ''2015'' and inserting ''2017''.

(g) TERMINATION.—Section 209 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6436) is amended by striking ''September 30, 2015'' and inserting ''September 30, 2017''.

## SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

### SENATE RESOLUTION 228—DESIGNATING SEPTEMBER 2015 AS ''NATIONAL OVARIAN CANCER AWARENESS MONTH''

Ms. AYOTTE (for herself, Ms. STABENOW, Ms. BALDWIN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. BROWN, Mr. BURR, Mr. COONS, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. MORAN, Mr. PETERS, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. SCHUMER, and Mr. MENENDEZ) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 228

Whereas ovarian cancer is the deadliest of all gynecologic cancers;

Whereas ovarian cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the United States;

Whereas, in 2015, approximately 21,290 new cases of ovarian cancer will be diagnosed, and 14,180 women will die of ovarian cancer in the United States;

Whereas the mortality rate for ovarian cancer has not significantly decreased since the ''War on Cancer'' was declared more than 40 years ago;

Whereas 25 percent of women will die within 1 year of diagnosis with ovarian cancer and over 50 percent will die within 5 years;

Whereas while there is the mammogram to detect breast cancer and the Pap smear to detect cervical cancer, there is no reliable early detection test for ovarian cancer;

Whereas the lack of an early detection test means that approximately 80 percent of cases of ovarian cancer are detected at an advanced stage;

Whereas all women are at risk for ovarian cancer, and approximately 20 percent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer have a hereditary predisposition to ovarian cancer, which places them at even higher risk;

Whereas scientists and physicians have uncovered changes in the BRCA genes that some women inherit from their parents, which may make them 30 times more likely to develop ovarian cancer;

Whereas the family history of a woman has been found to play an important role in accurately assessing the risk of that woman of developing ovarian cancer and medical experts believe that family history should be taken into consideration during the annual well woman visit of any woman;

Whereas many experts in health prevention now recommend genetic testing for young women with a family history of breast and ovarian cancer;

Whereas women who know they are at high risk of breast and ovarian cancer may undertake prophylactic measures to help reduce the risk of developing these diseases;

Whereas the Society of Gynecologic Oncology now recommends that all women diagnosed with ovarian cancer receive counseling and genetic testing;

Whereas many people are unaware that the symptoms of ovarian cancer often include bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, urinary symptoms, and several other symptoms that are easily confused with other diseases;

Whereas awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer by women and health care providers can lead to a quicker diagnosis;

Whereas, in June 2007, the first national consensus statement on ovarian cancer symptoms was developed to provide consistency in describing symptoms to make it easier for women to learn and remember the symptoms; and

Whereas each year during the month of September, the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance and partner members hold a number of events to increase public awareness of ovarian cancer: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved,* That the Senate—

(1) designates September 2015 as ''National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month''; and

(2) supports the goals and ideals of National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month.

### SENATE RESOLUTION 229—DESIGNATING JULY 26, 2015, AS ''UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS DAY''

Mr. WARNER (for himself, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. BURR, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. RISCH, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. KAINE, Mr. KING, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. LANKFORD, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. COTTON, and Ms. HIRONO) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 229

Whereas on July 26, 1908, Attorney General Charles Bonaparte ordered newly-hired Federal investigators to report to the Office of the Chief Examiner of the Department of Justice, which subsequently was renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation;

Whereas on July 26, 1947, President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.), creating the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thereby laying the foundation for today's intelligence community;

Whereas the National Security Act of 1947, which appears in title 50 of the United States Code, governs the definition, composition, responsibilities, authorities, and oversight of the intelligence community of the United States;

Whereas the intelligence community is defined by section 3(4) of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3003(4)) to include the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office, other offices within the Department of Defense for the collection of specialized national intelligence through reconnaissance programs, the intelligence elements of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Department of Energy, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis of the Department of the Treasury, the elements of the Department of Homeland Security concerned with the analysis of intelligence information, and other elements as may be designated;

Whereas July 26, 2015, is the 68th anniversary of the signing of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.);

Whereas the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–458; 118 Stat. 3638) created the position of the Director of National Intelligence to serve as the head of the intelligence community and to ensure that national intelligence be timely, objective, independent of political considerations, and based upon all sources available;

Whereas Congress has previously passed joint resolutions, signed by the President, to designate Peace Officers Memorial Day on May 15, Patriot Day on September 11, and other commemorative occasions, to honor the sacrifices of law enforcement officers and of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001;

Whereas the United States has increasingly relied upon the men and women of the intelligence community to protect and defend the security of the United States in the decade since the attacks of September 11, 2001;

Whereas the men and women of the intelligence community, both civilian and military, have been increasingly called upon to deploy to theaters of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere since September 11, 2001;

Whereas numerous intelligence officers of the elements of the intelligence community have been injured or killed in the line of duty;

Whereas intelligence officers of the United States are routinely called upon to accept personal hardship and sacrifice in the furtherance of their mission to protect the United States, to undertake dangerous assignments in the defense of the interests of the United States, to collect reliable information within prescribed legal authorities upon which the leaders of the United States rely in life-and-death situations, and to ''speak truth to power.'' by providing their best assessments to decision makers, regardless of political and policy considerations;

Whereas the men and women of the intelligence community have on numerous occasions succeeded in preventing attacks upon the United States and allies of the United States, saving numerous innocent lives; and

Whereas intelligence officers of the United States must of necessity often remain unknown and unrecognized for their substantial achievements and successes: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved,* That the Senate—

(1) designates July 26, 2015, as ''United States Intelligence Professionals Day'';

(2) acknowledges the courage, fidelity, sacrifice, and professionalism of the men and women of the intelligence community of the United States; and

(3) encourages the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

## AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2284. Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. KAINE) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by her to the bill H.R. 22, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exempt employees with health coverage under TRICARE or the Veterans Administration from being taken into account for purposes of determining the employers to which the employer mandate applies under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2285. Mr. WICKER (for himself, Mr. COCHRAN, and Mrs. FEINSTEIN) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed by him to the bill H.R. 22, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 2286. Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. NELSON, and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) submitted an