

eloquent remembrance by the Senator from West Virginia.

I am sorry that I did not have the opportunity to know Dr. Halverson and was not a participant in the prayer breakfasts. I attended his service this week. The Senator from West Virginia certainly does him great honor, and we appreciate it.

Mr. LAUTENBERG addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

THE REFUGEE PROGRAM

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, yesterday my good friend and colleague from Wyoming, Senator SIMPSON, made some comments, and particularly made reference to the so-called Lautenberg refugee program. Though Senator SIMPSON and I agree on some things and disagree sharply on some things, there is, on balance, mutual respect and I might even say affection. So where we disagree on this issue, it is because of a perspective on the issue.

However, during his presentation on the floor, he used references such as the so-called Lautenberg refugee bill. He used adjectives like derelict or deficient, that this bill was no longer of any value, and I just would like to clear the record.

Current law, under our immigration code, facilitates the granting of refugee status for certain historically persecuted groups. The existing law formally recognizes the historic experiences of certain persecuted religious minorities in the Soviet Union and Indochina, and the pattern of our denial of refugee status to members of those minorities entitles them to a relaxed standard of proof in determinations about whether they are refugees. The law lowers the evidentiary standard required to qualify for refugee status for Evangelical Christians, for Jews from the Soviet Union, certain Ukrainians, and some categories of Indo-Chinese.

Once a refugee applicant proves that he or she is a member of one of these groups, he or she has to prove a credible basis for concern about the possibility of persecution. Refugee applicants normally must establish a well-founded fear of persecution. The law has had a real and positive impact on refugee adjudication for persecuted individuals.

In his comments to the Senate yesterday, Senator SIMPSON said that there is evidence that members of the Russian mafia are using the program to enter the United States. I want to be perfectly clear that the refugee program was not intended to enable criminals to enter our country. It was not designed to facilitate entry into the United States by those not qualified under the description of refugee status.

Further, Mr. President, in my former life I was in the computer business and still have a lot of contact there. I have seen many of these people who have come, under the refugee exclusion, into

the design and programming phases of the computer industry, many of them entrepreneurs. I have met those who, in a very short period of time, have learned enough of the English language to practice law and become physicians. So we dare not accept one generalization that those who are using the program are principally members of the Russian mafia, that the gangsters are using this, because if they are, then it is not the fault of those who are coming.

It is my understanding that under United States law an applicant should be denied refugee status if our Government knows that he is a criminal, or for some reason or other is excluded from entry into the United States. So where does the responsibility lie? It lies with the INS or the State Department. They have to do a better job in weeding those people out based on current law.

The refugee program was intended to help historically persecuted religious minorities, certainly not criminals.

My friend, the Senator from Wyoming, also said the program is no longer necessary because we have good relations with Russia and that the program has been abused. As a matter of fact, I was stunned when I heard the Senator from Wyoming describe Russia as our best friend. I would say that is hyperbolic at least. Russia, our best friend? We want them to be a good friend, we want them to be an ally, but certainly one cannot say that they are now our best friend and that they are behaving like a democracy as we know it. And although he describes the program as being discredited, the fact is that it has served as a useful opportunity for those who are very concerned about what is going to happen and what has taken place in terms of their relationship with Russia and the former Soviet Union countries.

There is still a tremendous amount of instability in that area, and although anti-Semitism is no longer officially State sponsored, its roots run deep throughout the culture and its effects are felt in incidents across Russia and many of the other former Soviet Union countries. And now we are all made abruptly aware that on this coming Sunday, when elections are going to be held in Russia, there is a strong belief that those who are most likely to win seats are members of the Communist Party, avowed reformists. But the fact is we know that if people are looking fondly back to electing Communists to Government, with it goes a standard that has been set by those people for decades in that area. And so those who have been harassed in the past, who are likely to run into problems are very worried about what the future holds.

So if there are some who seek to abuse the program, as Senator SIMPSON claims, it is the responsibility of our Government to weed out that abuse. We do not stop collecting taxes in this country if someone abuses the Tax

Code. What we do is we go after them vigorously. And the same thing is true here. Our Government should eliminate the abuse if there is any in the program. It is not a reason to say that a program that has helped legitimate refugees is discredited.

Mr. President, the House version of the State authorization bill includes a 1-year extension of this program, a program that has provided a useful escape valve for historically persecuted people who come to this country and make a contribution to our society. In light of existing instability in the former Soviet Union, I believe that this program ought to be extended for another year. What it takes is our conferees in discussion to agree with the House.

I hope that will take place to give this program another year to work until we see what the conditions are going to be like in Russia in particular and some of the other countries of the former Soviet Union.

I yield the floor.

REFUGEES FROM FORMER SOVIET UNION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, yesterday, the distinguished chairman of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, spoke against the Lautenberg amendment which assists refugees from the former Soviet Union and which is reauthorized under the House version of the State Department reauthorization bill.

I support the amendment because it works. It has facilitated the rescue of more than 250,000 persecuted Jews and other minorities from the former Soviet Union since Congress adopted it in 1989. For decades, the United States led the world in seeking the release of the refuseniks and urging freedom of emigration under the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Having come this far, we should not abandon this historic commitment by bringing this humanitarian program to a premature end.

Clearly, major political changes have occurred in the region. The Soviet Union is now the former Soviet Union. And most people there enjoy greater freedom today than they did a decade ago.

But we only need to read the headlines to know that the region continues to face great upheaval. Jews and other minorities in the former Soviet Union are still the victims of persecution and deep-seated hatred and antisemitism.

When Senator SIMPSON and I met with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees earlier this year, she said she considered the former Soviet Union to be the most explosive part of the world for refugees. And visitors to the region over the past year have discovered alarming levels of antisemitic persecution.

An American delegation to the Ukraine in March found that Jews were victims of an organized harassment campaign. Many Ukrainian Jews received anonymous notices that read,