

House considers the Israeli press to be the only free press in the region.

Israel's economy has also prospered under democratic rule. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, "Israel's economy is far more diversified and sophisticated than its neighbors." "Israel has the highest proportion of engineers in the workforce [worldwide], and nearly double the share of second-place US and Japan." Its well-educated populace has enabled its high-tech industry to make advances in research and development, enabling Israeli firms "to achieve global leadership in a number of fields, including various segments of the software industry, anti-virus protection and computer security systems, as well as in the areas of fiber optics and electro-optics, medical instruments and medical imaging systems."

During my time in the Senate, I have worked to ensure Israel's security. One aspect of this has been securing economic and military assistance for Israel. During my most recent trip to Israel, in December 2007, I met with President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. We discussed, among other things, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Iran's role in the region, and the U.S.-Israeli bilateral relationship. In each instance, it was clear to me that both the United States and Israel benefit greatly from our strong ties and shared ideals.

At the core of the United States-Israeli relationship is the Middle East peace process. There have been so many developments since Israel emerged as a state. The enmity which has existed for decades has meant senseless killing, terrorism in Israel, and Hezbollah and Hamas firing rockets into Israel, prompting the justified retaliation by Israel as a matter of self defense.

It is crucial that Israel's neighbors understand the importance of words and perceptions in the peace process, bringing the region closer to the goals set forth in the November 27, 2007 Joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration at Annapolis: "We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples; to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition; to propagate a culture of peace and nonviolence; to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis."

The democratic principles set forth in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel have enabled Israel to thrive for the past 60 years and will continue to guide it into the future.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge the 60th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel.

On May 14, 1948, the people of Israel proclaimed the establishment of the sovereign and independent State of Israel, and the Government established full diplomatic relations.

The United States and Israel share a deep friendship and alliance. Our alliance is based on the belief of the United States in Israel's right to exist and our countries' shared values of democracy.

Both Israel and the United States understand the values of life, liberty, opportunity, security, and freedom. Additionally, we both seek to address the common threat of terrorism. We recognize that terrorist organizations have denounced the values of freedom, and we are dedicated to ensuring that terrorism does not prevail.

Throughout Israel's history, the country has strived to build a democratic nation despite severe obstacles. Yet the people of Israel continue to show great strength and perseverance as they seek peace with their neighbors.

I extend my congratulations to our friends, the people of Israel, and I join them in celebrating this occasion.

THE MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT OF 2007

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would strengthen and add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

In the early morning hours of Saturday, May 10, 2008, in Muncie, IN, Kyle Flood was attacked for being gay in what he believes was a hate crime. Flood, a 21-year-old college student at Ball State University, says he was leaving a bar at about 3 a.m. when two college-aged men approached him and his friends using anti-gay epithets. When the two groups crossed paths, a fight erupted. Flood was shoved to the ground and punched in the face. He was later treated at the local hospital for a scratched cornea, swollen eye, cuts and bruises. The Ball State community has reacted to the beating, and students have been informed to stay calm and try to travel to and from social events in groups. Police Chief Gene Burton has said that bias-motivated attacks are rare among students, but that they have happened before. No arrests have been made in connection with the assault.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. Federal laws intended to protect individuals from heinous and violent crimes motivated by hate are woefully inadequate. This legislation would better equip the Government to fulfill its most important obligation by protecting new groups of people as well as better protecting citizens already covered under deficient laws. I believe that by passing this legislation and

changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize National Foster Care Month, an effort to raise awareness about our responsibility to support the more than half a million children across the Nation who are living in foster care. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedicated adoptive parents who provide these vulnerable youth with the permanent families they deserve.

Having a family is vitally important to foster youth like JoJo Carbonell, from my home State of California. When she was in school, JoJo had to ask her teacher to excuse her from the assignment to make a family tree because she didn't know any of her relatives except her birth mother and her sisters. For JoJo, one of the most important reasons that she is now successful and stable is her foster parent, Sue Crowley. From Sue, JoJo learned the importance of family and began to develop heartfelt traditions she will carry with her forever. As JoJo grew older, she and Sue decided to become a permanent family through adoption.

I am proud of California's success in finalizing more than 66,500 adoptions of children from foster care between 2000 and 2006, but sadly many foster youth are never united with a permanent, stable family.

For Priscilla Davis, who "aged out" after spending 3 years at nine different placements in California's foster care system, having a family would mean having someone she could call if she is having a problem; having a family would mean there is someone to catch her if she makes a mistake; having a family would mean someone to call if something wonderful happens.

Unfortunately, Priscilla is one of about 4,000 foster youth in California, and more than 20,000 youth nationwide who emancipate, or "age out" of foster care every year without ever finding a permanent family or establishing a relationship with an adult who will love, support, and guide them.

A recent report by Kids Are Waiting and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative found that while the total number of children in foster care has declined, the number of young people aging out of foster care has increased 41 percent since 1998.

Last year, I introduced the Foster Care Continuing Opportunities Act, S. 1512, which would extend Federal funding to those States that try to provide services that help foster youth transition to adulthood. Right now, the future for foster youth when they are emancipated is often bleak. In California, about 65 percent of emancipated youth face homelessness, less than 3 percent go to college, and 51 percent are unemployed.

While extending support for these services at a Federal level could make