

and conventions industry in southern Nevada. Aside from the jobs directly within the building, the Las Vegas Convention Center also contributes to the success of the dozens of small businesses that serve and supply the trade show industry. This includes florists, office supply stores, caterers and transportation services, just to name a few.

The Las Vegas Convention Center has contributed to Las Vegas growing into the No. 1 trade show destination in America. Clark County hosts more than 22,000 meetings, conventions, and trade shows every year. The convention center has also been home to many of our Nation's most historic product announcements—including the VCR, the DVD player and high-definition television.

By hosting concerts by the Beatles, heavyweight fights featuring Muhammed Ali, events with Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Ford, Reagan and Bush, the Las Vegas Convention Center has for 50 years played a central role in the fabric of our national culture.

The Las Vegas Convention Center is an example of private industry and public agencies working collaboratively for the benefit of the community. I congratulate the Las Vegas Convention Center—and all those who make it a success—on 50 outstanding years of creating opportunity for the people of Nevada and capturing the imagination of people throughout America.

#### HELSINKI COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I would like to report to my colleagues on the work of the U.S. delegation to the eighth Winter Meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This meeting was held on February 19 and 20 in Vienna, Austria. Prior to attending the Winter Meeting, the delegation traveled to Israel and Syria to ascertain the prospects for the Middle East peace process at this critical time.

I had the honor to lead this delegation as chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, better known as the Helsinki Commission.

Joining me as delegation leader in Vienna was my Helsinki Commission Cochair, Representative ALCEE L. HASTINGS. Three Senate colleagues on the Commission—Senator ROGER WICKER, Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, and Senator TOM UDALL—also joined the delegation for the entire trip, as did fellow Commission member Representative MIKE MCINTYRE. Although not a member of the Helsinki Commission, Representative GWEN MOORE also joined the delegation.

The delegation first visited Israel. Our arrival came 3 days after that country's parliamentary elections and in the aftermath of the events in Gaza. We met with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert,

Likud leader and now Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu and numerous other officials. We also visited Yad Veshem and laid a wreath in memory of the millions lost in the Holocaust.

The delegation met with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in East Jerusalem and Palestinian Authority Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erakat in the West Bank and in each of these meetings discussed the current situation in Gaza and the West Bank, the potential for reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and how the United States can be a constructive partner in facilitating the peace process.

In Damascus, Syria, our delegation had a country team briefing with U.S. Embassy staff, including U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Syria, Maura Connelly. We also held a constructive meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallim, where the delegation pressed them on the need to improve human rights in Syria, encouraged them to assist the international community in bringing Iran into compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and promoted restarting peace talks with Israel.

The delegation paid a courtesy visit to the historic Omayyad Mosque as well as visited the only surviving synagogue in Damascus. A briefing on the Iraqi refugee situation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, Site Director in Damascus was extremely informative. The delegation was particularly moved by its meeting with a group of Iraqi refugees living in Syria. Their stories of hardship and suffering have galvanized our efforts to improve U.S. policies and activities in support of these refugees in Syria and in other surrounding countries.

The delegation's final stop was Vienna for the Winter Meeting. During the first day of the meeting, our delegation was joined by a delegation led by Representative JOHN TANNER that attended a meeting of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels earlier in the week.

A meeting of the Standing Committee, composed of the officers and heads of delegation to the OSCE PA, took place prior to the formal opening. As an OSCE PA vice president, I reported on the latest efforts of the Obama administration to close Guantanamo Bay as a detention facility, an issue of continued concern in the Assembly. Our efforts in recent years to be responsive to criticism of U.S. performance have been well received and provide a stronger basis for us to raise concern about the human rights performance of other countries. In addition to detailing the specific policy changes already announced by the Obama administration, I expressed hope that "these measures will help restore faith in the United States as a friend, ally and leader in the global

community. If the United States wants to lead, we must lead by example."

Cochairman HASTINGS also made a presentation on his work as the Assembly's Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs, in particular his travel to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel—all Mediterranean Partner states—last December. He met with parliamentarians and senior government officials to discuss greater OSCE engagement, the Middle East peace process, regional economic cooperation, the prospects of the Union for the Mediterranean, and the Iraqi refugee crisis.

OSCE PA President Joao Soares, Portugal, opened the Winter Meeting before 250 parliamentarians. The opening plenary was addressed by Barbara Prammer, President of Austria's National Council; Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, who chairs the OSCE in 2009; French diplomat Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, the OSCE's Secretary General, and by Representative JOHN TANNER in his capacity as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Following the opening plenary, additional discussions were held in each of the Assembly's three General Committees: the First Committee, dealing with political affairs and security; the Second Committee, focusing on economic Affairs, science, technology and environment; and the Third Committee, which covers democracy, human rights and humanitarian questions. Rapporteurs and guest speakers discussed current issues and the prospects for OSCE PA work in the coming year. Among the OSCE officials speaking in committee were Knut Vollebaek of Norway, the High Commissioner on National Minorities; Goran Svilanovic of Serbia, Economic and Environmental Coordinator; Miklos Haraszti of Hungary, Representative of Free Media; and Janez Lenarcic of Slovenia, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Every member of the U.S. delegation was active throughout the committee sessions. In the First Committee, Representative MCINTYRE reported on the delegation's visit to Israel and Syria, and Representative MOORE called attention to the plight of children in armed conflict and especially their use as child soldiers around the globe. In the Second Committee, Senator UDALL discussed the new prospects for U.S. engagement with Europe on climate change, and Senator WHITEHOUSE called for greater transparency regarding extractive industries, where corruption limits economic progress in developing countries. Senator WICKER responded to criticisms of the United States related to the economic crisis and pushed back against calls for greater trade protectionism. In the Third Committee, Senator WICKER stressed the continued need to focus on religious freedom, which is threatened in many countries of the OSCE region, while Cochairman HASTINGS explained the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's

important contribution to election observation in the region.

The Winter Meeting traditionally includes a plenary debate on issues that are particularly relevant and timely. This year, the debate focused on a proposal by Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and supported by French President Nicolas Sarkozy for a new European security architecture. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko and senior French Foreign Ministry official Veronique Bujon-Barre made opening presentations. Senators WHITEHOUSE, WICKER, and I each spoke in the debate. We stressed the need to maintain a comprehensive definition of security to include respect for human rights and commitment to democratic governance and, while not opposing further work, defended the NATO Alliance which some believe the Russian proposal intends to undercut. There was also considerable criticism of Russia's actions against neighboring Georgia in 2008, with considerable opposition to any attempt to legitimize this action in any new security talks.

As the Winter Meeting came to a close, Representative MOORE took the floor during debate on gender issues to announce her intention to introduce a resolution on the issue of maternal mortality, calling for action to reduce the number of women around the world and especially in developing countries who die due to the lack of medical care in response to complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth. A Greek presentation on piracy as a new security threat and presentations on Kazakhstan's preparations to chair the OSCE in 2010, rounded out the closing issues of the meeting.

In addition to the sessions of the Winter Meeting, the congressional delegation was briefed by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General, Spencer Oliver of the United States, and by the Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE, Kyle Scott. The delegation had bilateral sessions with OSCE Chair-in-Office Bakoyannis and numerous OSCE officials.

The U.S. delegation also held a lengthy bilateral session with the Russian delegation, during which dialogue between the U.S. Congress and the Russian Duma, among other issues, was discussed. While we do not agree on many issues, we did firmly agree on the importance of continued dialogue.

By all accounts, the Winter Meeting was 2 days of robust debate, and the U.S. Delegation was an active part of that debate, engaging European friends and allies on a variety of issues of importance to the United States. I want to thank my colleagues for the active participation throughout the trip.

At the invitation of the Government of Slovakia, I traveled the very short distance from Vienna to Slovakia's capital, Bratislava. My other colleagues remained in Vienna actively engaged in the work of the assembly discussed above.

Immediately upon arrival in Bratislava, I had a substantive and lengthy discussion with Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák. As the Minister had taken office just 2 weeks prior to our arrival, I had the privilege of being the first Member of Congress to meet with him in this capacity. Our wide-ranging discussion touched on the global economic crisis, the Middle East peace process, the situation in the Balkans—the Minister was recently the EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina—anti-Semitism, and the plight of Slovakia's Roma population.

Following that meeting, Keith Eddins, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, hosted a lunch with leading academics and NGO leaders to discuss current events in Slovakia and the state of U.S.-Slovak relations. After lunch, I met with the chief rabbi and the lay leadership of Slovakia's Jewish community. Finally, before heading back to Vienna, I met with a cross-section of Slovakia's Roma community. As Europe's largest ethnic minority group, the Roma have been victims of some of postwar Europe's greatest discrimination. Congress's attention to issues of importance to this community has been inadequate in the past, but I hope to see that change in the future.

The U.S. House and Senate should both take great pride in the unique ability of the Helsinki Commission to represent the views and values of our country abroad, something which I, as chairman, intend to continue at future OSCE Parliamentary Assembly gatherings, including the Annual Session which convenes in Vilnius, Lithuania, in June and July of this year.

#### IDAHOANS SPEAK OUT ON HIGH ENERGY PRICES

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, in mid-June, I asked Idahoans to share with me how high energy prices are affecting their lives, and they responded by the hundreds. The stories, numbering well over 1,200, are heartbreaking and touching. While energy prices have dropped in recent weeks, the concerns expressed remain very relevant. To respect the efforts of those who took the opportunity to share their thoughts, I am submitting every e-mail sent to me through an address set up specifically for this purpose to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD. This is not an issue that will be easily resolved, but it is one that deserves immediate and serious attention, and Idahoans deserve to be heard. Their stories not only detail their struggles to meet everyday expenses, but also have suggestions and recommendations as to what Congress can do now to tackle this problem and find solutions that last beyond today. I ask unanimous consent to have today's letters printed in the RECORD.

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

Fellow Idahoans, the high cost of gas is taking its toll on my family as well. I have

very little money left after driving to work and paying rent and insurance, to buy food. After everything is all paid for, I do not have any money to stash away for a rainy day. However, Senator Crapo and others are letting us down and trying to give us simple answers. I have spent countless hours researching alternative technologies for transportation as well as power. Senator Crapo and our other elected officials want to tell us the simple way is to drill for more oil, according to government scientists, drilling in ANWR will not actually have an impact for five years if we started drilling tomorrow, and it would only lower gas prices by 1 cent and make no mistake when they say domestic drilling this is what they mean. They want to open more nuclear power plants but nobody wants to take the nuclear waste and Senator Crapo has no problem leaving it in Idaho for us to deal with the nuclear waste of the world!!!! And Senator Crapo has no plans for the waste!! Search the MYT engine; it is a great new technology that just disappeared because oil companies do not want that technology out there. Our elected officials are not working for us and they are stuck in the mindset of oil as the only alternative. I demand and so should you that NASA stops wasting our money going to Mars and INL stops wasting money studying nuclear power and works on a way to make solar power and wind power more efficient. Solar thermal is a new type of solar power that is more efficient than solar panels and produces more electricity. Wind power is great and I see more windmills going up all around Idaho. The truth is the technology and the know how are out there, but our elected officials are stuck in the mindset of oil, coal, and nuclear and not willing to look at alternatives; demand that they think outside the box.

STEVEN.

I appreciate your emails and asking how the energy problem is affecting me and my family. I also hope you still have your integrity and that you honestly do what is right for America. In the 1990s, you were my Aunt's attorney in fixing her estate before and after she died. She was very impressed with you and thought you were an honest man. Please do not let us down.

I am a retired/disabled police officer. I am on an income that is pretty much fixed, but my wife is still working though she is 66 years old, and we are both on Medicare and Medicare Part D. I also take care of my 82-year-old father who lives 30 miles from me and he is also on a fixed income. I have to drive that distance two to three times a week to take care of him. We have a small car, but the prices are getting unbearable. We have cut back on most trips to the store and to take care of my dad. We are still doing okay, but the fear of the unknown grows constantly within us. I wish Congress would get off feeling animals (e.g., caribou) are more important than people. The environmental thing has just gone too far. I believe in taking care of the things that God has charged us with, but the citizens of this country are important, too.

We are constantly fearful of Congress doing away with Medicare and Medicare Part D. Please do the right thing and make this country something proud to live in again.

CLIFF.

Many changes have come about in our life as a result of the high gas prices.

1. Our planned 7,000 mile summer trip with our grandchildren has been scaled back to 500 miles.

2. We do not eat out, and non-essential foods have been cut from our food budget.

3. We must combine our shopping trips to the mall, grocery stores, library, doctor appointments etc. in order to conserve.