

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 21, 2016

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Room HT-2, the Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey:

We are writing to underscore the importance of maintaining strong ties with Armenia and empowering American diplomacy through continued U.S. assistance for Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh, the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, and at-risk minorities in the Middle East. Given recent events, continued U.S. support in the region is critically important.

As you work with your colleagues in preparing the Fiscal Year 2017 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, we respectfully ask that you consider the following requests:

Assistance to Nagorno Karabakh:

Direct U.S. aid to Nagorno Karabakh has, for almost two decades, represented a powerful investment in peace and an expression of America's leadership in support of a negotiated and democratic resolution of security and status issues related to the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. This direct aid has met pressing humanitarian needs such as the clearing of land mines and unexploded ordnance from villages and farmlands. The Nagorno Karabakh region has some of the world's highest per capita land mine accident rates. We encourage the Subcommittee to reject calls for politicizing critical, life-saving initiatives such as landmine clearance. We thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding leadership in support of this aid program and for consistently including language in its report calling for U.S. assistance in Nagorno Karabakh.

Additionally, we ask the Department of State and USAID to support expansion of humanitarian assistance in Nagorno Karabakh to include support for rehabilitation centers and regional clinics, which serve over 1,000 children and adults with physical and cognitive disabilities every year.

We urge the Subcommittee to expand vital U.S. assistance, which supports a deserving population that has strived against aggression and blockades to develop a strong democracy,

build a free market economy, and work toward an enduring peace for all peoples of this region. Since 1991, Nagorno Karabakh has successfully conducted six parliamentary and five presidential elections which have been praised by international election observers as free, fair, and independent.

We request that the Subcommittee include language directing USAID to spend at least \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2017 for humanitarian and development programs in Nagorno Karabakh.

Assistance to Armenia:

As members of the Subcommittee know, Armenia, a crucial ally in a strategic region of the world, has extended robust support for U.S.-led peace-keeping deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Mali, and Kosovo, and is cooperating with the U.S. on a broad range of regional and security challenges. In addition, Armenia met the Fiscal Year 2016 eligibility criteria for the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

At the same time, the people of landlocked Armenia continue to face the devastating impact of Turkey and Azerbaijan's dual economic blockades. Our assistance has played a vital role in helping alleviate these blockades and promoting Armenia's free market system and democratic development.

We respectfully request that the Subcommittee include language within the Assistance for Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia Account ensuring that not less than \$40 million in overall Fiscal Year 2017 economic aid (including Economic Support Fund, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement, and Global Health Programs), is appropriated for Armenia.

Suspension of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan:

The oil-rich government of Azerbaijan is listed as one of the most corrupt in the world, and has been ruled by the Aliyev family for much of the past half-century.

Azerbaijan continues to launch cross-border attacks not only into Nagorno Karabakh, but also Armenia, a NATO Partnership for Peace country with troops who have served in both Afghanistan and Kosovo. The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, regularly threatens to renew full-scale hostilities, refuses U.S. and international calls to pull back snipers, makes land claims against Armenia, and openly incites anti-Armenian hatred, including against Americans of Armenian descent.

Azerbaijan neither needs nor deserves American military aid.

We respectfully request that the Subcommittee suspend the appropriation of Fiscal Year 2017 U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan until its government ceases cross-border attacks, ends its threat of renewed war, and agrees to a settlement of regional conflicts through peaceful means.

Assistance to Christian and other minority communities from Syria:

As has been widely reported, nearly 20,000 individuals from Syria have sought safety in Armenia, a state, which despite being one of the poorest nations to accept Syrian refugees has

received modest levels of U.S. and international relief and resettlement assistance. Armenia has generously provided full citizenship rights to many Armenian Syrian refugees, and has sought to compassionately integrate arriving families into Armenian society.

In Syria, distribution gaps in need-based international development deliveries to Aleppo, Syria and other areas of the country have resulted in desperately needed food, medicine, and other relief supplies not reaching Armenians, Christian communities, and other at-risk vulnerable minorities.

We request that the Subcommittee instruct the State Department and USAID to put in place policies and programs to close gaps in the distribution of need-based aid to at-risk minority populations in Syria, including Armenians.

We further ask that the Subcommittee instruct the State Department and USAID to ensure the allocation to Armenia of a proportional level of U.S. and international aid supporting the efforts to regional states to resettle those fleeing from Syria.

Assistance to the Javakhk Region in Georgia:

Over the past decade, USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation have expanded their presence in Samtskhe-Javakheti in an effort to address core humanitarian and economic difficulties that face the population. We encourage the Subcommittee, as part of a U.S. aid package to Georgia to enhance U.S. assistance to the largely Armenian-populated region of Samtskhe-Javakheti in south-central Georgia, including funding for job-creation programs and ongoing improvements to transportation and communication infrastructure.

We request that the Subcommittee include language directing USAID to target at least 10 percent of Fiscal Year 2017 aid to Georgia to fund sustainable job-creation programs in the Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Enhancing Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act:

Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act stands as a statement of U.S. opposition to Azerbaijan's blockades and other aggressive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Since its enactment in 1992, Azerbaijan has not lifted its illegal blockades and has ignored U.S. calls to cease its destabilizing threats.

In light of Azerbaijan's aggressive actions, we urge the Subcommittee to add the following language narrowing the President's waiver authority and requiring the following additional certification requirement: "In the last fiscal year, Azerbaijan has not taken hostile action, either through military force or incitement, including but not limited to threatening pronouncements by government officials toward Armenia or Nagorno Karabakh, and has both stated and demonstrated its commitment to pursuing a lasting peace with Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh through solely non-violent means."

Ending the Exclusion of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh from the Peace Process:

The Nagorno Karabakh Republic was one of the three parties to the 1994 cease-fire, which ended military hostilities between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. In its aftermath, Nagorno

Karabakh participated in the OSCE Minsk Group peace process as a partner, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Since 1998, however, at Azerbaijan's insistence, Nagorno Karabakh has been excluded from the peace process. Nagorno Karabakh should, in the interests of peace and basic fairness, be permitted to fully participate in all talks regarding its future. The best and most sustainable path to peace requires direct engagement with the people and government of Nagorno Karabakh, whose fate and future are the subject of ongoing talks and whose security will rest on the outcome of these negotiations.

We respectfully request that the following report language be included: *"In the interest of promoting a lasting and durable peace in the South Caucasus, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic must be reinstated into the OSCE Minsk Group peace process as a full negotiating partner."*

Thank you for your leadership on the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs. We are grateful for your role in strengthening the relationship between the U.S. and Armenia, supporting aid to Nagorno Karabakh, and on all the issues we have raised.

We appreciate your consideration of these requests.

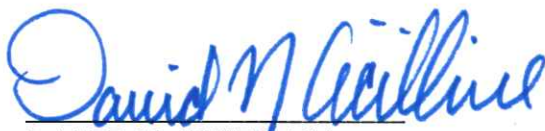
Sincerely,



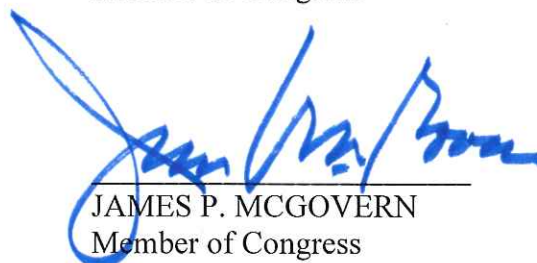
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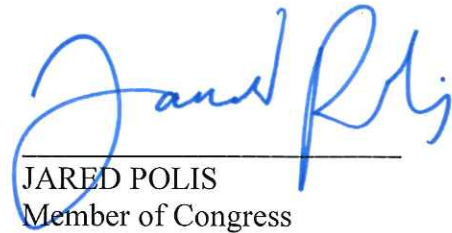
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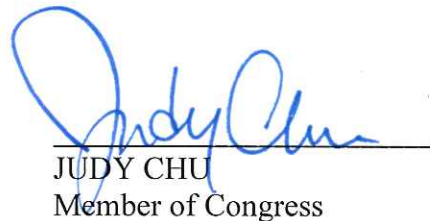
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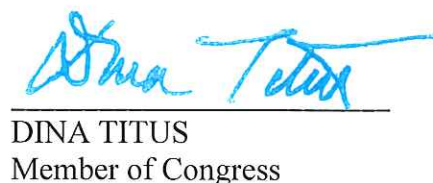
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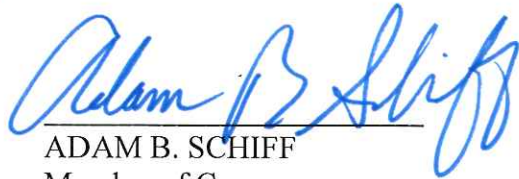
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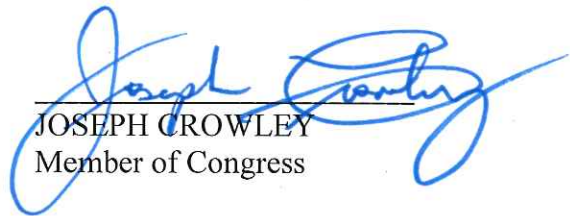
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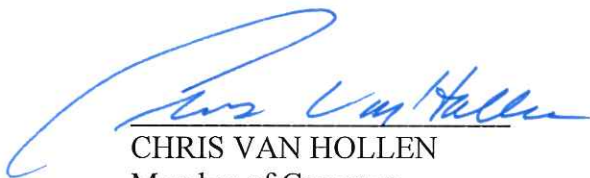
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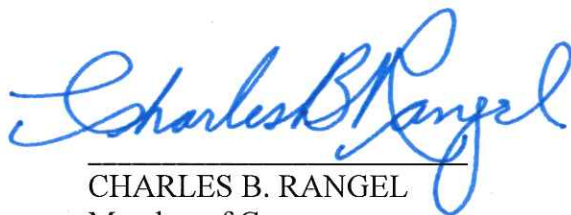
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