

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 16, 2017

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you prepare to welcome Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Washington, D.C., we write to express our serious concerns about the continuing erosion of human rights and the dramatic decline of democratic values in Turkey. We strongly urge you to make these issues a priority during your meeting with President Erdoğan.

Turkey's democratic identity has long been a part of the U.S.-Turkish relationship and its role in the region. Turkey joined the NATO alliance two years after it held its first competitive election in 1950. Turkey's democracy has been a great source of strength for the alliance and a bedrock of stability across the Middle East and the Balkans.

However, over the past several years, Erdoğan and his allies have mounted a continuous assault on the rule of law, particularly using the courts to stifle fundamental rights including free speech, to quash any opposition to their undemocratic actions. They have thrown thousands of Turks in jail, on shaky and political grounds, particularly journalists reporting on their actions, and left many of their citizens, and even Americans in Turkey, fearful of their own futures.

We are particularly troubled by the recent constitutional referendum, which suffered from a lack of transparency and lays the groundwork for Erdoğan to further undermine democratic institutions. The referendum campaign was held under a state of emergency in a tightly controlled media environment where critical voices from the press and civil society were jailed. Election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who were tasked with evaluating the legitimacy of the election itself, found the campaign was imbalanced and essential democratic freedoms were curtailed.

Journalists have been targeted as the Turkish media is subjected to censorship and intimidation by the Erdoğan government. According to Reporters Without Borders' *2017 World Press Freedom Index*, Turkey ranks 155 out of 180 countries making them one of the worst countries for press freedom. Likewise, Amnesty International reports indicate that over 120 journalists have been imprisoned and more than 150 media outlets have been forcibly closed simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and the press.

The government has also increased direct threats against political opposition groups and minority communities including ethnic Kurds. In fact, the government has imprisoned parliamentarians and opposition party leaders. According to media reports, the government has continued its aggressive crackdown since the April 16 referendum.

As it is a critical moment for Turkey and the U.S.-Turkish relationship, the United States must be candid and consistent in our support of democratic values and respect for human rights for the sake of Turkey's future, as well as the long-term interests in the region of both the United States and our NATO allies. We therefore urge you to make support for Turkish democracy a priority, both in your meetings with President Erdoğan this week and in U.S. policy toward Turkey thereafter.

Sincerely,



BRADLEY S. SCHNEIDER  
Member of Congress



BILL JOHNSON  
Member of Congress



ELIOT ENGEL  
Member of Congress



GUS M. BILIRAKIS  
Member of Congress



DANA ROHRABACHER  
Member of Congress



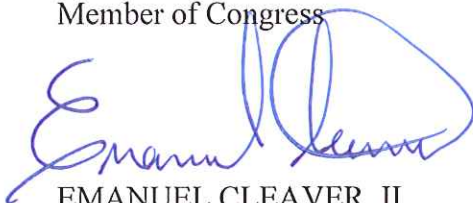
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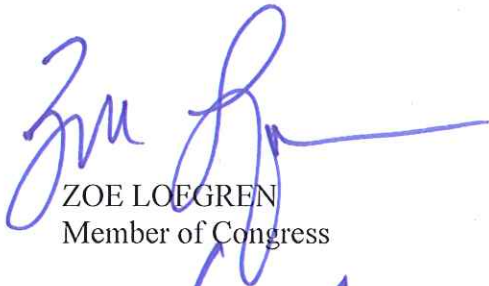


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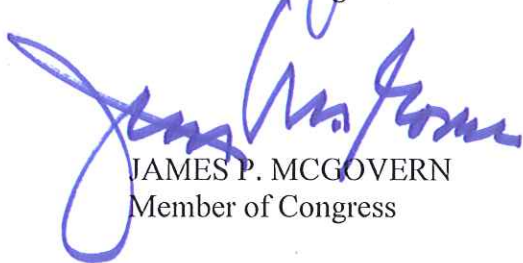




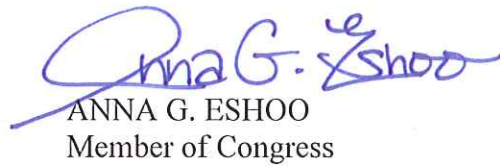
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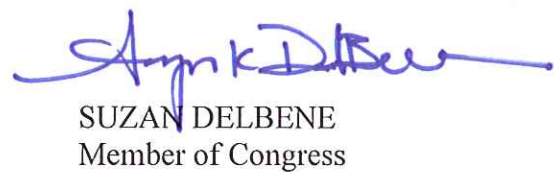
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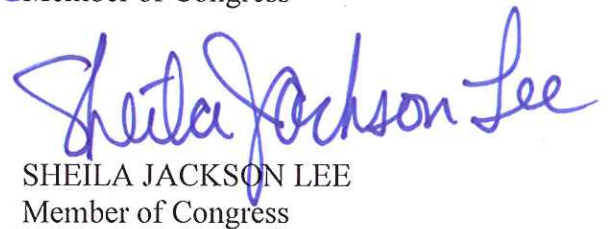
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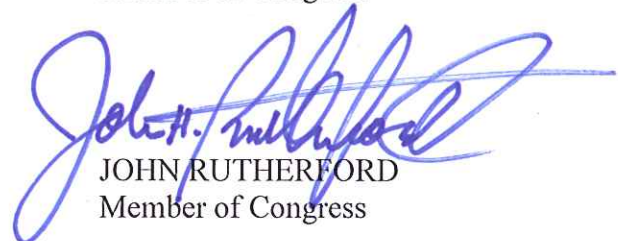
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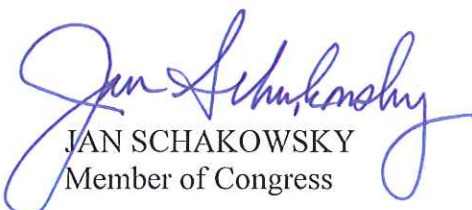
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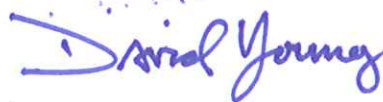


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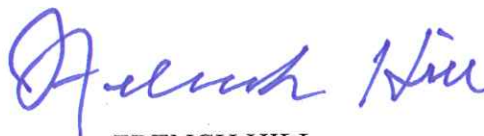
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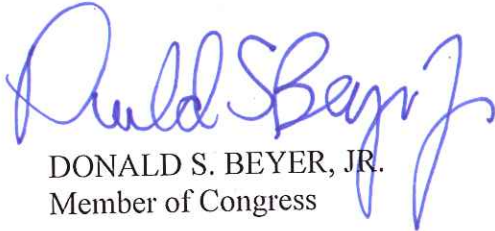
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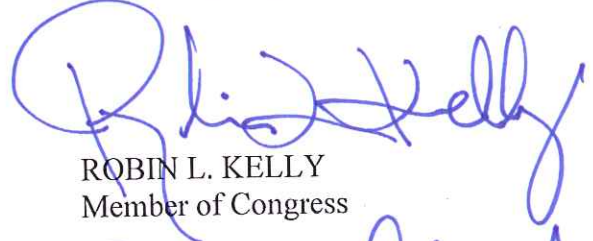
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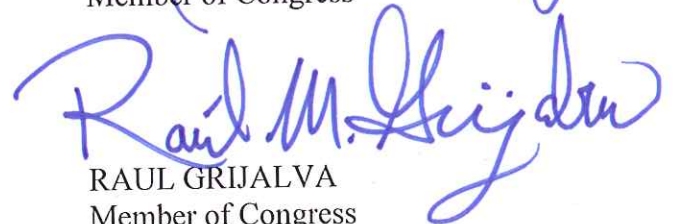
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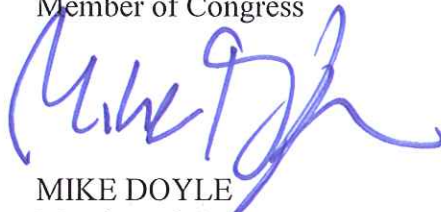
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cc: The Honorable Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State