Statements on 2017 United States Congressional Delegation to Armenia

Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ):

“Yerevan looks increasingly like a modern Western city, but even in the rural areas we saw on the way to Dilijan and Lake Sevan, there were clearly major improvements to the infrastructure and the agricultural economy.

“When I first visited Armenia 20 plus years ago, I worried that subjects where Armenians excelled, for example in education and the arts, would be lost due to the Artsakh War, the earthquake, and the Turkish boycott. There’s still a long way to go, but things are coming back more rapidly than expected; in part because of help coming from diaspora Armenians. The high tech programs we witnessed at the Armenian University at Yerevan and the classical performances at a public school with music students were signs of renewed excellence by younger Armenians. The IT sector has grown over 30% over the last year alone.

“Armenia is embarked on political reform with a new Constitution. The parliamentary elections last spring were mostly transparent and seen as largely free by international observers. The MPs are embarked on judicial reform legislation, and efforts to make judges more independent of government influence. Again, there is a way to go, but I felt the MPs and their leadership were determined to make progress towards democracy.

“We met with the Defense Minister just prior to the independence celebration and fireworks. He mentioned that despite Armenia’s dependence on Russian troops for defense purposes and entry into the Russian Customs Union, the country was determined to improve ties with the West. He stressed the importance of Armenia’s participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace and the contribution to US efforts fighting terrorism in the Mideast.

“President Sargsyan made it clear that Armenia intends to sign an agreement with the European Union this fall that would put the country back on track towards integration with Western Europe. He also asked for more progress on trade and taxation issues that affect American investment in Armenia. Overall, this trip was a great opportunity for Armenia Caucus members to learn what we need to follow-up on when we’re back in Congress to improve US-Armenian relations with regards to trade, military cooperation, and many other areas.”
Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Congressman David Valadao (R-CA):

“Living in the Central Valley, I have heard many stories and descriptions of Armenia from my neighbors and friends. Having the opportunity to experience the country they love firsthand was an unforgettable and enlightening experience.

“In addition to visiting historic landmarks and learning more about the Armenian culture, I met Armenian business leaders and government officials, examining the positive impact of the strong bond between our two nations.”

Armenian Caucus Co-Chair Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-CA):

“I had an amazing and eye-opening journey with five of my fellow Members of Congress on the second congressional delegation to visit Armenia since it has achieved independence. We saw firsthand the amazing strides Armenia has made in overcoming staggering obstacles. This trip also demonstrated that many challenges and opportunities remain for both of our countries. As the Co-Chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus, and as one of only two Members of Congress with Armenian heritage, I remain strongly committed to ensuring our countries continue to build on this burgeoning relationship so that Armenia and the U.S. can prosper and thrive and I am excited about moving the ball forward on these issues.”

Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA):

“My recent visit to Armenia as it celebrated its 25th year of independence, was an extraordinary experience for me personally and as a Member of Congress. I believe the trip strengthened the relationship between the United States and Armenia, and it also deepened my understanding of the challenges the country has and how the United States can be a helpful partner.

“Despite efforts beginning in 1975 to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide, Congress has yet to acknowledge what took place 102 years ago. The deliberate annihilation of 1.5 million Americans, Assyrians, Greeks and other minorities by the Ottoman Empire is a fact that must be acknowledged by the United States. Likewise, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh must be resolved and the Minsk Group is important to this effort.

“I saw first-hand the enormous contributions that the diaspora has made to build a bright future for Armenia. The hospitalities extended were second to none, whether it was a visit to the American University of Armenia, to winemakers or music students, Armenia is on the move with a deep determination to continue building a just and democratic society. I left the country with a great sense of gratitude and pride.”

Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI):

“The opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Karapetyan and Armenian government officials was not only enlightening, but highly productive. The need for cooperation between our two countries
is ongoing, and this diplomatic mission was important to strengthen relationships and continue to keep lines of communication open.

“U.S. support has helped bolster Armenian democratic institutions and civil society, and our two countries must continue to work together to advance these interests. The U.S. and Armenia share strong bonds, as America is one of the largest destinations for the Armenian diaspora. These Armenians have gone on to contribute greatly to their new homes, as well as being influential in the continued struggle for recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

“Meeting with the Catholicos of all Armenians was a focal point of the trip, as well as learning more about the current situation at the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and the importance of continued security cooperation between the U.S. and Armenia. As an OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair country, U.S. involvement is important in achieving a peaceful settlement to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.”

**Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI):**

“I traveled to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh with a bipartisan group of congressional colleagues to hear and see firsthand the challenges and opportunities that exist within Armenia and the region, and identify areas of mutual interest and cooperation that will strengthen the security, economic, and cultural relationships that bind our two countries. Focusing on the priorities of a peaceful, sustainable, and secure region remains the key to deepening the American-Armenian relationship.

“The resilience and courage I witnessed in the people of the Nagorno-Karabakh region who remain in an ongoing conflict over their independence, further demonstrates our shared values of freedom, democracy, and self-determination. We must support a diplomatic resolution to this ongoing conflict, such as what has been proposed by the Minsk Group (made up of the United States, France, and Russia), to allow for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to exercise their freedom and independence.

“One major issue that continues to be unresolved, is global recognition and condemnation of the Armenian genocide. It is unconscionable that the United States government still has not formally recognized and condemned the Armenian genocide. I stand with Armenians in America and around the world in condemning the Armenian Genocide, and I call on my colleagues to adopt House Resolution 220 so we never forget, or repeat, the suffering endured by the Armenian people.

“While there is much progress to be made within Armenia, the resilience of the Armenian people, their rich culture, values, and the depth of economic and academic investment I witnessed during my trip leaves me hopeful for the future of Armenia and the region.”