

Madam Chair and members of the committee, Thank You for allowing me a few minutes of your time.

As most of you may not know, my daughter Amy works in the government affairs firm in DC that represents the Azerbaijan America Alliance, a non-profit organization that seeks to grow the relationship between Azerbaijan and America through educational, cultural and political discourse.

As such, she knows a very great deal about the country of Azerbaijan, its people, its history and its politics. From her, I've had the opportunity to learn about the country, though I admit I am far from expert on many details of Azerbaijan.

I do know, though, that the resolution before you concerning support for an independent Nagorno Karabakh is a very grave affront to the government of Azerbaijan, a country that is a key ally of the United States, and Israel, in a very sensitive region of the world.

Nagorno Karabakh is not, by any stretch of the imagination a separate and independent country. If the Nagorno Karabakh region were to be granted recognition, it would, in an almost certain probability, join Armenia within weeks, if not days. It is important to note that no other country in the world, not even Armenia, has recognized the area as an independent country.

Armenia's invasion of the land and the pursuing war displaced nearly 700,000 Azerbaijani citizens. There have been deep tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia that go back many, many years in time.

It is likely true that there are no "clean hands" in this tension. There is a cease-fire in place that many claim has been routinely ignored by both sides. Consider, however, that the government of Armenia was one of ten rogue nations that supported the recent Russian invasion and takeover of Crimea.

Armenia has also publicly threatened attack on one of the world's most important oil pipelines that supplies Israel with 40% of its oil. Armenia is a close ally of Iran and is a member of the "Collective Security Treaty Organization", Russia's answer to NATO.

While any action by the Vermont Senate might be viewed by some as a small thing, it would NOT be viewed as small by our friends and allies in Azerbaijan. Around the world, it would be seen as "Wow, a state of the United States has just stuck a finger in Azerbaijan's eye!" I would submit that would be a very, very wrong message to send.

As we look at world politics right now, I see Azerbaijan as a young, democratic country that is western-looking, and successfully finding it's place among the world of nations. While Russia has already devoured Crimea and is casting an eye on all of the Ukraine, I must ask what it might take for them to begin thinking about a forced annexation of Azerbaijan, a former Soviet Union Republic.

I simply think that this whole issue is far too complex and far too sensitive for Vermont to be able to understand well enough to take a position. I know we have a desire to support freedom and independence, but I don't think that would be the result in this case.

I'm convinced this would be a dramatic insult to a young country that, while it may be undergoing a few stumbles as it learns how to survive in the modern world, and on its own terms, it is a country of good people who are diverse in many ways, where its neighbors are not. It is a young country that wants very much to align itself with the western world. It is a young country deserving of our support, not our condemnation.

I ask you, please, do not pass this resolution. I am not asking you to make some show of support for Azerbaijan, or against Armenia for that matter, but just to remain neutral and silent on an extremely sensitive situation.