Mr. President, I

rise to discuss the critical situation

concerning the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The seriousness of the Taliban’s gross

injustices is alarming. This movement

continues to make outrageous demands

on religious minorities, women, and

the relief workers trying to alleviate

the suffering of the Afghan people.

With impunity, the Taliban has largely

ignored international condemnation,

becoming increasingly fanatical and

strict.

I am cosponsoring a bill with Senators

BROWNBACK and BOXER which

condemns the Taliban for its harsh demands

on Muslims, Hindus, women,

and religious minorities. The legislation

strongly urges the Taliban to reopen

United Nations offices and hospitals

so that the people of Afghanistan

may receive necessary relief. I encourage

my colleagues to consider cosponsoring

this legislation.

Hindus and all other religious minorities

have been ordered to distinguish

themselves from Muslims by

wearing yellow badges. This decree is

reminiscent of the Nazis forcing the

Jews to wear the yellow star of David.

It is shocking that the Taliban would

order this kind of religious branding.

Furthermore, Muslims and non-Muslims

are prohibited from living together,

and religious minorities are not

permitted to construct new places of

worship. The fanatic Taliban religious

police invoke terror on city streets,

sometimes whipping those who are not

attending mosques at designated times.

This kind of religious intolerance is

abominable and should not be allowed.

The Taliban’s iron grip on Afghanistan

not only affects religious practices,

it is further devastating the suffering

Afghan people by obstructing relief

efforts by the United Nations and

other humanitarian organizations. The

United Nations World Food Program

believes it may be forced to close

around 130 bakeries in Afghanistan’s

capital city if the Taliban will not

allow women to help address the needs

of the hungry. Without the aid of both

men and women, program leaders cannot

maintain the bread distribution

program. Also in the capital, a 40-bed

surgical hospital was forced to close its

doors. Sixteen international staff

members escaped to Pakistan because

there were genuine concerns about

their safety. This is not the first time

foreign staff have had to flee. Several

U.N. workers have even been arrested,

a gross violation of a previous agreement

between the Taliban and the U.N.

that relief workers would be protected.

The Taliban is compromising both the

safety of international relief workers

and the well-being of the Afghan people

with their harsh and unreasonable policies.

The injustice meted out by the

Taliban is sobering and demands continued

attention. That is why I am cosponsoring

S. Con. Res. 42 with Senators

BROWNBACK and Boxer, and it is

my fervent wish that the suffering endured

by all the Afghan people and

international workers be quickly relieved.