

WASHINGTON—Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (D-IL) released an open letter to his constituents about his trip to Poland over the July 4th weekend. Quigley attended the 10th anniversary of the Community of Democracies, laid a wreath at President Lech Kaczynski's grave, and visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial.

Dear Friend,

I recently had the honor of representing the United States Congress in Poland at an important moment in that nation's history, and in our own relationship with the growing democracies of the world. As I walked the beautiful and historic streets of Krakow during the Fourth of July weekend, I was reminded of the critical role Poles such as Kazimierz Pulaski and Tadeusz Kosciuszko played in creating the world's oldest democracy in the United States. I was also reminded that Poland's constitution is the second oldest in the world after ours, and that for more than 90 years, our two nations have shared diplomatic relations and a purpose to advance freedom and democracy across the globe.

The strength of this purpose was evident in Krakow as the city hosted a conference celebrating the Community of Democracies. This year, leaders representing more than 106 democratic and democratizing countries around the globe attended the conference to commemorate the council's 10th anniversary, to celebrate democracy, and to speak about the challenges that democracy faces in the world today. It was my privilege to witness the strength of Polish democracy first hand, as the nation held its Presidential elections during my visit there.

This year's election occurred early due to the tragic death of Polish President Kaczynski, his wife Maria, and 94 other civic, political, and spiritual leaders of Poland in a plane crash over the Katyn forest. During my trip to Krakow, I visited the Wawel Cathedral and laid a wreath at President Kaczynski's grave. I was also honored to deliver a flag and resolution from Speaker Pelosi on behalf of the House of Representatives to Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski expressing sympathy for this tragic loss of life. The people of the United States stand together with the people of Poland, and we stand in admiration for the strength of Poland's democratic institutions which have survived and continued during this unthinkable tragedy.

It was a truly humbling experience to see in person the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, a place that remains a symbol of terror and genocide. It was in my parents' lifetime

that hundreds of thousands of Jews, Poles, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the mentally and physically handicapped were slaughtered here. The sadness has not dissipated, and the overwhelming sense of sorrow is still palpable. During the Community of Democracies conference Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pledged \$15 million to preserve the concentration camps so that future generations may bear witness to what occurred there. I fully support this initiative.

Lastly, it was personally rewarding to fulfill a commitment to the Polish community of my district to visit Poland and experience the culture, the food, and the people. While in Poland, I continued the ongoing conversations about the need to include Poland as a country that may participate in the Visa Waiver Program. This proposal has longstanding and bipartisan support. I strongly believe the U.S. should modernize the Visa Waiver Program by enhancing program security requirements and extending visa-free privileges to Poland, a country that has proven its steadfast dedication to the cause of freedom and friendship with the United States. Including Poland in the Visa Waiver Program will have positive security, economic, and bilateral effects, and I shared these sentiments with the leaders in Krakow.

Polish traditions are rich, the culture is vibrant, and the people are welcoming and friendly. I come home to Chicago with a newfound respect for Poland's commitment to democratic ideals and a closer understanding of the culture of my Polish constituents. I also return with a greater recognition that our nation must be active in its support for our partners in democracy. This means continuing to advance the diplomatic relations between our two countries and finding meaningful ways to connect with the people of Poland, such as finally including their nation in the Visa Waiver Program.

Sincerely,

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress