

# California State Senate

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## SELECT COMMITTEE ON CALIFORNIA, ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH MUTUAL TRADE, ART AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

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SENATOR ANTHONY J. PORTANTINO  
CHAIR



### Background

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#### Overview of Armenian-Azeri Relations

Armenia is one of the oldest civilizations in the world; its capital city of Yerevan was established several decades before Rome. The Armenians have faced and overcome many tribulations over the centuries. Notably, Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in 301 AD. Over time, much of Armenia's historic lands were seized by the Ottoman Empire, predecessor to today's Republic of Turkey. The Armenians lived for decades alongside the Turks and other ethnic minorities in the region, contributing largely to the economic prosperity of the Empire. Beginning in the late 19th century and continuing into the early 20th century, however, as the Ottoman Empire began to radicalize, Armenians were slaughtered en masse. These massacres culminated in what is now known as the Armenian Genocide—the first Genocide of the 20th century—wherein 1.5 million Armenians perished at the hands of Ottoman Turkey. Armenians were rounded up, deported, sent on death marches, and brutally slaughtered over the next several years. Turkey to this day denies that genocide took place and has made no effort at reparations.

With the establishment of the Soviet Union in the midst of the Genocide, Armenia once again lost land and its independence. This time, the Soviets annexed present-day Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and handed it to Soviet Azerbaijan in a peace treaty compromise. Tensions remained high between Armenia and Turkey-backed Azerbaijan over the next several decades, reaching an all-time high when the fall of the Soviet Union was imminent. In the 1980s, there were 17,000 Armenians living in the city of Sumgait in Azerbaijan. Armenians were a large part of the workforce and educated class. Civil unrest mounted in the country due in large part to overcrowding, unemployment, and rampant poverty.

**Sumgait Pogroms, 1988**

On February 20, 1988, amid increasing economic instability and political turmoil, thousands of Armenians held a peaceful demonstration in Stepanakert, Azerbaijan, demanding that the region be rejoined with Armenia in accordance with its original borders. That day, the Supreme Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh voted to join the Armenian SSR, which Azeri authorities strongly opposed. Noting these demands, the Azeris took action. One week after the peaceful demonstrations were held, on the evening of February 27th, 1988, the pogrom of the Armenian population of Sumgait began. The next three days would see brutal atrocities Armenians had faced once before, during the Genocide earlier that century.

The Azeri perpetrators targeted victims based solely on their Armenian background. First, the Armenians of Sumgait were blocked from leaving the town. Then, the addresses of Armenian residents were collected. Finally, the massacres began. Men, women, and children were raped and sexually abused both within their homes and publicly on the streets. Bodies were mutilated with axes, to the point of being unidentifiable. People were dragged through streets, homes were invaded and ransacked, and anyone who tried to fight back was killed. First responders were prevented from arriving to the scene, and Azeri police did nothing to stop the violence.

On March 1, Soviet troops were able to suppress the violence. However, much of the debris was cleaned up before investigations could begin. The Soviet media remained silent, as did the local media within Sumgait, choosing not to report on the incident until there was international outcry. Ultimately, Soviet authorities arrested 400 perpetrators of the killings. In July 1988, the United States Senate unanimously passed Amendment 2690 to the Fiscal Year 1989 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill (House Resolution 4782), which called on the Soviet government to respect the desire for autonomy of the Armenian people. The resolution noted that dozens of Armenians were killed and hundreds more injured in the preceding months. As many as 200 Armenians were reported to have perished in the Sumgait Pogroms. It would later be considered the beginning of the Armenian war for independence, known widely as the Nagorno-Karabakh War.

**Present Day Azeri-Armenian Relations**

The Sumgait Pogrom marked the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh War between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war was fought from 1988 to 1994 over the liberation of historic Armenian lands. It culminated when the Armenian majority voted to secede from Azerbaijan and proclaimed the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh as a sovereign entity.

Violence has persisted throughout the two decades since the end of the war. Beginning in 1998, the Azeri government ordered the destruction of nearly all Armenian churches and cemeteries in Julfa, Nakhichevan, a historically Armenian region located within Azerbaijan's borders. The demolition continued into 2005. In February of 2004, Azeri Lieutenant, Ramil

Safarov, hacked to death Armenian Lieutenant, Gurgen Markaryan, with an ax. Safarov was extradited in 2012, after which he was pardoned and dubbed a hero by President Aliyev. And April of 2016 saw the largest escalation of violence against Armenians since the US-brokered ceasefire agreement of 1994, when Azerbaijan launched an unprovoked 4-day attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, killing 99 ethnic Armenians and injuring scores more.

### **Anna Astvasturian-Turcotte**

Ms. Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte is an author, lecturer, lawyer, business woman and a human rights activist. She is an Armenian refugee from Baku, Azerbaijan. After fleeing Baku in the fall of 1989 due to ethnic cleansing of Armenians, Anna and her family spent three years in Armenia as refugees before coming to United States in 1992.

Anna received Bachelor of Arts degrees in English & Literature and Philosophy & Religion, a minor in Russian Language & Literature from the University of North Dakota. She received her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Maine School of Law. As a law student Anna received an Outstanding Law Student of the Year by Who's Who American Law Students. In 2004 Anna was one of the first Americans to clerk at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands after working toward and observing the ICC's creation at the United Nations in New York.

In 2012 Anna published her book, titled *Nowhere, a Story of Exile*, which she wrote at the age of 14 as her family settled in North Dakota as refugees. The book is based on the childhood diaries she kept as her family was fleeing Baku, Azerbaijan and during the years as refugees in Armenia. In April, 2013 Anna successfully spearheaded the recognition efforts of Nagorno-Karabakh independence at the State of Maine House of Representatives. In November, 2015 she was elected to the Westbrook Maine City Council by a 64% landslide. In 2017 the Russian translation of Anna's book was published.

Anna is the recipient of Mkhitar Gosh Medal, Republic of Armenia's highest civilian honor awarded by President Serge Sargsyan for exceptional achievements in the political-social spheres, as well as outstanding efforts in the fields of diplomacy, law, and political science. Anna also received a Gratitude Medal from the President of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Bako Sahakyan, Vahan Cardashian award for her contributions within the Armenian Diaspora from ANCA-WR and Activism Award from ANCA-ER for enhancement of human rights, democracy, truth and justice.

Aside from speaking worldwide on genocide prevention, refugee issues, international law and human rights, Anna has a 13 year career in banking regulatory compliance and risk management, currently as a Vice President, Senior Corporate Compliance Manager at TD Bank. Anna lives in Westbrook, Maine with her husband John and their son and daughter.

**Trade between California and Armenia**

California is home to nearly 1,000,000 residents of Armenian heritage. Accordingly, the state has a substantial interest in maintaining strong economic ties with the Republic of Armenia. To that end, in 2002, under the leadership of Governor Gray Davis and State Senator Jack Scott, California established the California International Trade Office in Armenia (CITO). At the time, Armenia had such missions in 15 countries around the world. Then-Senator Scott believed that such a commitment with Armenia would be very lucrative for the state.

Governor Schwarzenegger signed SB 897 (Scott-Pasadena) in 2005, which extended the sunset provision for the trade office in Armenia to 2008. Since then, however, the state has not pursued extending the CITO, instead choosing to cooperate on a more informal level with the Republic of Armenia. Senator Anthony J. Portantino, who established the Select Committee on California, Armenia and Artsakh Mutual Trade, Art and Cultural Exchange in 2017, has called for reinvigorated trade with Armenia through the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the subsequent re-establishment of a trade office.

The first step in the effort toward increased trade and bilateral cooperation is the signing of an MOU between California and Armenia. An MOU is an agreement between two parties detailing the respective parties' obligations and responsibilities. This agreement is critical because it details the efforts each side will make in working together. The signing of an MOU is only an initial step because the document is nonbinding. Still, its advantages are many, as both California and Armenia stand to benefit.

California currently utilizes MOUs with the state's counterparts across China to assist in building relationships, in addition to cultural and business opportunities. Mr. Gordon Hinkle, Vice President of the California Center (Global Operations), has helped to lead numerous executive-level trade missions to numerous cities and provinces in China. Gordon joined Governor Jerry Brown in April of 2013 in China, for a historic Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony in the city of Nanjing, with China's Secretary Luo Zhijun, solidifying plans to engage in business and cultural exchanges with the Jiangsu Province and officially announced the development of the California Center in China, which held its Grand Opening in May of 2014. He will speak to the broad benefits of MOUs and California's interests in engaging with foreign governments. Mr. Valery Mkrtoumian, Deputy Consul General of the Republic of Armenia, will discuss the importance of an MOU between California and Armenia, and will highlight the need for a trade office to solidify relations.

**UC Divestment from the Republic of Turkey**

The University of California, the state's largest employer, has holdings in the Republic of Turkey by way of bonds. The UC does not make public the details of such holdings because of mounting pressure from across the state—including students, academics, and the legislature—calling for divestment from controversial, and often morally unsound, corporations and governments.

In 2013, a grassroots movement led by a handful of UC students of Armenian descent grew into a statewide effort to urge the University of California to divest from the Republic of Turkey. The momentum, led by students Razmig Sarkissian, Arev Hovsepyan, and others, was inspired by the campaign calling on the UC to divest from fossil fuels. Over the next three years, the student government at every UC voted unanimously in support of divestment. The effort also gained traction in the legislature, where AB 2650 (Nazarian, 2016), calling for the State of California to divest from Turkey, passed the Assembly with unanimous support. While a huge milestone symbolically, this victory is not enough. The movement requires action from the UC, who thus far has remained silent on the issue of divestment from Turkey.

The UC has in recent years divested from various entities, including the private prison system and the Dakota Access Pipeline. Both of these efforts began as grassroots movements and gained the increasing support of the public, ultimately leading the UC to reconsider its stance and move to divest their holdings. In 2015, the UC divested \$30 million in holdings from companies that operate private prisons, a decision which did not require regent approval. The move was hailed a victory by students and advocates, who pointed to the fact that the UC should do business in the realm of education instead of profiting from incarceration. In 2017, the UC regents divested \$150 million from two companies responsible for building the Dakota Access Pipeline, notorious for allegedly threatening sacred Native American burial grounds and the water quality in the area. The UC continues to have \$2.6 billion invested in fossil fuel corporations.

Divestment from the Republic of Turkey is essential to the Armenian community and the state for many reasons. With California having the greatest number of Armenian-Americans in the country, and being home the most diaspora Armenians anywhere in the world after Russia, there is a particular interest among the community in how the UC invests student tuition dollars and taxpayer money. The Republic of Turkey has a staggering record of human rights abuses. In the early twentieth century, the Turkish government carried out genocide of ethnic Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians, resulting in the extermination of roughly 3,000,000 people. Since that time, not only has Turkey refused to acknowledge or atone for the genocide, it has also continued to perpetrate atrocities against the aforementioned groups and other ethnic minorities. Whether by confiscation and destruction of sacred grounds, or the criminalization of political dissent, or the relentless attacks on its own Kurdish population, the Republic of Turkey hardly stands as a model for the UC or its students. Thus, the Armenian-Americans in California face particular pain in knowing that their tuition dollars directly support the government which continues to oppress their counterparts in Turkey. Moreover, with recent crackdowns on its own military,

legislators, and intellectuals following a failed 2016 coup attempt, Turkey has become a full-fledged authoritarian government. The UC's unremitting commitment to doing business with such a government indicates a lack of moral leadership, and shows signs of an economic partnership bound to unravel as the country continues to descend into totalitarianism. With such a high risk of impending economic failure, divestment from the Republic of Turkey is also imperative for all UC students and the residents of California more broadly.

Mr. Jagdeep Bachher, Chief Investment Officer, Vice President of Investments at the University of California, will discuss the interests of the UC in maintaining its financial obligations in the Republic of Turkey, and will touch on the ongoing effort by the UC to work with the American University of Armenia. Ms. Arev Hovespyan, Mr. Razmig Sarkissian, and Mr. Aram Manoukian, will discuss their involvement in leading the Divest Turkey campaign and future steps.

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### Speaker Biographies

#### Panel 1

##### Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte

Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte is an author, lecturer, lawyer, business woman and a human rights activist. She is an Armenian refugee from Baku, Azerbaijan. After fleeing Baku in the fall of 1989 due to ethnic cleansing of Armenians, Ms. Astvatsaturian Turcotte and her family spent three years in Armenia as refugees before coming to United States in 1992.

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political science. She also received a Gratitude Medal from the President of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Bako Sahakyan, Vahan Cardashian award for her contributions within the Armenian Diaspora from ANCA-WR and Activism Award from ANCA-ER for enhancement of human rights, democracy, truth and justice.

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## **Panel 2**

### **Gordon Hinkle**

Gordon Hinkle is the Sr. Vice President for Golden California Inc. / California Center and heads global operations, including: membership recruitment and oversight on service management. He oversees numerous special programs highly focused in the areas of: food and agriculture, education, sports, media, and entertainment and also serves as the Government Relations Director for its sister-company, McWong International Inc.

In recent years, Mr. Hinkle has helped to lead numerous executive-level trade missions to numerous cities and provinces in China. He joined Governor Jerry Brown in April of 2013 in China, for a historic Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony in the city of Nanjing, with China's Secretary Luo Zhijun, solidifying plans to engage in business and cultural exchanges with the Jiangsu Province and officially announced the development of the California Center in China, which held its Grand Opening in May of 2014. Mr. Hinkle was also instrumental in helping to establish economic and cultural ties between the State of California and the Sichuan Province, solidified in an agreement by Governors from both states in 2015 and the launch of a state-of-the-art facility for California Center in Sichuan's capitol city of Chengdu in 2016.

Throughout his career, Mr. Hinkle has served in many public policy and service roles, including: Chair of the Planning Commission for the City of Roseville, California; Press Secretary for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation as Governor Schwarzenegger's Appointee from 2007-2010; elected to the Placer County Republican Central Committee, and is currently serving as a Presidential Appointee to the U.S. Selective Service Board in California Region III (Appointed consecutively by both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama).

### **Valery Mkrtoumian**

Valery Mkrtoumian is the Deputy Consul General and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia. Mr. Mkrtoumian has served a long tenure as a diplomat in various capacities across

the globe. He has served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Armenia, was the head of the State Protocol Department, the Director of the European Department, and Director of the American Department. The Deputy Consul General also served as the Charge d'Affaires of Armenia in Ottawa, Canada, Consul General of Armenia in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Head of Foreign Relations Department in the Parliament of Armenia, and as Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Armenia. Mr. Mkrtoumian attended the Yerevan State Linguistic University of Armenia, and pursued his post graduate studies in Moscow, Russia. He speaks English, Russian, and Armenian.

### **Panel 3**

#### **Jagdeep Singh Bachher**

Jagdeep Singh Bachher is responsible for managing the UC pension, endowment, short-term, and total-return investment pools. He reports directly to the Board of Regents on investment matters and the chief financial officer on administrative issues related to managing a group of more than 60 investment professionals and staff.

Before joining the UC system, Bachher was an executive vice president of venture and innovation for one of Canada's largest and most diversified investment fund managers. He was with Alberta Investment Management Corp (AIMCo), based in Edmonton since 2009. He also served as the corporation's deputy chief investment officer and chief operating officer. With an investment portfolio of more than \$66 billion (U.S. dollars), AIMCo invests globally on behalf of public sector pension plans, provincial endowments, and government funds.

Prior to his position at AIMCo, he served as president at JH Investments (Delaware) LLC and worked in the U.S. Wealth Management, Canadian, and Investments divisions of Manulife Financial. Before joining Manulife, he was an entrepreneur. He is a visiting scholar in the Global Projects Center at Stanford University and chairman emeritus of the Institutional Investors Roundtable, a leading financial think tank. He is also a member of Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) and the Institute of Corporate Directors. Bachher received his Ph.D. and M.A.Sc. degrees in management sciences and B.A.Sc. degree in mechanical engineering from University of Waterloo. He has been a champion for change in the investment business and gained an international reputation as an innovator.

#### **Arev Hovsepian**

Arev Hovsepian graduated from UCLA with a degree in Psychobiology in 2016. During her time at UCLA, she held various leadership positions in student organizations and served as the External Vice President of the Armenian Students' Association. Ms. Hovsepian is an active member of the Armenian Youth Federation and is one of the founders of the organization's Divest Turkey campaign. She currently works as a legal assistant and will begin law school in the fall.

#### **Razmig Sarkissian**

Razmig Sarkissian works as an educator and Digital Media Director at Armenian Mesrobian School (his alma mater). He graduated from UCLA with a degree in English and minors in Armenian Studies and Digital Humanities. As an undergraduate at UCLA, Mr. Sarkissian served as president of the Armenian Students' Association, and worked within the Undergraduate Students Association Council's External Vice President's Office as Director of Student Lobby Certification. He is a current member of the Armenian Youth Federation Western United States, an international organization dedicated to the principles of freedom, democracy, self-determination, economic justice, and social equality. He is one of the founder of the Divest Turkey campaign.

**Aram Manoukian**

Aram Manoukian is a third year UCLA student studying Geography. He is active in many campus organizations, amongst them the Armenian Students' Association, where he focuses on initiatives that involve political activism. He is a member of the Divest Turkey campaign.