

Turkey – Free Pastor Andrew Brunson

[due to their alleged connection with the attempted coup,](#)” according to the Central Intelligence Agency.

What does Pastor Brunson have to do with any of that?

Erdogan believes the leader of the coup attempt was Fethullah Gulen, a 77-year-old Turkish cleric who now lives in Pennsylvania. And like any insecure authoritarian, Erdogan is determined to bring Gulen back to Turkey to extract revenge. So Brunson, who founded the Izmir Resurrection Church in Turkey, is to Erdogan [Erdogan said last year, referring to Gulen,](#) “and we will do what we can in the judiciary to give you this one (Brunson).”

[ARRA Editor’s Note: Unlike Pastor Branson who has been imprisoned and is still prohibited from leaving Turkey, Fethullah Gulen is free in the U.S. to do anything he wishes including returning to Turkey which could probably result in his death.]

Brunson was in prison for 20 months and recently was released to house arrest. The North Carolinian, whose daughter graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in December, faces a prison sentence of up to 35 years if he is convicted at the end of his ongoing trial, the Associated Press reported.

U.S. Thom Tillis, R-NC, has done admirable work in bringing Brunson’s incarceration to the attention of the world. Tillis has visited Brunson twice in Turkey and takes to the Senate floor every week to remind his countrymen of Brunson’s plight. He also garnered the support of Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-NH, and James Lankford, R-Okla. Several House members from North Carolina also have pushed for Brunson’s release

"I heard that he was really concerned that maybe the American people would look at the indictment and believe it and forget him," Tillis told *The News & Observer's* Brian Murphy in April. "It was important for me to go over there, face-to-face visit him in prison and tell him that that's not going to happen."

Tillis, who has observed part of Brunson's trial, described it as "truly a kangaroo court" with secret witnesses.

In part because of Tillis' efforts, President Donald Trump has taken up Brunson's cause and increased the pressure on Erdogan. Last week, Trump said he was doubling tariffs on imported Turkish metals to punish Turkey for refusing to free Brunson; on Tuesday, Erdogan said Turkey would boycott U.S.-made electronic products. *The Washington Post* [responded to the Post](#). He assured Americans that democracy was thriving in Turkey and they should have no concerns.

Absent from his 254-word letter was a single word saying that Turkey had any evidence that Brunson had committed a crime.