

hunting with them all came back in one piece. The story goes that Senator SCHUMER even shot a bird or two.

A lot of us have some trouble accepting that, but that is what BEN says and I will take him at his word. He has bagged all kinds of game birds—dove, quail, pheasants, turkey—but he has also had the opportunity to hunt all over the world and has bagged some of the most exotic game that is possible for a hunter to hunt. He is the epitome of a sportsman.

BEN isn't just a great hunter, though. He is also an accomplished practical joker and a wonderful singer. That may surprise some people. In our caucus, I proved to everyone that he could sing, and sing quite well. He recorded a few years ago a song called "Western Town" to raise money for visually impaired children. He was one of a dozen Nebraskan celebrities to record songs for this charity. I obtained a copy of this and played it at a Democratic caucus a few years ago. It was a hit. He was singing—it is his voice—and it was very good. Here is how it goes:

I'm from a western town in Nebraska. Don't know why I left so long ago. All I know is this western town in Nebraska lives in my heart and in my soul.

He did a great job of that song, as he has done everything since I have known him.

I am sure BEN is looking forward to going home to the western town—Omaha—where he lives with his wife Diane. She is wonderful. She was a great first lady and a wonderful Senator's spouse. I like her for lots of reasons, the smile she has, but also she makes some of the best chocolate chip cookies I have ever eaten. They have four children and five grandchildren. As he departs for Omaha, he will be sorely missed here in the Senate.

He has always been a loyal and dedicated member of this caucus, even when he was showing loyalty by questioning the wisdom of the party sometimes. He is arguably the most conservative member of the caucus. And while there are a few things BEN and I disagree on, we agree on most everything. Through the last 12 years he has been a valued member of the team. He has made many of our accomplishments possible through his dedication to country first and State second. That is how it should be.

Edwin Chapin, a North American preacher and poet, said:

No more duty can be urged upon those who are entering the great theater of life than simple loyalty to their best convictions.

BEN NELSON lives by his convictions, even though it may put him at odds with his party or his constituents. His highest duty is to country and his conscience.

We had a retirement party a week ago tomorrow, and when it was over, I grabbed BEN and we embraced. I care a great deal about him. He has made some extremely difficult votes, but he did it because it was the right thing to do. His duty is to country and his con-

science, and I repeat, I have such high respect for BEN NELSON. I will miss him. I have enjoyed working with him.

I congratulate BEN NELSON on his career in public service, including his service in the Senate, and wish him the very best in his retirement.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate shall be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the unanimous consent order, the vote that had been scheduled will be delayed until tomorrow.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. We are in morning business; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

TRIBUTE TO JENNI RIVERA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, before I begin today, I know there are millions of people around the world and in this country who are mourning the loss of a singer by the name of Jenni Rivera, who was a huge star, particularly in Latin America but also in the United States. She died yesterday evening in a plane crash in northern Mexico.

Jenni was a real American success story. She was born in California to immigrants from Mexico. She started working at her father's small record label in Long Beach, CA, and she recorded from there. She made a number of top hits that made all the charts around the world. She was recently in Florida to receive a Billboard Music Award and performed at the Billboard Music Awards. We saw that on TV. My mom was a huge fan of hers—and also kind of the equivalent of "The Voice" in Mexico on the Telemundo network. She passed away last night.

Her calling card was she was a singer in a genre of music that is largely dominated by males. Yet she brought a powerful voice to that genre where she sang frankly about her struggles to give her children a better life in this country. Her death at a young age is a real tragedy. I know there are millions

of people across the country and around the world mourning her loss today. She is survived by her five children and two grandchildren.

Our prayers go out for her that God may grant her family the peace to deal with this difficult circumstance.

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I come here on December 10, Human Rights Day. I want to briefly discuss human rights because, I would just say, while we have made great advances around the world in the cause of human rights, there are still a lot of roads to travel. Today is a good opportunity to take note of some of the struggles and challenges around the world with regard to human rights.

The first issue I want to talk about with regard to human rights is modern-day slavery. When people think about slavery they think about the historic nature of slavery in this country or around the world. It is hard to imagine that today, in the 21st century, that there are slaves in the world. It is even harder to believe there are slaves in the United States, but the fact is there are. It has been well documented that human trafficking around the world numbers in the millions.

Of course, sex trafficking is a big part of that, a grotesque part of that, and we are all aware that it is a very serious problem. So too is forced labor-type slavery, which we find around the world and even in the United States. In fact, there is no major city in the United States that does not have an element of human trafficking and human slavery within its confines. I think it is important to understand that exists, it is real, and it is happening.

To that extent, remember there are things we are trying to do in this legislative body, in the Senate, in Washington, to deal with this issue. One of the issues we are going to have a chance to deal with soon, I hope, is reauthorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which was sponsored last year by Senator BROWN and Senator LEAHY. Hopefully, we can finish that before the end of this year, but if we cannot, I hope early in the next Congress we will address it.

As you know, there are also reports that the State Department does rank countries around the world on the efforts they are making to deal with human trafficking, and they actually rank them in three tiers, the third being the worst, those nations not doing enough. I hope we look at how we reform the process of giving some of these countries waivers. There are countries that are perpetually on the list of the worst possible places with regard to government policy toward human trafficking. Yet they are getting waivers from the implications and the consequences of being a tier 3 country. There are countries getting that waiver every single year.

I hope we will examine the process legislatively, of how we grant those waivers, so we can have more information as to exactly why it is our government is granting waivers to other governments and other nations that are not making any advances whatsoever on human slavery and trafficking.

Another aspect we should take some time to look at is some transparency from the business community, particularly large international companies that do business around the world. We should look for ways to encourage and incentivize companies to report voluntarily on their supply chains to ensure the products we use in the United States are not the product of human slavery, modern slavery around the world. We can do that as well.

Obviously, we do not want to put any more onerous costs on our businesses, and we will be careful how we approach it, but I think it is important that we know the products sold in the United States are not directly or indirectly benefiting from slavery around the world. That is something I hope we will remember; that human trafficking and human slavery is real, it exists all around the world, and exists in our own country. I hope we will continue making strides dealing with this issue.

One last point on that is a few months ago several of my colleagues and I sent a letter to the *Village Voice*, which is a newspaper in the United States, which actively—and unfortunately—advertises in its back pages, including in a site called *backpage.com*. It advertises the services of people being held against their will in those circumstances. It is outrageous to believe a major American publication continues to advertise the services of young girls and young boys, some of whom are minors, and is doing so shamelessly. I hope they will heed our call to stop that from happening. It is a massive source of revenue for that company. It is outrageous, it is disgusting, it is grotesque, and I hope more of our colleagues will join us in writing a new letter to them in continuing to call attention to this because it is simply unacceptable.

Secondly, I want to turn to the issue of religious freedom, which is another human rights cause around the world. Sadly there is not enough advancement being made in that regard. We are seeing a step backward with regard to religious liberty and religious freedom around the world.

In April of this year the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom released its latest report with some very grim news. I want to go through some of it, but it is important to understand we are not talking about the countries, we are talking about the governments. There are some governments that are aiding and abetting the persecution of unprotected religious minorities. I want to highlight some of those countries and governments. The list is long, but these are a few I wanted to point to today that are truly unacceptable.

Let's start with the People's Republic of China, which is not exactly a beacon of hope for those who are looking for religious liberty. Of course we all know the situation in Tibet, which is not just a religious issue, it is a cultural issue. We see the self-immolation of folks who are willing to burn alive because of the effort of that government to wipe out their identity. What they are going through is intolerable.

It goes much deeper than that. Proselytizing Christians and the orthodox, "nonpatriotic" Catholic Church, face significant oppression. The Chinese Government actually authorizes who the leadership of the Catholic Church can be. It is truly unique that in all the world there is a government that will tell them who their bishops are and who will run their church. If they worship outside of that setting, they are persecuted.

There are others, of course, such as the Tibetan Buddhists whom I mentioned before. Here is a report that talks about that. It is not just the religious believers who are facing persecution in China. This is from the report:

The Chinese government also continues to harass, detain, intimidate, disbar, and forcibly disappear attorneys who defend vulnerable religious groups.

Again, we need to understand that we are not talking about the people of China; we are talking about the government of China which is aiding, abetting, and allowing this religious persecution to go on. We hope with the change in leadership in China that has taken place there will be a change in attitude.

The truth is that China has much to offer the world. We hope for a peaceful, prosperous rise for the people of China. We look forward to working together with them to make the world a better place. But China cannot assume that role as long as there is no respect for religious liberties as far as these practices that are happening in that country with the direction of its government.

Of course Egypt has been in the headlines lately. I think it has been well documented that violence particularly against orthodox Christians has been high. This is from the report:

In 2011, violent sectarian attacks, targeting primarily Coptic Orthodox Christians, have resulted in nearly 100 deaths, surpassing the death toll of the previous 10 years combined.

I think the Arab spring has a lot of promise, but I think it also brings with it some warning flags. One of those warning flags is the persecution of religious minorities in places such as Egypt. So as Egypt works its way forward—and we know it has problems it is facing in its own society with regard to what kind of government and powers it needs and should have—we should keep an eye on how the new constitution, the new laws, and the new government treat religious minorities, particularly Coptic Orthodox Christians who suffered the death of 100 of their members.

Iran does not have a sterling record on human rights. Its treatment of religious minorities is particularly egregious. The violations of religious freedoms in Iran include prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused. All religious minorities in Iran are at risk, but even the recognized non-Muslim religious minorities that are supposedly protected under their so-called Constitution, including Jews, Armenian, and Assyrian Christians, face increasing discrimination, arrests, and imprisonment, according to the report. So too are dissenting Muslims. They are basically Muslims who are not following the Shia line. They are being intimidated, harassed, and detained. That is the record of Iran, which has a terrible human rights record, but in particular with the issues of religious liberty.

Saudi Arabia bans any non-Muslim worship. Even private religious activities are suppressed if they are discovered. I think it is important to point that out as well.

Closer to home is the island of Cuba, which is a place, of course, because of my heritage which is close and near to our heart so we keep a close eye on what is happening there as well.

The report finds:

Serious religious freedom violations continue in Cuba . . . Violations by the Cuban government include: detention, sporadic arrests, and harassment of clergy and religious leaders, as well as interference in church affairs. The Cuban government also controls and monitors religious belief and practices through surveillance and legal restrictions.

In Russia the report finds:

The government increasingly used its anti-extremist law against peaceful religious groups and individuals, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslim readers of the works of Turkish theologian Said Nursi.

Russia is a country that is beginning to backslide on religious liberty as well.

Finally, here in this hemisphere, just as in Cuba, Venezuela. The report finds that violations of religious liberty include:

The government's failure to investigate and hold accountable perpetrators of attacks on religious leaders and houses of worship, and virulent rhetoric president Hugo Chavez, government officials, state media, and pro-Chavez media directed at the Venezuelan Jewish and Christian communities.

I think sometimes we take for granted the religious liberties we have in this country, and we should never do so. The fact is we may have some cultural divisions in America when it comes to religion, and that is not tolerable either. But one of the great things we have had in this country since its inception is the belief in religious liberty and religious freedom enshrined in our governing Constitution. It is something that is the exception rather than the rule around the world. I think our example should inspire the world in that regard, but I think we should always use our voice, our power, and our example to lead the way around the

world on this Human Rights Day on the issue of religious liberty.

Last but not least, the cause for women around the world is something that bears watching as well. Some of these issues are interrelated. When I talk about human trafficking and human slavery, a disproportionate number of those held in bondage around the world are young women and young girls.

On the issue of human rights with regard to women, there are a couple of parts of the world that are very troubling. Afghanistan comes to mind because just today we got the report that a senior advocate for women in Afghanistan was shot down by unknown gunmen on Monday. It is the latest assassination against women's rights activists in the country. Najia Seddiqi was headed to her office in the eastern Laghman province when she was shot and killed. She was the head of the Women's Affairs Department for the Laghman province. Her predecessor in that post was killed just 4 months ago. The Taliban, which many hold responsible for the attack, has not yet had a comment, but it comes just a week after a teenage girl who was volunteering at an anti-polio drive was fatally shot northeast of Kabul. The Taliban has targeted senior female officials in the past for working in the U.S.-backed Afghan Government. That is just one issue of a coordinated attack to go after women who dare to participate in the political life of the country. It goes beyond that.

There is this very troubling law in Afghanistan which the government claims to have tried to clear up. It is called running away. Basically some judges have interpreted running away as a crime. It has been used against young girls and women who run away from home because it is a home where they are being abused or a home where they are being forced to marry somebody.

There are some sad stories I want to share. A 17-year-old leapt from her roof to the streets of Kabul in an effort to avoid marriage ordained by her grandfather when she was only 9 years old. The judge who heard the case mentioned that Farima ruined her life. The judge stated in a court that the court is a place where a woman can plead for divorce or custody of her children only if and when she has five male witnesses and a husband or a fiancé who condones the separation.

This is the 21st century we are talking about. We are not reading something from history. This is happening right now. Of course we all know the story of the brave little girl in Pakistan who was shot. We hear these cases every single day. It goes on and on. I could be here for 3 hours highlighting abuses against women, against religious liberty, the abuses of human trafficking and human slavery around the world. I think what is important today on December 10, Human Rights Day, is to take a moment and understand that

the cause of human rights is not a partisan cause; it is not even a nationalist cause. It is a human cause that requires each and every one of us to raise our voice and to call attention to any time and any place where human rights are violated.

I want to congratulate the leading role this government has played in calling attention to those abuses around the world and in being honest with ourselves when these things are happening here at home. Of course, like anything else, we have to first set the example before we can lead, and that is why I think it is so important that on the issue of human trafficking and modern-day slavery that the United States have cutting-edge legislation which deals with an emerging problem that keeps changing and so the laws have to adapt to it. I hope we will take the first step in doing that by authorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act as soon as possible.

I suggest the absence a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUMENTHAL). Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEATH TAX

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, we are in the midst of an intense debate about how to deal with the expiration of bipartisan tax relief at the end of this year.

The President and the Democratic Party campaigned primarily on raising the top marginal rates. Yet income tax rates are not the only tax policy set to expire at the end of this month. If Congress does not act, the currently low death tax rates which have previously been supported on a bipartisan basis will skyrocket. They will go from an exemption amount of \$5 million and a tax rate of 35 percent to an astonishingly low exemption amount of \$1 million and a 55-percent tax rate.

The question is clear: Where are the Senate Democrats on this issue? Again, a low death tax has previously been a rare point of bipartisan agreement. Yet this past July, my friends on the other side of the aisle proposed and passed a bill that included a tax cut extension for individuals making under \$200,000 or families making under \$250,000.

Conversely, the bill would have designated the millions of families in New York, New Jersey, Florida, Virginia, and elsewhere who make in excess of \$250,000 as rich and subject to higher taxes. Still, when it came to the death tax, this bill, which was supported by all but one Democrat in this Chamber, was silent.

In other words, that bill assumed that current death tax rates would expire—a crushing blow to America's

families and businesses and farms. This bill, which, once again, was supported by nearly every Senate Democrat, would allow the death tax to skyrocket and the exemption to be reduced to the lowest amount in over a decade, creating an administrative and compliance burden for nearly 1 million estates.

Allowing death tax policy to expire is another example of the President putting ideology and sentiment ahead of economic reality. While the death tax targets the transfer of wealth from one individual to an infinite amount of other individuals, the repercussions are felt throughout all income levels.

From a person working in the cornfields, to a cashier at a mom-and-pop store, to a gas station attendant, the long arm of the death tax affects more than the so-called wealthy. It is called the death tax not only because it is a tax imposed at a time when family members are grieving over the loss of a loved one but also because it can be a death sentence for the family businesses and farms that American workers depend on for their livelihoods.

I know a lot of my friends on the other side of the aisle understand this. Some have spoken on the floor of the Senate in favor of extending the death tax rate. Some have introduced legislation to do so.

My friend, the chairman of the Finance Committee, where I serve as the ranking member, has indicated he would like to see the current death tax regime extended. So what is the problem? Unfortunately, bare-knuckle politics is getting in the way of good policy. And the President's insistence on a \$2 trillion tax increase is undermining progress on resolving the death tax.

I have been a longtime proponent of repealing the whole death tax. Not only is it double taxation and a deterrent to savings, but it also sucks up capital in the marketplace. The death tax adds inefficiency to our economy. It is what economists refer to as dead-weight loss. In other words, it creates another burden on our free market system that prevents the full potential of economic growth.

For instance, many family farms have to purchase insurance in order to prepare for paying the death tax so they do not end up having to literally sell the farm just to pay the death tax. This added cost is embedded into the cost of goods when sold. In other words, American consumers, American workers, or Americans looking for work are those who will ultimately pay the death tax.

This past July, the Joint Economic Committee analyzed the costs and consequences of the death tax. In a report the committee found that, as of 2008, the death tax has cumulatively reduced the amount of capital stock in the U.S. economy by roughly \$1.1 trillion since its introduction as a permanent tax in 1916, equivalent to 3.2 percent of the total capital stock.

Coincidentally, since its inception nearly 100 years ago, the death tax has