

value what they call progressive social policy over protecting the rights of believers. I hate the use of that word “progressive” because it is anything but. This backtracking by many stalwart defenders of religious liberty represents one of the most serious ways religious freedom is under attack in this great country.

I will note one other political sea change that is undermining religious liberty in the United States. For many years, groups on the left have been advocating for laws to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. I am in general agreement with such laws and do not believe that sexual orientation should be grounds for discrimination or mistreatment. Many of the groups advocating for these laws have previously been willing to include exemptions for religious organizations that hold traditional views on marriage and sexuality. I believe such exemptions are appropriate and strike the right balance by protecting rights to nondiscrimination while enabling religious organizations to hold true to their beliefs. Indeed, I believe it is essential for nondiscrimination laws to properly accommodate religious liberty, and I would actively oppose any such law that fails to account for the rights of religious believers.

Unfortunately, many groups that were previously willing to support religious exemptions in nondiscrimination laws have reversed course. For example, many groups that supported last Congress’s Federal Employment Non-discrimination Act or ENDA, which would prohibit discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation, have withdrawn their support for the act because it contains a robust exemption for religious organizations. This Congress, they are instead supporting the Equality Act, which contains no religious exemption at all.

I supported ENDA because I believed it reflected the right balance between nondiscrimination and religious liberty. I took some criticism for doing so. I still believe it does reflect the right balance, but many groups on the left have indicated they are willing to cast religious liberty aside in furtherance of other goals. For these groups, religious liberty no longer deserves special protection. It is no longer a pre-eminent value. Rather, it should be accommodated only so far as it is convenient and does not interfere with other objectives. This is a sea change and one that bodes ill for the future vitality of religious freedom.

I said at the outset that religious liberty is under attack in America in ways that are both surprising and unprecedented. Certainly the willingness of former defenders of religious freedom to turn their backs on believers is both.

I would like to close by returning to the New Mexico photographer case I mentioned earlier, for that case contains perhaps the most surprising and unprecedented feature of all. In a con-

curing opinion, one of the judges in the case called the requirement to violate one’s religious beliefs when they conflict with State social policy “the price of citizenship.” That statement represents a complete inversion of the relationship between government authority and religious liberty in America. When we are born or become American citizens, we do not surrender our rights of conscience to the government. We do not pledge our allegiance to a secular God. We retain our right to religious liberty. Indeed, not only do we retain our right; our government guarantees our right to freely practice our faith in accordance with the dictates of our own conscience. As the Declaration of Independence instructs, all men—and women—are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and it is the fundamental purpose of government to secure those rights.

If there is a price we pay as American citizens, it is not that we give up our God-given rights, first and foremost of which is the right of religious liberty, it is that we agree to work together to promote the common good of our country.

Subjugating religious beliefs to government decrees is not the price of citizenship. To the contrary, respecting and honoring the fundamental rights of all Americans is the price our government pays in order to enjoy the continued consent of the American people. Those who attack religious liberty and seek to devalue its place in society fundamentally misunderstand this key point.

Unfortunately, too many in America today, from the courts to the Obama administration, to the State legislatures, undervalue religious freedom and view it at best as a secondary goal. People of good will in Congress and across our Nation need to recognize that religious liberty is under attack and that unless we stand up and vocally support the rights of believers to live their faith, we will find much of what we have fought for and much of what our forebears fought for swept away. We must fortify the rights of believers to follow their conscience even when their fellow citizens or elected officials would prefer a different course.

I will have much more to say on this topic in future remarks, but with that, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this week we honor the men and women who serve our Nation with honor and their families who also sacrifice—whom we do not remember enough—who sacrifice so much for the servicemembers they love and for all of us in our country.

The sacrifice of our veterans demands that we fulfill the promises we have made. This body is always willing to spend more dollars in armaments

and on weapons, but when it comes time to fulfill our obligations to veterans, too many in this body are not generous enough.

I am the only Ohioan ever to serve a full term on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. I take that duty very seriously. I know the Presiding Officer, Senator TILLIS from North Carolina, does too. That means working to end the VA backlog. It means putting a better system in place. It means ensuring that our veterans have a roof over their heads and a place to call home. It means providing veterans with health care and the educational opportunities they deserve and which they have earned.

Too many veterans face mental health challenges that can end in tragedy. More than 8,000 veterans each year take their own lives—154 a week, 22 a day. Hundreds of thousands of veterans struggle with invisible injuries. Nearly 300,000 have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, and 300,000 have faced traumatic brain injuries—all because of the service they gave to us.

Earlier this year we passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act. It is a good start yet not enough. We need to make sure that when servicemembers return home, they have the educational and the employment opportunities they need, not only to survive but to thrive.

The GI bill’s educational benefits are critical, but veterans, unfortunately, have a limited amount of time before their GI benefits expire. In crowded colleges—whether in North Carolina, Oklahoma or Ohio—general education requirements and prerequisites often fill up quickly. Many colleges and universities in my State offer priority registration to veterans. All of our colleges and universities need to follow Ohio’s lead. That is why I worked with Senator TILLIS, the Presiding Officer, on legislation to ensure that all veterans and servicemembers and their qualifying dependents can use their GI benefits to their full potential and be guaranteed priority registration.

The Senator from North Carolina and I also introduced the Fry Scholarship Enhancement Act, which would expand eligibility for the VA’s Yellow Ribbon Program to help students avoid out-of-pocket tuition and fees for programs that cost more than the allowance set by the post-9/11 GI bill.

Sadly, for too many veterans, they are far from the goal where they should be. They struggle just to find a place to call home.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, some 50,000 veterans were homeless during a survey conducted on a single night in January 2014. That is 50,000 too many. It is a disgrace that after serving our country with honor, thousands of veterans are left without a roof over their heads.

Earlier this month I visited the Joseph House in Cincinnati, where Nathan Pelletier and his team of dedicated staff and volunteers provide addiction treatment and traditional housing.

A group of us meeting there, mostly veterans who are homeless or were homeless, listened to Britton Carter, who was formerly homeless. He completed his treatment program in the Joseph House. He now works as a case manager there helping other struggling veterans.

Veterans such as Mr. Carter have served our country with honor. We owe them support, and we owe them counseling when they return home. That is why I joined my colleagues in introducing the Veteran Housing Stability Act of 2015, which would make meaningful improvements to services for homeless veterans that would give veterans more access to permanent housing opportunities.

We know in the Veterans' Affairs Committee a number of things. We know that the unemployment rate of veterans is generally higher than society's unemployment rate. We know that veterans' suicide rate is higher than society's suicide rate. We know that veterans' drug addiction is higher than society's drug addiction rate. We know that veterans have suffered from PTSD and traumatic brain injury in numbers much higher than the general population. That is why we owe them so much. We in this body so rarely think about the cost of war.

We, as I said earlier, are willing to send more money to buy more weapons, to spend more money in armaments. We are not so generous when it comes time to take care of our veterans.

HONOR FLIGHTS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, the last point I wish to make before turning to the Senator from Oklahoma is something that we call Honor Flights. One of the great things that have come out of the National World War II Memorial is that men and women who have served in World War II are now getting the opportunity to go to visit this National World War II Memorial.

Retired Air Force Capt. Earl Morse, who worked in a VA clinic in Springfield, OH, would often talk with his World War II veteran patriots. He realized that for most of these veterans, their dream of seeing the memorial built on the National Mall would never come true. So one day in 2004, Captain Morse, a pilot and a member of the air club at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, asked one of his patients if he could personally fly him to Washington free of charge. The veteran, Mr. Loy, broke down in tears and accepted Earl's offer. Soon Earl was offering to fly other World War II veterans to visit the memorial and soliciting help from other pilots.

Eleven pilots from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base volunteered. In May

2005, the first Honor Flight took off from Springfield, OH.

A decade later, the Honor Flight Network is a national nonprofit that has flown 100,000 veterans, usually 40 or 50 or 60 at a time in a charter flight—always with a caretaker because these veterans are never young. They are World War II veterans. They have been out of the service now for 70 years at least.

The Honor Flight Program is in 41 States. I have had the honor of meeting a number of them. Toledo, OH, seems to be one which has particularly excelled and is encouraging local people, raising local money and getting every single veteran from northwest Ohio who was able to and wanted to join these Honor Flights.

I will quote one of these volunteers. Jim Salomon works for the Honor Flight Program in Dayton. He told me of a volunteer who goes by Ace and who works at an Arby's in Maryland and provides discounted meals for Honor Flight Program attendees. Jim said:

Ace is part of Honor Flight Dayton's family. We rely on Ace and he has not let us down. Over the last nine years Ace has saved us more than \$30,000 [because of Arby's donating these meals], which pays the cost of transporting 92 veterans.

With an average of 800 World War II veterans dying each day, the mission of the Honor Flight Program is more important now than ever.

I am thankful to those who have helped Honor Flight. I am thankful to those veterans and their families who have done so much.

I remind my colleagues, as they are always eager to vote for more money for weapons, that we should understand and think about the cost of war and take care of our returning servicemembers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, there is a lot of news that is happening this week. There are a lot of things going on—an incredible celebration of veterans and the recognition they are very worthy of. That is the 1 percent in our Nation that actually secures the security of the rest of the 99 percent of our Nation.

We could not be more grateful—members of my own family, myself, and the proud people of Oklahoma who celebrate our veterans every single day of the year. We are very pleased to be able to do that.

OBAMACARE

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, we have a lot of information this week about ObamaCare hearings. They are again back in the news because the administration has filed a lawsuit against the Little Sisters of the Poor to compel

them to violate their faith and to be able to put into practice the principles of ObamaCare rather than their own personal faith.

So the Obama administration is taking a group of nuns called the Little Sisters of the Poor all the way to the Supreme Court to compel them to cave on their faith. That case actually includes four universities from my State of Oklahoma as well that are grouped together with this group from the Little Sisters of the Poor that will all have to go before the Supreme Court to validate their faith publicly in front of the Nation while the administration tries to tell them they can't practice their faith in America.

GITMO

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, we also have news this week that the President is trying to push through Gitmo and he is trying to change Gitmo through some sort of Executive action. We don't know exactly what that is.

He seems to have this flippant attitude about what is going to happen at Guantanamo Bay, saying we can move them into the United States more cheaply. Well, I would tell you—as a person who has been to Guantanamo Bay and has seen that facility and am very aware of what is going on there—we are missing one big element. The terrorists do not know who the guards are at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Nor do they have access to their families.

And while they are infuriated about Gitmo, I promise you if those prisoners are moved into Colorado, Oklahoma or Kansas or any other place, the terrorists overseas won't rage about Gitmo anymore, they will then rage about Colorado or they will then rage about Illinois or wherever those prisoners are being held. They are not mad at Gitmo and the treatment there. They are mad that these terrorists, whom they have affection for, are being detained by the United States of America. Right now all of the individuals who are guarding those individuals and keeping them detained will no longer be hidden anymore because terrorists could linger around the outside of these facilities and contact the different guards that are coming in and out. Suddenly, the guards and their family members become exposed and the stakes for those individuals are exposed.

He is not thinking through the real consequences of flippantly moving these individuals into the United States. It is a big issue that we face.

KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, but I have to say this last weekend, as I was going through all the different news and the many things that we track, I was quite surprised last Friday afternoon at the way the President addressed something that this Nation has