

the family and friends of Officer Colson. I hope they are able to find solace in the fact that Jacai Colson was a true hero.

#### WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH 2016

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to join the American people in celebrating Women's History Month. It is clear that 1 month is hardly enough time to recognize all that women have done, what they are doing, and what they have yet to accomplish. Despite the persistence of dogmatic opposition, women have played a major role in advancing every society on earth.

I am a proud husband, father, and grandfather. In my time representing the people of Maryland, in the U.S. Senate, I have traversed the State many times. As a member and now ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I have had the chance to travel and meet with people from very diverse backgrounds.

At home and abroad, I have found it difficult and often imprudent to make generalizations with regard to policy. One common truth, however, that easily crosses national borders, ethnic lines, political divides, and religious devotions is this: the way a nation treats its women is very much a barometer as to how well that nation is doing.

And so this March we will celebrate women on the forefront of industry and innovation, science and social justice, policy and patriotism, and so much more. We must also remember that Women's History Month is not just about celebrations. Women's History Month should be a time when all Americans come together for a frank conversation about the well-being of women at home and abroad. That conversation must lead to concrete action because, if we want to improve any aspect of our society, starting with empowering and lifting up women is an investment that will return the greatest dividends.

Throughout American history, we have made progress in so many arenas because women had the bravery to break the proverbial glass ceiling. One such woman who I think deserves accolades during this Women's History Month, and every month for that matter, is a Member of this very body. This Congress boasts the most female representatives in history. I suspect that number would be larger if we gave the people of Washington, DC, full statehood and a voting Senator, but I will discuss that another time.

The record number of women in Congress is not an accident; it took hard work and grit. The living embodiment of that grit and know-how is the senior Senator from Maryland, my colleague Senator MIKULSKI. There is a wonderful sense of symmetry in the fact that in 1981, then-Congresswoman MIKULSKI co-sponsored the first Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming a Women's History Week, and today she is being celebrated as a role model during Women's History Month.

Senator BARB has been more than a dedicated champion for the State of Maryland. She has fought tirelessly for the welfare of all Americans across the country. In the Halls of the Senate, she opened doors that had previously been closed to women. Sometimes she used gentle politicking, and sometimes she knocked the doors off the hinges. No matter how she did it, Senator BARB refused to accept second-class treatment because of her gender and fought to be recognized as an equal. To take that one step further, Senator BARB refused to let other women be treated like second-class citizens by the rule of law or antiquated social norms. I don't have the time to list all that she has done for Marylanders and working families across the country in her long and distinguished career, but I will share a list of hard-fought firsts: first Democratic woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right; first Democratic woman to serve in both Houses of Congress; first woman to be elected to statewide office in Maryland; first Democratic woman Senator elected to a leadership position; first Democratic woman to serve on the Senate Appropriations Committee; first woman to chair an Appropriations Subcommittee—the Commerce-Justice-Science Subcommittee; first woman to serve on the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee; first woman to serve on the Senate Small Business Committee; first woman to serve on the House Interstate & Foreign Commerce, now known as the Energy & Commerce Committee—first woman on the Health Subcommittee; most senior woman in the Senate on January 3, 1997; longest serving woman Senator in U.S. history on January 5, 2011; and longest serving woman in Congress in U.S. history on March 17, 2012.

Senator BARB will be leaving the Senate when her term ends next January. That does not mean that she will stop doing what she does best, fighting for what is right. Generations of young women who choose to participate in public life or who dream of joining the U.S. Senate have benefited from Senator BARB's trailblazing legacy.

As we begin to fathom life in the U.S. Senate without Senator BARB, we should take a minute to analyze the current state of politics and policy as it relates to women in America.

Regardless of any Member's political support of anyone running to replace President Obama, it is worth noting that there is a chance that a woman, a former U.S. Senator, a former Secretary of State, and Former First Lady could potentially be the next President of the United States.

The 2016 election should serve as a chance to audit how our political system is working on behalf of women, including in terms of health care.

The Affordable Care Act, ACA, has played a role in creating greater gender equality in this country. Under the ACA, being a woman is no longer a "preexisting condition." What does that mean? It means insurance companies can no longer force women to pay more based on their gender.

The ACA also provides more preventive services for women at no cost. Lifesaving preventive services like mammograms, cervical cancer screenings, and prenatal care are now covered at no additional cost for roughly 48.5 million American women with private insurance. Access to these services means that fewer women will be sidelined from the job market, unable to support families because of preventable illnesses. There is no question that we are making progress in women's health care, in terms of cost, equity, and in providing much-needed services.

We have further to go. Gender-based disparities in medical research still remain. Some medical trials today do not consider the impact of gender in their research, and diseases like heart disease, which is the leading cause of death for American women, are often misdiagnosed or overlooked.

That is why I have continuously fought for robust funding for the National Institutes of Health, NIH, which pioneers much of our Nation's groundbreaking medical research and clinical trials. I was very encouraged to see the NIH receive a \$2 billion increase in the fiscal year 2016 Omnibus spending bill—thanks in large part to Senator MIKULSKI. That is the largest increase NIH has received since 2003. By ensuring that NIH has all of the tools it needs to continue such urgent work, we can address persistent disparities and continue to build on the gains in our health care system made under the ACA. One thing is certainly clear: we only stand to gain from increased resources for our medical community to improve the health of women.

Improving health care is only one part of the equation involved in empowering and uplifting women in the United States.

I have previously spoken about the need to close the gender pay gap, the need to pass meaningful legislation to reduce the number of women killed by guns during instances of domestic violence, and the need to ensure women can continue to make choices concerning their own reproductive health. All of these are critically important to the well-being of women in America.

America was built on the promise of equal rights. Our history is defined by groups struggling to achieve full equality under the law. I think many Americans would be shocked to find out that the Constitution still lacks a provision ensuring gender equality. Think about that: women still lack the same constitutional protections as men. I think this is wrong and have introduced legislation to remove the deadline for States to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, which 35 States have ratified already—just three more to go.

The Equal Rights Amendment is slightly longer than two tweets, but

would finally give women full and equal protection under the Constitution. It reads as follows:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

It is that simple. When Congress passed the ERA in 1972, it provided that the measure had to be ratified by three-fourths of the States, 38 States, within 7 years. This deadline was later extended to 10 years by a joint resolution enacted by Congress, but ultimately only 35 out of 38 States had ratified the ERA when the deadline expired in 1982. To put that in context, in 1992, the 27th Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting immediate Congressional pay raises was ratified after 203 years.

Article V of the Constitution contains no time limits for ratification of constitutional amendments, and the ERA time limit was contained in a joint resolution, not the actual text of the amendment. The Senate could pass my legislation removing the 10-year deadline right now. I hope that the majority leader will bring this legislation up for a vote because American women deserve to know that their most fundamental rights are explicitly protected by our Nation's most venerated document.

I would like to take a moment to discuss some issues that apply more to women outside of the United States but still affect every American.

I serve as the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In that position, I have seen firsthand how the relatively small amount of money allocated for foreign assistance saves both lives and American tax dollars over time. At less than 1 percent of the Federal budget, foreign assistance helps us rely less on costly military operations and prevent international catastrophes before they happen.

As I previously stated, the way a nation treats its women is very much a barometer as to how well that nation is doing. And just as in the United States, giving women outside United States the tools they need to succeed uplifts families, communities and nations. The millennium development goals, MDGs, were some of the most aggressive and successful attempts to combat global poverty and improve the quality of life for millions of women and families in the developing world.

The millennium development goals, first established in 2000, brought together nations, businesses, international organizations, and foundations in a focused and coordinated effort to reduce poverty and disease by 2015. Over the last two decades, the number of people worldwide living in extreme poverty has been cut in half, from about one in every six people in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. We have made progress in global education, with a 20 percent increase in primary school enrollment in sub-Saharan Afri-

ca and a nearly 50 percent decrease in the number of out-of-school children of primary school age.

In terms of gender equality, we still have a long way to go, but today we can cheer the fact that women have gained more parliamentary representation in ninety percent of the countries of the world than twenty years ago. The rate of maternal mortality has declined by forty-five percent worldwide, including by sixty-four percent in Southern Asia and forty-nine percent in sub-Saharan Africa.

When it comes to combating HIV/AIDS, we have made truly incredible strides over the past fifteen years. New HIV infections dropped by forty percent between 2000 and 2013, and the number of people living with HIV that were receiving anti-retroviral therapy increased seventeenfold from 2003 to 2014.

Behind these impressive numbers are countless women who are alive and strengthening their families and communities because of the millennium development goals, but there are still many areas where we need to make more progress.

In September 2015, more than 150 world leaders gathered at the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 sustainable development goals, SDGs. The SDGs aim to build on the successes of the millennium development goals and catalyze further progress.

One area where there is still much work to be done concerns child marriages. I am pleased the sustainable development goal 5 includes a target to eliminate child, early and forced marriages.

According to the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, each year, 14.2 million girls are married before their 18th birthday. Some of these girls are as young as 9 years old. Childhood marriage robs girls of their adolescence, denies them an education, greatly increases the risk of maternal mortality, and decreases their chance of becoming economically independent. Pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death for young girls in low- to middle-income countries. And children of young mothers have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition compared to children of mothers older than 18.

Terrorist groups often use forced marriages to sustain their efforts. Last April, for instance, Boko Haram kidnapped over 250 girls in Nigeria. Some of those girls were later forced to marry their kidnappers. The so-called Islamic State is also notorious for forcing local women and girls to marry its fighters. Forced marriage is deplorable for many reasons, not the least of which is that it is used as a weapon of war.

The women and girls being forced into these marriages are the very same women and girls who could be leaders, business owners, teachers, and doctors if given the chance. It is in the best in-

terest of these girls and of the United States that the international community speak with a united voice against this practice. As ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I invite all members of Congress to work together to find a way to address this pressing human rights issue.

I am an original co-sponsor of S. Res. 97, a bipartisan resolution supporting the goals of International Women's Day. After seeing the impacts that the MDGs have had on vulnerable populations around the world, I have no doubt that the goals contained in this resolution can be accomplished if the United States is willing to take the lead in organizing the international community.

I have mentioned only a small portion of legislative priorities the Senate could act on right now.

As we move through Women's History Month, let us remember that strong and empowered women have gotten us to this point in history and will help lead us to a brighter future.

#### BLACK WOMEN'S HISTORY WEEK

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I wish to request that, for the second year in a row, the U.S. Government officially recognize the last week in March as Black Women's History Week. During the week of March 28, 2016, as part of Women's History Month and in honor of the second year of the United Nation's International Decade for People of African Descent, several leading social justice organizations will be holding their second annual week of events to honor Black women and recognize their current struggles in American society. This week will shed light on the reality that Black women confront many intersectional challenges in American society, yet their concerns are often pushed to the margins of public attention and intervention. This week marks the perfect occasion to attend to the often hidden experiences of Black women and to generate attention to address the challenges they face.

Black women have traditionally gone above and beyond the call of duty in their contributions to American society. Black women have been inspirational symbols of strength and perseverance through their high voter turnout and historic leadership of racial justice movements. Even in the face of grave oppression throughout our Nation's history, Black women have continued to stand strong and contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities, and our country as a whole; yet at the same time, Black women continue to face undue burdens and obstacles to their own well-being. Acknowledging both the centrality of Black women in our history and social fabric as well as the unique inequalities they face is critical in our efforts