

speech, where its exercise does not depend upon the sufferance of the government.

In striking down the disparagement clause of Federal trademark law, the Court reminded us of what too many of those on college campuses appear not to have learned, and too many others seem to have forgotten: “Speech may not be banned on the ground that it expresses ideas that offend.” “Speech may not be banned on the ground that it expresses ideas that offend.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education estimates there were 43 reported instances of revoked speaking invitations or similar efforts to block speakers on campuses just last year. That is double the number recorded the previous year. It is more than 700 percent higher than the six incidents recorded back in 2000.

The trend is getting worse, not simply in terms of the overall number of incidents but—more worryingly—in terms of the growing aggressiveness of those efforts. This year alone, there have been multiple instances of intimidation, violence, and rioting at universities across the country.

There has been nasty and thuggish behavior aimed at suppressing speech. Sadly, it has often succeeded.

As USA TODAY put it in a recent editorial:

In just the place where the clash of ideas is most valuable, students are shutting themselves off to points of view they don't agree with. At the moment when young minds are supposed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments, they are answering challenges to their beliefs with anger and violence instead of facts and reason.

This should worry all of us, regardless of party, regardless of ideology.

Hearing criticisms of one's beliefs and learning the beliefs of others is simply training for life in a democratic society. It doesn't mean one has to agree with those opinions, but no one is served by trapping oneself and others in cocoons of ignorance. That is hardly the recipe for a free and informed society.

To quote Frederick Douglass, “To suppress free speech is a double wrong [because] it violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker.”

Just as it was not right during the Obama years for Americans to endure harassment or incur crippling expenses because the government didn't like what they believed, it certainly is not right today for Americans to live in the shadow of fear simply because they dare to speak up or think differently or support a candidate or a cause that the speech suppression crowd may disagree with.

It really doesn't matter who you are or whether what you are saying is popular. These rights do not exist to protect what is popular; they exist precisely to protect what isn't.

That is one reason I have long opposed ideas like the flag-burning constitutional amendment. That doesn't mean I agree the flag should be burned.

Of course, I don't. I disagree strongly, but it is the principle that matters because the moment we allow ourselves to believe that some people stand outside the free speech protections of the First Amendment, then we are all in trouble—all of us.

The growing trend of intolerance we are seeing has taken many forms lately, but the underlying hostility to free speech has not changed. As I noted earlier, in recent years, the threat had often come from the Federal Government. These days, the threat tends to come from different quarters. There have been many high-profile incidents of speech suppression and violence at universities across the country, in particular, but it would be a mistake to think this problem is isolated to college campuses.

The bottom line, for me, is this: We simply cannot allow this trend of violence and intimidation to become the new normal in our country. This is a really serious problem that deserves serious attention. The solutions will not come simply. They will not be found in a single piece of legislation.

As President Reagan famously put it, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on to them to do the same.”

That is what we are called upon to do again now—to inform, to engage, to empower; in the end, to inspire a new generation to defend a fundamental right for future generations, just as past generations did for us.

That is what I aim to do by continuing this dialogue on the Senate floor. From this platform, I will continue to raise the importance of free speech, outline the threats it faces, and do what I can to inform and encourage Americans to rally in its defense.

Others are using their platforms to advance similar goals, as Chairman GRASSLEY did yesterday. I hope more will join as this discussion continues because free speech is crucial to who we are as Americans, regardless of party, and we owe it to future generations to do what we can today to defend it.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO RECIPIENTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate this year's winners of the Congressional

Award. Established by Congress in 1979, the award recognizes the achievements of young Americans between the ages of 14 and 23 years old. It celebrates their accomplishment in four program areas: voluntary public service, personal development, physical fitness, and expedition/exploration.

The Award challenges participants to set goals in an area that interests them. If they successfully achieve their goals, they earn bronze, silver, and gold certificates and medals. Through the program, these young Americans gain new skills, earn greater confidence, and position themselves to be productive citizens.

Each year in June, these young people are presented their Congressional Awards at a ceremony here in our Nation's Capital. On behalf of the U.S. Senate, I would like to congratulate all of the winners for their accomplishments and for the example they set for others. Among this impressive group, my State of Kentucky is home to five medalists. Through their efforts, the recipients of the 2017 Congressional Awards are strengthening their communities and our Nation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a list of this year's recipients of the Congressional Award be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Alabama: Madison Haney.

Arizona: Piyaporn Chivatanaporn, Ayesha Ahsan, Jacob Cryder, Emily Hartzler, Jacob Matsumoto.

California: Alannah Ruiz, Edward Jung, Nathaniel Chien, Katie Wong, Abhiraj Chowdhury, Hannah Lee, Conrad Chu, Riya Dholia, Ethan Teo, Kai Fisher, Megan Pollon, Minyoung Cho, Michael Ngan, Reed Fundter, Hee Won Jung, Suzie Kim, Yoojin Kim, Jonathan Liu, William Choi, Naomi Kim, Austin Noll, Daniel Hong, YuYing Dai, Steven Gi, Hyeun Lee, Kayla Samini, Alexander Kang, Tiffany Kim, Lina Kim, Pranit Kumaran, Danielle Lee, Jihyun Woo, Sung Ho Woo, Jung Hyo Baik, Snghyun Byon, Gordon Chan, David Huh, Jordan Jennison, Beom Kim, Katherine Kim, Ha Young Kong, Brandon Lee, Connie Lee, Eric Lee, Harris Liou, Hasan Liou, Jacob Nam, Daniel Jewon Choi, Dean Colarossi, Connor Fiddler, Emily Ha, Jeimin Ha, Sonia Kim, Yena Kim, Alice Lee, Tyler Nguyen, Peter Stewart, Jennifer Yi, Yan Zhang, Hee Won Jung, Jamie Ostmann, Janice Park, Katrina Chan, Jaeyub Chung, Alexander Scott, David Bao, Jake Leung, Lauren Rennecker, Naomi Kim.

Colorado: Edwin Bodoni, Spencer Christensen.

Connecticut: Rachel Goldstein, Sydney Tabor, Ann Wechsler, Christian Yon.

Delaware: Kayleigh Barnes, Micah Petersen.

Florida: John Finelli, Jean-Paul Recht, Joshua Florkowski, Ronald Florkowski, Amir Kamrani, Alexis Behne Sharma, Julie Bicknell, Stephanie Brookshire, Christian Cropp, James Dowling, Nicole Ferruggia, Reece Haire, Caitlin Hiscock, Garrett Holmes, Aalisha Jaisinghani, Rachel Maunus, Jack McGinley, Ben Meyerson, Olivia Perez, Sofia Perez, Diana Pinkham, Cameron Pirozzi, Jonathan Prokos, Shelby Russo, Brianna Steidle, Sabrina Uvanile, Cali Vaughn, Jesse Katzeff, Brendan Shipley, Jillian Hanley, Srijiith Nair, Colleen Murray, Sofia Santa-Cruz.

Georgia: Margaret Silliman, Rachael Liu, Cristina Dalton.

Idaho: Samuel Cuentas, Rebecca Levi, Christiana Stone, Jesse Cole, Annabelle Day, Solveig Norton.

Illinois: Natalia Czachorowski, Mary Kuprianczyk, Samia Abdul-Qadir, Adam Koszyk, Jason Yang, Clayton Pope, DeAnna Pope.

Indiana: Lauren Ciulla, Matthew Frye, Emily Huff.

Iowa: Susan Alverio.

Kansas: Vasavi Garimella, Jared Gillen, Arjun Mahajan, Ryan Mohamadi, Katherine Walsworth, Irfan Ansari.

Kentucky: Katherine Speece, John Garland, Zachariah Kiser, Mackenzie Rigney, Kayla Sears.

Louisiana: Sean Thomas.

Maryland: Hansel Motiram, Ryan Briscoe, Madeline Carwile, Lucy Lee, WeiAnne Reidy, Alix MacKillop, Clara da Silva, Nikhil Swaminathan.

Massachusetts: Mikayla Steele, Alexandra Duplin, Ishan Shukla, Harrison Theodore, Maria Theodore.

Michigan: Emily Deese, Jeremy Tang, Emma Hicks, Sara Trojanowski, Emily Prokop, Thomas Libcke.

Minnesota: Emily Baer, Matthew Baer, Braden O'Connor, Payton Puerzer.

Mississippi: Lane Mitchell, Abby Pitts, Mamie Albritton.

Missouri: Olivia Hoijarvi, Allison Licavoli, Natalie Dameron.

Nebraska: Luis Sanchez-Romo, John Paul Terneus, Terese Navarra, Ethan Nelson.

Nevada: David Tegtmeier, Sara Tegtmeier, Neha Zafar, Taimur Khalid.

New Jersey: Satchel Bell, Funda Akilli, David Crain III, Michael Doliszny, Madison Gandy, Marta Majewski, Amanda Olivio, Urv Patel, Anthony Uzzolina, Andrew Laberee, Dominic Esposito, Christopher Lauria, Mitchell Lauria, Maya Ravichandran, Allison Wetherell, Erica Wu, Rahul Yerrabelli, Nicholas Coleburn, Ryan Robert Murphy, Vaed Prasad, Felicia Aschettino, Madilyn Somers, Lindsay Fogel, Maura Herbertson, Thiago Santos, Elena Boal, Priya Vulchi.

New York: Heejin Han, Christopher Kim, Naome Sajjani, Genevieve Bruen, Edward McCabe, Santo Tiralosi, Mahika Had, Fiona Dubrosa, William Gregson, Allison Herskovitz, Zachary Kunow, Kathleen Schofield, Lucas Zhao, Charles Siragusa, Gabriel Curcione.

North Carolina: Holly Hutcheson, Jacob Rowe, Emma Morris, Thomas Douglas, Capri D'Souza, Caroline Fitzgerald, Lauraleigh Guthrie, Jack Maginnes, Delaney Dunlap, Jenna Viveiros, Bennett David, Ashley Jamison, Kathryn Ellis, Jordan Feldman, Lawton Gresham.

Ohio: Natalie Carter, Ellen Haney, Pakrush Katragadda, Katherine Skelly, Max Lee, Hannah Addington, Arihant Chordia, Vidur Prasad, Sanjana Yerubandi, Laurel Grae, Jaidev Sharma, Alan Ai, Dusstyn Reynolds.

Oklahoma: Luisamaria Rubio.

Oregon: Kendall Fleshman, Megan Baumhardt.

Pennsylvania: Nisha Arya, Joshita Varshney, Elizabeth Belka, Victoria Belka, Noah Berkowitz, Seth Berkowitz, Lindsay Fullerton, Samantha Gable, Jasna Janikic, Erin Markham, Emily Matthews, Swathi Prakash, Anthony Radcliffe, Kristen Sparhawk, Stephanie Waldstein, Indra Alagar, Jaya Alagar, Krishnan Alagar, Rajan Alagar, Sarah Laible, Teja Polisetty.

Rhode Island: Aidan Sowa, Ryan Sowa.

South Carolina: Maggie Bowyer, Mary Grace Shannon, Jeremy Ward.

Tennessee: Evan Ladd, Carmen Ross, Grant Gammon.

Texas: Chelsea Parrott, Briana Gonzalez, Ruveyda Karaca, Almaas Khan, Gopal Raman, Monica Attaway, Edward Cen, Adam Hoffman, BJ Kim, Animate Mazurek, Miki Somosot, Srikanth Anantha, Tejna Dasari, Ashish Dave, Shrey Derasari, Siri Jois, Emily Jue, Eric Li, Rahul Popat, Charles Wang, Lauren Yang, Darrel Dennis, James Hefner, Jarrod Clark, Shan Su, Joseph Nemece.

Utah: Hannah Brau, Mariah Pay, Payam Rasheed, Sofia Tiratto, Madison Arriaza, Saja Hassoun, McKenna O'Connor.

Virginia: Caroline Yi, Jordan Hibbs, Kimberly Laker, Lisa Huang, Pavan Krishnan.

Washington: Andrew Chin, David Singleton, Benjamin Stewart, John McManis, Rachel Demaree, Isabella Maehl, Katherine Chen, Nathan Chen, Nicholas Grosinger, Alexandra Marsh, Jessica Waller, William Waller.

West Virginia: Alonzo Webb.

Wyoming: Bailey Anderson, Grace Anderson, Lexi Bedard, Maxwell Bockmann, Sara Brennecke, Molly Burns, Tanner Laurence Christensen, Kaitlyn Erramouspe, Elexis Forgey, Benjamin Gallagher, Daniel Garcia, Liam Guille, Charlotte Hecht, Jarom Herring, Lily Joslin, Carli Knight, Konnar Knotwell, Cassidy Little, Thomas Lubnau III, Gregory Marchal, Patrick Marchal, Conner Martin, Luke McIlvain, Nicholas Nelson, Megan Pachniak, Giovanni Pizzato, McKenzie Powell, Devrae Russell, Karen Russell, Meagan Skolnick, Jaycie Wells, Ben Wetzel.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, on June 5, 2017, the Senate adopted S. Res. 176, a resolution commemorating the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem. I am a cosponsor of this resolution. Unfortunately, I missed the vote due to a delayed flight. If I were in Washington, DC, during the time of this vote, I would have cast my vote in support of this resolution.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, earlier this month, the Senate passed by voice vote the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017. I recognize this bill is the result of a bipartisan compromise, and I commend Senator TESTER, ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, for his efforts to find agreement on this particularly challenging issue.

Everyone in a position of public trust, particularly those serving at the VA, must be held accountable for their actions. Whistleblowers must also be protected so that misconduct can be brought to light. This balance between accountability and transparency is essential to ensure that the services provided to the public—particularly to veterans—are of the highest quality and that we can attract the best and brightest to Federal service.

Unfortunately, while the bill passed by Congress seeks to strike the appropriate balance, I remain seriously concerned about some of the bill's provisions which would expedite the process of terminating employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, by reducing current due process protections.

sions which would expedite the process of terminating employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, by reducing current due process protections.

To ensure the integrity of the Federal civil service, it is essential that Federal employees have access to constitutionally protected due process rights. Specifically, the bill lowered the evidentiary standard for firing rank-and-file employees for misconduct from "preponderance" of the evidence, 50 percent or more, to substantial, 30 percent or more. Reducing due process protections for rank-and-file VA employees in this manner will make it harder for the Federal Government to attract the best and brightest to public service.

During the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee's consideration of the bill, I cosponsored an amendment offered by Senator BROWN to strike the section of the bill lowering the evidentiary standard. Unfortunately, the amendment was not adopted. Going forward, I intend to closely monitor the VA's implementation of the act to see that these new authorities are not abused in order to retaliate against VA workers. Not only would this be unfair, but it would also exacerbate the Department's challenging retention issues.

I am also disappointed that this bill does not address the longstanding recruitment and retention issues facing the VA. According to the VA, there are over 30,000 vacancies across the VA, including over 150 in Hawaii, for frontline medical personnel that this administration has not filled as of the end of January 2017.

The over 40,000 veterans in Hawaii who are enrolled in the VA healthcare system deserve the best healthcare and highest ethical and professional standards from those they depend on to provide that care. While we must ensure whistleblowers can come forward without fear of retaliation and those who violate the public trust are held accountable, the VA cannot effectively carry out its mission without being fully staffed.

While this legislation was supported by VA Secretary Shulkin and makes some useful changes to improve accountability, we still have much work to do to ensure that veterans in Hawaii and across the country have access to the best healthcare we can provide.

Therefore, going forward, I will closely monitor the VA's implementation of this law to ensure that the changes made are not abused. I will also continue working to see that the staff vacancies in Hawaii and across the country are filled with qualified personnel.

MINORITY HEALTH

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am deeply disappointed by the secrecy that has been employed by my colleagues in their reckless attempts to gut the Affordable Care Act. It is clear to me that, in the absence of hearings,