

previous administration—many in the waning hours of President Obama's Presidency—were rolled back or suspended. I am glad Congress did its part, using the Congressional Review Act to roll back 15 harmful regulations last year. As much as anything, I think that has contributed to the soaring stock market, the increase in consumer confidence, and the extraordinary rebound of our economy.

As last summer began, we passed a bill funding Texas priorities. It funded things like the National Space Administration programs at Houston's Johnson Space Center, which will advance missions, hopefully back to the moon and eventually to Mars. We allowed through that funding to make sure that the Department of Homeland Security had what they needed to hire additional Border Patrol and agents at ports of entry to improve those checkpoints and to add immigration court judges too.

I remember thinking about Hurricane Harvey. A friend of mine years ago asked the rhetorical question: Do you know what makes God laugh? Then he answered: When we make plans.

Hurricane Harvey is perhaps an example of that, because we were making other plans when we got this natural disaster known as Hurricane Harvey.

Texas was pummeled with the most extreme rain event in the history of the United States, devastating more than 28,000 square miles along the coast. I, along with the entire Texas congressional delegation, helped secure roughly \$30 billion for recovery efforts, but the thing I am most proud of is the way ordinary Texans responded to their neighbors in need. They weren't waiting around for Washington to act first. They wanted to act to help their neighbors, their community, and their State.

Recognizing we have the Presiding Officer from Louisiana, I just want to make special note of the Cajun Navy that came over from Louisiana to help rescue people off of their rooftops. That is part of what makes not only Texas and Louisiana great, but it is what makes America great, too, when people will come to the aid of their fellow Americans.

As Texans tore out sheetrock and molded carpet in their living rooms, Federal resources helped piece together the lives disrupted. Now we have to make sure we complete the task by delivering additional relief not only to Texas but to Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as to those States devastated by the wildfires out West. The House having passed a substantial disaster relief bill and sent it over to us, I am hopeful that is something we will take up and pass very soon, perhaps as soon as January 19.

I spoke about natural disasters, but now let me turn to a manmade disaster. After the hurricane, Texas was dealt a second blow just 2 months later, when a man opened fire at a church in Sutherland Springs, TX.

With multiple convictions for domestic violence, a felony conviction, and a history of mental illness, this individual should never have been able to legally purchase a firearm because, under existing law, those conditions disqualify you from being able to purchase a firearm, if you are a convicted felon, convicted of domestic violence, or have a history of mental illness.

That is why, following this terrible disaster where 26 people were killed, I introduced the bipartisan Fix NICS Act—that is, Fix the National Instant Criminal Background Check System Act—to ensure existing laws are enforced and convicted felons don't exploit our background check system by lying and buying. I am going to continue to urge the passage of this important piece of legislation, which is, as I say, bipartisan, as it should be.

The fall of 2017 gave way to winter and soon came the flurries of snow not only here in Washington but back home in Texas. The week before Christmas, we completed comprehensive tax reform—a historic overhaul of the Tax Code and the first in more than three decades.

We said originally that our goals were threefold: One was to make the Tax Code simpler; the second was to make sure everybody in every tax bracket saw a decrease in their tax liability; and third was to make the American Tax Code competitive in the global economy. Until that point, we had the highest tax rate in the industrialized world, which caused companies to move or invest offshore and create jobs in other countries rather than the United States because we had the most burdensome tax in the industrialized world.

As I said, this bill—now law—reduces taxes in all income brackets and boosts the standard deduction and child tax credit. This means that only 1 out of 10 taxpayers will likely choose to itemize because they will actually benefit more from the standard deduction along with the child tax credit. It will allow businesses to add jobs, raise wages, and reinvest in the United States from overseas. For example, a family of four making the median income will see their taxes drop by more than \$2,000—a reduction of nearly 58 percent.

Tax reform complements an economy that has already been truly unleashed under this administration. Just since January, the economy has added 1.7 million new jobs, and over the last two quarters, our economy has grown at more than 3 percent—as compared to an average of only 1.9 percent under the previous administration.

While not historic in the sense that the tax bill was historic, there is other legislation we passed with little fanfare but significant impact that I would like to mention.

One is a bill I championed called the PROTECT Our Children Act, which reauthorizes task forces to combat child exploitation online. The second I would like to mention is a bill that tackled

elder abuse. A third, called the SAFER Act—which was signed today by the President—reauthorizes rape kit audits and prioritizes the training of pediatric nurses handling sexual assault cases.

I was shocked and chagrined a year or so ago to learn there could be as many as 400,000 untested rape kits either sitting in evidence lockers or in laboratories untested. Now, thanks to the Debbie Smith Act—named after a heroic woman who has championed the funding of Federal efforts to identify and test this backlog of rape kits—that number is far smaller today, but reauthorization of the SAFER Act is important to keep our commitment to victims of sexual assault that we will do everything in our power to help them identify their assailant and bring them to justice, and, at the same time, exonerate people who may be falsely accused because there is no DNA match.

Finally, other legislation I filed and has now been signed into law assists police departments in hiring military veterans. We know our police departments are always in need of good, highly qualified applicants for those important first responder jobs. Once signed by the President, it will streamline the process that Active-Duty personnel and reservist members go through to apply for their commercial driver's license.

We know it is a long and arduous process to apply for a commercial driver's license, so why not take our Active-Duty military who are soon to retire or our veterans and expedite their ability to qualify for a commercial driver's license when they leave the military?

As I said, these bills don't grab big headlines, but they chip away at problems and were passed on a bipartisan basis—which I think puts the lie to the canard that nothing ever gets done in Washington.

The job of men and women in Congress is to serve the people who elected us. This last year we made important strides, but our work is just beginning. As I said at the outset, there is much that lies ahead. Many Americans and many Texans are still knocking at the door of greater prosperity. I hope we will make it our New Year's resolution to open that door a little wider in 2018.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RESCINDING THE COLE MEMO

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I rise today because earlier on this day, the Trump administration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded the Justice Department's policy known as the Cole memo.

The Cole memo is a policy issued under the Obama administration instructing prosecutors to shift away

from a focus on nonviolent marijuana crimes and toward more serious crimes that threaten our communities. This memo was a critical step and a move in the right direction, undoing some of the catastrophic damage that has been caused by the failed War on Drugs. It was a step forward for the Federal Government in mending our broken drug policies that have so hurt our Nation in so many ways. I believe it was a step forward that the vast majority of Americans who believe the War on Drugs failed agree with. It was a step forward that improved Americans' safety, saved money, and better aligned our laws with our most fundamental values of fairness, equality, and justice. Yet, today, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has instructed the Department of Justice to not just double down on failed policy but to turn back the clock and undermine the well-being of our country.

The policy change actually goes against what Jeff Sessions promised elected officials in this body before his confirmation. We already heard from the other CORY in the Senate—Republican Senator CORY GARDNER—that he had a commitment from the Attorney General before his confirmation that this is not what he would do.

This is an attack on our most sacred ideals and the very purpose of the Department of Justice, which is to protect Americans, to elevate ideals of justice, and to do right by people. It is a failure of this administration, which said—our President said during his campaign that he would honor what States are doing. It is a betrayal by our Attorney General, who gave a commitment to at least one Republican Member of this body. But most significantly, it will hurt America. It ignores the fact that there is a growing bipartisan consensus that the War on Drugs has failed. It sacrifices our critical, urgently needed resources in our communities, violating our values and destroying families, and has failed to make us safer.

Let me walk through those four points one by one—first, this massive waste of public resources that are urgently needed in other areas. In the last four decades in this country, we have spent so much on these policies at the same time that we are disinvesting from public education, from our public colleges, disinvesting from investments and innovation, investments in science and research. Yet we have spent trillions of dollars on this failed War on Drugs.

We have created a nation that says we are the land of the free, but we are the incarceration nation on the planet Earth. One out of every four incarcerated people on this planet is imprisoned here in the United States of America. One out of every three incarcerated women on the planet is incarcerated right here in the United States of America.

Between the time of 1990 and 2005, we have devoted so much of our resources

to building new prisons. During that time, we were building a new prison in the United States every 10 days to keep up with the massive amount of people who were being driven into our prisons. One new prison was being built every 10 days as our infrastructure and our roads and bridges crumbled.

We have sidelined the resources of our law enforcement officials. I know this, having been a former mayor. The precious time, resources, and energy of our law enforcement officials have been sidelined, redirecting them to marijuana enforcement, and for what?

At a time when we have real issues to deal with in our country, such as a drug epidemic; at a time when people cannot afford treatment and when there are waiting lists for treatment because we don't have the resources to deal with this opioid epidemic, we are instead using our resources to enforce marijuana laws.

The Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, reported last year that 91 Americans die every single day from the opioid epidemic in this country. Meanwhile, according to FBI data from 2014, one American is arrested every single minute for marijuana possession—one American every minute for marijuana possession. That is about 1,700 Americans being arrested every day for marijuana possession, using police resources, resources to put people in jail, to hold them, to feed them, court resources. All that can be used better and invested in our society to deal with the ravages of the opioid epidemic. Police resources that could be used to chase after violent offenders are instead being used for marijuana possession. It is somehow crazy that we think we can arrest our way out of a problem.

Doubling down on these failed efforts makes no sense. It is a massive waste of our precious resources as a society.

No. 2, it is also perpetuating injustice in our country. We believe that every one in this Nation should have equal justice under the law. Those are the words written on the Supreme Court. But we know this War on Drugs has not been a War on Drugs, it has been a war on people—and not all people but certain people, the most vulnerable people. It has been a war on people, a war on mentally ill people. It has been a war on people of color.

The unequal application of marijuana laws has created a justice system where outcomes are often more dependent upon race and class than dependent upon guilt or innocence. In privileged communities and places all across this country, marijuana is being used with little fear of consequences and openly spoken about and joked about with little understanding of the painful fact that the War on Drugs in America has scarcely affected their lives but the War on Drugs, because of the unequal application of the laws, is affecting people in other communities.

I have seen this personally. I went to Stanford and to Yale, and I watched drug use being done openly—marijuana

use. There are no FBI investigations, no sting operations set up to go after the privileged in this country.

There are people in this body who openly admit to using marijuana with no consequence. But if you are poor or vulnerable in the United States of America, they are coming after you, and there will be consequences. I have had countless conversations with elected officials about their own personal drug use because it is outrageous to me, this outrageous hypocrisy that they could flaunt drug rules while poor people and people of color suffer as a result of our marijuana laws.

The facts are clear. The disproportionate enforcement of marijuana laws has helped to create a system of massive injustice in our country, and it is obvious. There is no difference in America between Blacks and Whites using marijuana, no difference between Blacks and Whites selling marijuana. Blacks are 3.7 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a White person is. This is a targeting of certain communities, a targeting of low-income people who are having their lives devastated by this unequal application of the law. Jeff Sessions' announcement today will make the problem worse.

People don't understand what it means to have a felony conviction for marijuana possession. Most people have no understanding that this is a lifetime sentence in America. It not only affects the individual's ability to get a job, you can't get a Pell grant if you have a felony conviction for marijuana usage, which many people in this body have done. You can't get a business license with a felony conviction for marijuana. You can't get food stamps. You can't get public housing.

It devastates individuals economically, but it devastates their families as well. It destroys the lives of children when suddenly the earner in their family, who is guilty of no more a serious crime than some of my colleagues—suddenly they have to pick up the pieces after one of their parents is sent away to prison. Missing 1 or 2 days of work often means losing your job, not being able to make your car payment or rental payment. We know that for children, where their father is in prison, they are more than five times more likely than their peers to be expelled or suspended from school.

This marijuana enforcement is devastating families—the fundamental building blocks of communities—and it is devastating communities. These laws weaken our overall economic health. One study found that if it weren't for the mass incarceration explosion as a result of the War on Drugs, the poverty rate in this country would be 20 percent lower.

We have a self-inflicted wound by wasting the resources—police resources and financial resources—of this country, and we have another self-inflicted wound by destroying families and communities economically.

It also has hurt our safety as a country. There are communities all across this Nation that worry about the safety of their children, the safety of their families, and the safety of their neighborhoods. By taking these critical resources away from law enforcement, this is a sacrifice of our efforts to make communities safe and strong.

In 2016, more Americans were arrested for marijuana possession than for all violent crimes combined. How many unsolved murders are there? How many unsolved assaults? How much violence and crime should our police be investigating as opposed to dealing with marijuana prohibition? We have fewer police resources, fewer officers. We have occupied our prisons with more marijuana arrests than for rape, murder, aggravated assault, or even the unsolved robberies alone in our country because we are spending our precious police resources on marijuana prohibition. Our history shows this is true.

Historians now attest to the complete and utter failure of another prohibition in this country, which is the prohibition of alcohol. It arguably made people less safe. It led to more drinking and was a blow to our economy and the ability of our officers to do their job. It was even a blow to officers' safety and security.

If we are serious about making our communities safer or stronger, families more secure, we should be focusing on how to undo the catastrophic damage of marijuana prohibition, not double down on it.

I say all of this as someone who ran a police department in Newark. It was under my authority as mayor. My officers would talk about the churn of people they arrested again and again on nonviolent charges—which, by the way, many of our law enforcement officers may have engaged in and people in positions of authority, like Senators and Presidents, have done themselves, deepening the distrust between officers and the community.

I saw firsthand how the disproportionate enforcement of our drug laws made communities of mine overcriminalized and underprotected—overcriminalizing possession of marijuana and underprotecting them on serious crimes.

This is an issue which I know too personally. I have seen this from walking privileged and elite communities like universities or here in Washington, and I know it because I may be the only Senator who, when I go home, I go home to an inner-city community. I go home to a community where my census track is about \$14,000 per household. I love my neighborhood. I love my community. I love my neighbors, but it is outrageous to me that communities like mine and all over this country have seen the vicious impact of the War on Drugs, while other communities—elite communities—can brag and joke about their marijuana usage.

I am proud that I spent most of my adult life working with the people of

Newark, NJ—a city that is rich with culture, that is rich with art, that is rich with civic engagement—but I know, from Camden to Paterson, to Passaic, to Newark, there are communities like mine that, every single day, are getting the devastating blow of this prohibition—this war on marijuana.

I see the anguish people feel about the unjustness and the unfairness of it all and having lives upended for getting caught with small amounts of marijuana. I have seen countless people who couldn't find a job or a decent place to live to support their families.

I will never forget, as a city councilman in Newark, waiting in line at the DMV. A guy came over and told me the story that he was issued a uniform. He finally had a job that had a pension. He could support his family and move out of a bad neighborhood into a better one. He was so excited. They ran his record, and 18 years earlier he had a nonviolent, marijuana-related charge, and they took it all away from him. Think about that comparison to the highest office in the land, where marijuana users have occupied with no consequence—the hypocrisy of it all.

These aren't just a few people. These are hundreds of thousands of Americans who are bearing the brunt of nonviolent charges for marijuana. They have had their lives destroyed. They have that lifetime sentence of, time and time again, having to check a box about a marijuana arrest, having their uniforms taken away, opportunities closed.

I have seen how these laws make us less safe. When are we going to get back to this understanding that we—all of us as Americans—put our hand on our heart and we make a pledge; we swear an oath that we will be a nation of liberty and justice, not for the privileged, not for the elite, but we will be a nation of liberty and justice for all.

Countless people have talked about equal justice under the law. They have talked about these ideals and principles from this floor. They talked about it in the suffrage movement. They talked about it in the civil rights movement. It goes all the way back to slavery. Frederick Douglass, on the 24th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, made a statement that was as true then as it is now. He said:

Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.

Well, this is the War on Drugs. This is the marijuana prohibition. It has been a systematic oppression of poor people in our country. It has destroyed and devastated individuals, families, communities, and cities. It has bled our national treasure. It has filled our jails to the point where we had to build more and more of them. It has taken away resources from investing in drug treatment or education, which we know not only drives down drug use but empowers people economically.

This is the War on Drugs. This is the war on marijuana. Attorney General Sessions' policy rescission today will only make these problems worse, at a time that the majority of the American public agrees with me—agrees that this prohibition must end. The majority of the American people understand that this policy makes our communities less safe, wastes taxpayers' money, makes it more difficult for police officers to do their jobs, and ultimately hurts the struggling folks at the bottom of the economic ladder most. It disproportionately affects Black and Brown Americans. They are the ones who are bearing the brunt of our failure to get rid of this prohibition.

Let's be clear about what this setback is. The American people know the War on Drugs has failed. They want change. Republicans and Democrats and Independents in States all across our country are making change at their legislature, at the ballot box—voting in a repeal of these awful, unfair, wasteful policies all across this country. In red States and blue States, Americans are marching, are standing up, and are fighting to change these laws.

We know States that have legalized marijuana have seen a massive increase in revenue and decreased rates of serious crime. Crime is going down in those communities. They have been able to put more resources to use to address urgent public needs like education and infrastructure.

In Colorado, arrest rates have decreased and State revenue has increased. Washington State has seen a 10-percent decrease in violent crime over the 3-year period following legalization.

It is time for Congress to step up to the plate. It is time for us to once again live up to our oath. It is time for us once again to fight to make our country a place of liberty and justice for all.

I know right now Attorney General Jeff Sessions and President Trump are standing squarely on the wrong side of history. I know what our ancestors have taught us about the arc of the moral universe bending toward justice. I know this is not a matter of if but a matter of when we will have sane marijuana policies in this country and end the prohibition that is destroying neighborhoods. I know these things.

How long will people suffer? How long will we waste resources? How long will we make ourselves less safe? How long? This fight is more than about a substance—a plant. It is more. It is about the soul of our Nation. It is about our ideals. It is about justice. It is about justice for veterans who rely on medical marijuana to treat their PTSD. They fought for us, they stood for us, and now, according to Jeff Sessions, with the use of medical marijuana to deal with their PTSD, they are criminals.

That is not the America I believe in. It is about justice for the man who has

a criminal record for doing something that three out of four Presidents have done—who now can't get a job, can't get a business license, and can't move his family to a better home.

This is not justice. This is not the America I know we are. This is about the mother I stood next to with her child who had Dravet syndrome—who fell into seizure after seizure multiple times a day—who was a marijuana refugee, leaving a State that didn't end prohibition to go to a State that had medical marijuana laws. According to Jeff Sessions, she is a criminal.

This is not our America. This is not the land of truth and justice to treat a parent like that—like a criminal. This is about families and communities that too long have been fractured by the inaction of this body to address the overcriminalization of our country. This is about the very values people fight for and stand for. This is about who we will be. We cannot fall into this Nation where the privileged and the elite have certain laws and the poor and the struggling have others.

What Jeff Sessions did today is unconscionable, unacceptable, and I will fight against it because when I go home, I see the communities in struggle. I can't turn my head and not understand that there are millions of Americans who are hurting from this decades-long War on Drugs.

This is a self-inflicted wound that goes deep to the bone of our country. It undermines our health and well-being, and too many suffer because of it. We have to fight. I feel this sense of hopefulness because around this country, Democrats and Republicans on the State level are making changes. They are marching forward. They are undoing past wrongs. I feel a sense of hope and promise, and even though today we were delivered a painful blow by our Federal Government to cast a shadow against every American citizen who is using medical marijuana—every American citizen who is doing things Senators have done—I still know that truth will go marching on. I still know we are a nation of justice. I know we are better than this, and I know what our future holds.

I ask my colleagues to reject this action by the Attorney General, to speak out against this devastating reality. There are Senators here who represent States where the people have spoken. It is now time we speak for the people. It is now time we speak for our country's ideals. It is now time we don't just speak the words of our pledge but we make this country, in truth, a nation of liberty and justice for all.

Thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IRAN

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I have two topics I want to speak about today; one is Iran.

There is no question that Iran is the principal state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Both the Obama administration and the Trump administration have without hesitation made that point. The Iranian regime provides money and it provides material support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and a host of other terrorist groups. They have threatened to wipe out Israel, one of our closest allies. Their threat is to frankly wipe Israel off the map. And they have systematically trampled on the fundamental freedoms that all people everywhere would want to have. They have done that by taking those freedoms away from their own citizens and those human rights away from their own citizens.

In recent days, we have seen what happens after a decade of that kind of corruption and oppression. Protesters began a week ago to protest. It was, by all accounts, unexpected by the previous protest groups, by the military, or by the government. It spread to at least 50 cities, where brave people wanting to stand up—and in the streets began standing up by the thousands—to protest a government that denies them their rights, a government that has impoverished their country while it funnels billions of dollars to terrorists across the Middle East and across the world.

Where did those dollars come from? Unfortunately, too many of those dollars came from us.

I came to the floor, to this spot, nearly 2 years ago to ask that same question about where that money came from, after the Obama administration paid Iran what amounted to \$1.7 billion in what appeared to be a ransom for the release of five American hostages. At the time it was explained: Well, this is just money that we have had for a long time, which was part of an economic agreement, a foreign military sale that we have held on to. It turned out that the story was not true. We later learned that \$400 million of that payment was delivered in pallets of cash that came off an airplane. The pallets were stacked high with cash. And, on top of the \$100 billion in sanctions relief, we had another stack of billions of dollars in just straight cash—the sanctions relief, under the terribly thought-out Iranian nuclear deal, and the cash to apparently grease the skids so that agreement and others could happen.

We have heard of other things in recent days where the administration turned its back on bad things that were happening in order to see that the Iranian deal was going to go through. Now, if the Iranian deal had been a good deal, that would have been one thing, but to turn your back on bad things so that another bad thing can happen is even worse.

So where is this money going? Protesters have seen that the money that we delivered to them and the sanctions relief that we delivered to them didn't go to them and didn't go to their economy. It continued to finance terror around the world and war in other countries.

The State Department, once again, in their assessment said:

Iran remained the foremost state sponsor of terrorism in 2016 as groups supported by Iran maintained their capability to threaten U.S. interests and allies. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Qods Force, along with Iranian partners, allies, and proxies, continued to play a destabilizing role in military conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

Those assessments always come about a year late, after you have had time to assess the previous year. I have no doubt that the same assessment for 2016 will also be the assessment for the year we just ended—2017.

Frankly, the Iranian people are tired of it. They are angry. They are putting their lives on the line to protest.

The response of the Iranian Government has been predictable. First of all, they blame others for creating these problems. They said that we were agitating those freedom fighters in their country, those freedom protesters. They censored access to the social media. They have cracked down by arresting hundreds of people. The reports are that at least 20 people have been killed.

It is clear that their behavior hasn't changed; the hope that the Iranian deal would somehow bring the long sought-after moderates in the current government to the forefront has not happened. We should support the Iranian people.

I join the administration in expressing my support for the men and women, young and old, and the courage that they have demonstrated as they stand up and try to achieve the greatness of that country, with its long heritage and its incredible assets in location and in resources, which they should be able to achieve; they just have not been allowed to do that.

The last time this happened, our country was very quiet. This time, our government is speaking up. Hopefully, others will join in. The European countries have more economic impact in Iran than we do, and there is a good reason for that. We have been very thoughtful of wanting to support this regime. They have not. It is time for them to speak up as well.

So I join the administration, I join the President, and I encourage friends of freedom around the world to not let this moment pass again—to not, one more time, act as if nothing has happened, and that, somehow, this is exactly what the Iranian Government says it is, because it is almost never what the Iranian Government says it is. We wish for those who care about freedom to stand up and defend and encourage those who are seeking a greater freedom.