

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? Pro-testers 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.

FEMA DECISION

Mr. President, the other issue I want to speak about today very briefly is that I want to commend the administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a decision they just made. That decision was to make houses of worship eligible for Federal disaster aid. This is in line with legislation that I introduced in September of last year. Senator GILLIBRAND and I introduced this legislation after the impact of Hurricane Sandy on houses of worship.

FEMA's Public Assistance Program provides financial grants for the repair, reconstruction, and replacement of private nonprofit facilities—private nonprofit facilities. However, until yesterday, houses of worship were ineligible for FEMA public assistance grants.

As we saw last year, houses of worship—churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places—are critical institutions within communities. They help feed people in need and, in trying to respond to disaster, they provide comfort and shelter during those disasters. FEMA not only did the right thing by making houses of worship eligible for disaster assistance, it did what our Constitution demands.

According to FEMA officials, the change in policy was prompted by the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*. We have a provision in our constitution which I argued against and other Missouri elected officials filed amicus briefs against where we said our constitution was wrong in finding that religious, not-for-profit organizations couldn't be eligible for State programs simply because they were religious. That is not what the U.S. Constitution says. It is not what the Supreme Court determined State constitutions have a right to do.

So FEMA has taken an important step. I think it is equally important now that we make this policy permanent law. It is the right thing to do. It deserves to be permanently the right thing to do. I am hoping that we see the legislation that I have introduced and that many have cosponsored in whatever is the next supplemental disaster funding. Money is going to be spent. Let's go ahead and properly authorize it, as the Supreme Court said we had every right to do and as FEMA has decided that it is the right thing to do.

We are in a new year. We have new challenges. One of the goals we have is to be sure that we move forward in strengthening our economy, to help those responding to disasters and expanding opportunities for hard-working families. We have done that with regulatory reform, with judges who will determine what the law says, and with a tax bill where people will soon see in their paycheck that it is actually all about hard-working families.

I have an editorial from the Joplin Globe today. A tornado struck a community in 2011, and over 100 people

were killed. According to the Joplin Globe editorial—just to remind me of the numbers—some 28 churches were either destroyed or damaged by the tornado that came through Joplin. A significant number were totally destroyed. I have been to a number of those buildings that have been replaced, but they were replaced without any of the kind of assistance that other not-for-profits would have had.

The Joplin Globe editorial ends with this:

Floods, fires, tornadoes and hurricanes don't treat churches differently. Neither should FEMA.

Again, I congratulate FEMA for the decision they made on this topic.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Joplin Globe editorial be printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Joplin Globe]

OUR VIEW: FEMA AID FOR CHURCHES

During Joplin's 2011 tornado, some 28 churches were either destroyed or damaged. But those that were still standing quickly opened doors and became centers for those left homeless after this national disaster.

That's why we applaud the Federal Emergency Management Agency's announcement that houses of worship are eligible for FEMA Public Assistance program grants, which provide funding for the repair, reconstruction or replacement of private nonprofit sites.

That's thanks to U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., who introduced the legislation in September to make houses of worship permanently eligible for disaster assistance. Sen. Claire McCaskill, the Democrat from Missouri, also added her name to the bill in a show of bipartisan support.

Both Blunt and McCaskill, in statements put out on Wednesday, recognize the value churches can play in disasters.

"I'm glad to see FEMA do the right thing by ensuring houses of worship are eligible for disaster aid on the same terms as other nonprofits," Blunt said. "As we saw again last year, houses of worship serve a vital role during disasters, providing shelter, food and other services for families who need it the most."

Previously, houses of worship were ineligible for FEMA Public Assistance program grants. FEMA's announcement on Wednesday means that churches, synagogues or mosques affected by disasters declared on or after Aug. 23, 2017, and for applications for assistance that were pending with FEMA as of Aug. 23, 2017, are eligible for assistance.

Blunt's right. Legislation is still needed to ensure houses of worship remain eligible for disaster assistance under federal law on a permanent basis. Floods, fires, tornadoes and hurricanes don't treat churches differently. Neither should FEMA.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO JAMES CHARLES

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, for the past year or so, I have been coming to the floor nearly every week, and I know the Presiding Officer looks at this as possibly his favorite time of the week because he gets to hear a lot of these "Alaskan of the Week" speeches. I know the pages love them. I come to the floor to talk about my State, really brag about my State, and recognize an Alaskan who has made a difference—made a difference in their community, whether it is a small community or a big community in the State, in the country.

I have repeatedly stated—I am sure not all my colleagues agree, but maybe some of them do—that Alaskans live in the greatest State in the greatest country in the world. We certainly have the most beautiful landscapes and all the seasons. I was in Fairbanks and Anchorage over the holidays. It was wonderful. Winter is such a great time in the great State of Alaska. For those who love snow, Alaska is the place to be, so we want everyone to come visit. But it is truly the people and strong communities throughout Alaska that make our State so great—such a welcoming place.

For those of us who live in Alaska, sustainable community is everything. Living in one of the most magnificent places on Earth, also, certainly has its challenges. We depend on each other. Our traditional knowledge, our ingenuity, our warm-hearted nature, and our determination to overcome these challenges is what makes our State great and is often the theme of our "Alaskan of the Week" speeches.

Today I wish to transport you to the village of Tuntutuliak—a village of about 400 people, southwest of Bethel, AK, on the 700-mile long, mighty Kuskokwim River—and introduce you to a truly amazing elder who, for 77 years, has worked tirelessly for his community and for our State. This is James Charles, who is our Alaskan of the Week.

Over the past decades, when there has been a meeting on the Kuskokwim concerning fish or wildlife or subsistence, James has been there helping to create and shape a fishing and hunting community and regulations, not only for the region but for the entire State of Alaska.

James was born in 1940 in a fish camp below Helmick Point on the Kuskokwim River. During that time, Alaska was being devastated by a tuberculosis epidemic. In fact, in the mid-20th century, Alaska Native people experienced the highest incidence of tuberculosis of any population ever. This is one of the many challenges we talk about.

Sadly, the epidemic took James's father, his uncle, and both grandparents, leaving his mother and the community