

events that could be triggered by a decision. This is not a game. This is serious stuff.

On top of all that, losing the trust of our allies and nations around the world, losing our influence in a solution in Syria—ISIS is going to reemerge. It is not going to be the same ISIS it was before, controlling vast amounts of territory, but I will tell you what, al-Qaida never controlled vast amounts of territory. Operating from caves and hideouts throughout the Middle East, they carried out 9/11 and other threats against the United States and the homeland that were thwarted.

ISIS is going to reemerge now. They are once again going to be able to recruit people. They are going to have an insurgency that is going to be able to strike and perhaps externally plot. They are going to be able, from that presence they have in Syria, to influence their affiliates everywhere from the Philippines to Central Africa, to other countries in the region.

That is why I am here to tell you this is a catastrophic decision. Forget, for a moment, about no one being notified; it was just announced at the last minute. I haven't heard a single member of the administration—not one, not the Secretary of Defense, not the Secretary of State—who is going to own this decision? Who is willing to step forward and tell the American people or Congress, here is why we are making this decision, and here is the strategy it is in furtherance of? Someone explain that. It is important. The American people deserve to know. I haven't heard that today. We haven't heard it before.

We thought we had the outlines of some strategy here. All that has been taken away. Why are we doing this? What is the rationale and what comes next? What is the plan to keep ISIS from reemerging? What is the plan to keep Iran from growing its presence in Southern Syria and threatening Israel? What is the plan to deal with the al-Qaida element that already exists there? What is our role? What role are we going to play in a post-ISIS and post-al-Qaida Syria—and particularly as it relates to whether it can be used as a base of operations against our interests and our men and women in uniform stationed in the region. None of that has been outlined.

Is anyone in the administration going to own this and explain it? Because so far we haven't heard it, and this is an important public policy decision.

I hope I am wrong about all this. I hope this all works out, but it is not going to, and I am telling you, these are the kinds of decisions that define Presidencies. These are the kinds of mistakes that end up haunting a nation for years and years and years thereafter.

It is the hard lesson of Iraq. It is the hard lesson of decisions made at other times in our history. I hope this can be

reversed. I hope this can be reexamined because I honestly believe—put politics aside—I honestly believe this is a catastrophic decision for America's national security interests. If this stands, we in this Congress and we as a nation are going to be dealing with the consequences of it for years to come.

We will remember this day as the day that started it all. We will remember this day as a major blunder, in which by ignoring the advice of every diplomatic and military official who has spoken about this publicly for the last 2 years, we made a decision, for reasons that have not yet been explained, that triggered—that triggered—a series of events that no one foresaw at the time but proved to be much more dangerous and much costlier than anything we are doing there now.

So I honestly and sincerely hope someone in the administration is listening and that there is a chance to reverse or amend this decision before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

LIVER TRANSPLANT POLICY

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I am here to speak tonight because something is not right. I want to express my real concern with the recent decision of the national liver allocation policy made by the Organ Procurement Transplant Network made on December 4.

This sounds like something that is far away and perhaps of no real consequence, but the decision that was made has huge consequences on every American and should be receiving more attention than it has to date because the number of organs that are available for transplant and where those organs will be available is being determined by this small group of people.

The decision they made throws aside expert advice from transplant surgeons and hospitals on best practices. It also carries the risk of decreasing organ donation rates, as donors learn their organs will not be used in their own communities but will be shipped someplace in the country. Places in the country today have donor programs designed to encourage donors to donate their organs, and part of that is the understanding that those organs are going to be available for your family, your friends and neighbors, and people within your community.

This decision limits the availability and access to donated organs in areas that currently have low wait times and damages the ability of our major transplant hospitals to perform these services for patients. In December of 2017, following two rounds of public comment period and extensive deliberation by the OPTN board, that board approved a compromise allocation policy that served the transplant community's best interests. This served as a policy reform that was worked out over

years to better benefit the entire country based upon compromise by transplant experts, patients, and stakeholders.

However, the next year in 2018, a lawsuit was filed based upon the HRSA allocation policies, and in the face of that single voice of criticism, they disregarded years of work and compromise that was reached the year before. It is unfortunate that the basis for this policy change was litigation, not a determination of how best to improve the Nation's organ transplant, procurement, and allocation process. HRSA has rushed to respond to this lawsuit by abdicating their duty to implement good policy, instead allowing a single case to divert liver allocation policy across the entire United States.

In October, I had a meeting with Dr. George Sigounas, the Administrator of HRSA. He described to me the importance of the comment period on these policies and how seriously his Agency would take them, especially considering that they were the very institutions and doctors who would go on to perform these transplants.

Shortly thereafter, I was disappointed to learn these comments were not comments made by the public, by these institutions, the doctors who perform transplants—that these comments were not even considered by the individuals tasked with crafting and advising the latest policy. In fact, Sue Dunn, the president of OPTN, has informed a number of commenters in the transplant community that their concerns over new policy were not even read by the board that approved the new policy. The reason these comments were not considered was due to the fact that OPTN's comment system was so overloaded in the days leading up to the decision that it caused a complete shutdown of that process.

So many transplant hospitals, surgeons, and medical professionals had deep enough concerns that they took the time out of their day to express them. These are the people tasked with saving lives through transplants each and every day. Yet their opinions, in essence, were deemed invalid. So many comments were submitted that the entire system shut down, and OPTN's response was simply to ignore them.

Further, OPTN did not choose to reconsider their damaging policies in the face of widespread opposition from the medical community. OPTN continues to push forward against all common sense in their pursuit to radically alter the way organs are distributed across the United States. Decisions on national organ allocation should be grounded in expert opinions rather than in a response to a single lawsuit. HRSA and OPTN are making a grave mistake in pushing this damaging policy that carries a significant cost—human lives.

In the meeting I had with Dr. Sigounas, as I indicated, he told me these comments should not just be comments but present actual suggestions of what the policy should be. I

know of institutions and organizations that did that, and to learn they were disregarded causes me to have great concerns.

The Senator from Missouri, Mr. BLUNT, and I have probed Secretary Azar, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, on this subject, and we are eagerly awaiting his justification for what appears to be a major significant error. It appears that HRSA and OPTN making policy in such a reckless fashion has become the normal state of affairs. Additional oversight may be necessary to ensure that fairness in organ allocation policy is protected and some common sense prevails in future policy. I know there is a group of Senators who are working on legislation to do just that.

I am very disappointed in the actions of HRSA, OPTN, and UNOS. This process has been flawed from start to finish, guided not by what is best for the country but how to sidestep a single lawsuit.

Organ procurement and allocation policy is too important. It is about life and death and is too important to be simply decided by lawsuits and countersuits, which I fear now will become the way of addressing this issue.

I will continue to work to protect our hospitals, our doctors, and particularly our patients—Americans—from this policy that disregarded all input from those in the transplant community. This discussion cannot be seen as anything coming to a close. It is far from over. I remain committed to finding answers, changing the tide, and putting patients and providers first in these life-or-death scenarios.

I thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

TRIBUTE TO MARCIA FUDGE

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, 10 years ago this summer, we lost a longtime friend of mine and colleague, a remarkable public servant, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones.

When MARCIA FUDGE, then the mayor of Warrensville Heights, a Cleveland suburb, won the special election to Stephanie's seat to represent the 11th Congressional District, including Cleveland and the home where Connie and I live, she had big shoes to fill, but MARCIA rose to the occasion. For the past decade, she has been a fighter for my hometown of Cleveland and the east side suburbs into Akron and all the Ohioans she serves.

On the Education and Workforce Committee, she has become a senior leader who knows how to get things done. She stands up for Ohio's teachers, students, and families.

MARCIA also joined the Agriculture Committee, perhaps not initially seen as a natural fit for someone with an urban district like hers, but she understands that farm bills are not just about crops. They are food bills, eco-

nomics development bills, conservation bills, research bills, and nutrition bills. She and I—and I am the first Senator in half a century to be on the Ag Committee for some of the same reasons Congressman FUDGE is on this committee. We have worked together to write two farm bills.

This year, we both served on the bill's conference committee, and we fought House Republican efforts to erect more bureaucracy to gut nutrition programs in Ohio that families rely on. These are programs for people making \$8, \$10, \$12 an hour who don't have quite enough income to feed their families. We won that fight.

Tomorrow the President is scheduled to sign the bipartisan farm bill we passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both Houses. Congresswoman FUDGE and I worked to right a century-old wrong and get Central State University the 1890 land grant status they deserve. That designation isn't just a rhetorical honor; it means more opportunities for funding and research in partnerships with industry—the sort of results that Marcia delivers for her district.

She is a leader among her colleagues. As head of the Congressional Black Caucus, she led the fight on so many issues, including working to ensure that all Americans have a voice in their government.

A few years ago, we held a field hearing on barriers too many Ohioans face exercising their most fundamental right—the right to vote. MARCIA was a star in that hearing. It came in the wake of a despicable Ohio law and, frankly, years of attempts at voter suppression by Ohio Republicans—a despicable Ohio law that cut the number of early voting days in half.

We know exactly whom these laws are aimed at. MARCIA testified about how these suppression tactics hurt communities of color. Unfortunately, it has gotten worse—limiting absentee balloting, restricting provisional balloting—and the Supreme Court, a Court that puts its thumb on the scale of justice in support of corporations over workers, a Court that puts its thumb on the scale of justice to support Wall Street over consumers, and a Court that rubberstamps all these restrictions on voting.

I look forward to continuing our fight alongside MARCIA against these tactics straight out of the Jim Crow era. I know MARCIA will continue to be a leader. There is no doubt, even before her election to Congress, that MARCIA was a force to be reckoned with: a former mayor, a former congressional chief of staff, and former national president—as important as anything she has done, I think in her mind—of Delta Sigma Theta. She still helps lead efforts to bring Deltas from around the country to the Hill each year for Delta Days. Hundreds of driven, ambitious, smart, committed, empathetic talented Black women come to our Nation's Capitol to meet with Members of Con-

gress and make their voices heard. They have an incredible role model in MARCIA FUDGE.

I am grateful, Congresswoman FUDGE, to have you as my Congresswoman. I am proud to call you a colleague and a friend.

ECONOMY

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I noticed today news reports from Bloomberg that the year 2017 is shaping up to be or likely was the most profitable year in Wall Street history. So what is Congress's reaction to that? What happens in the majority leader's office? More special interest legislation, more breaks for Wall Street, more tax cuts. So this Congress—this Congress has decided that Wall Street never quite has enough; that the richest people in this country are never rich enough; that the most powerful people in this country are not powerful enough.

So what happens down the hall in the majority leader's office? What happens way down the hall in the Speaker's office, although voters this year decided this year to eject him and his staff and his cohorts and his fellow travelers—if I can use a phrase like that—from that office and elect a whole different group of people.

What they have done is meet behind closed doors to help the oil companies, the drug companies, the gun lobby, and help especially Wall Street. In fact, not only are there all kinds of Wall Street lobbyists day in and day out—tobacco lobbyists, gun lobbyists, and others, but the White House itself looks like a retreat for Wall Street executives.

We know that. That is why, I guess, Wall Street had such a great year in 2017.

TRIBUTE TO PAT ROGALA

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I want to honor the career of Patricia Rogala, who has been with my office our entire 12 years in the Senate and my 14 years in the House before that. Pat is the model of a dedicated public servant. After more than 25 years serving the people of Ohio, Pat is retiring at the end of the year.

Her first day on the job in Cleveland, Congress was in the middle of a fight—sounds familiar—over healthcare. Some local activists sent an Elvis impersonator to the office singing a healthcare song to the tune of "It's Now or Never." Pat said at the time, "What am I getting myself into?"

Fortunately, she stayed. As our Ohio scheduler, she has sent me all over my State. She has helped me put more road miles on our made-in-Toledo Jeep Cherokee than any travel agent ever could.

She has made sure I am able to serve Ohioans through meetings and roundtables and plant visits. She juggles a Senate schedule that changes—as we see tonight—always at the last minute. She ensures that this