

year and kept from running an addiction treatment program for veterans. It happens that Brandon's only "mistake" was to point out poor treatment of suicidal veterans. Eventually, after a concerted effort by my office, Senator JOHNSON's office, and the Office of Special Counsel, Brandon was provided a new position within the VA's Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. That is how it should be done.

Without the protections established by the Whistleblower Protection Act, Brandon's story might have turned out very differently. Without these protections, who knows how many other instances of waste, fraud, and abuse that we have been able to find and repair thanks to whistleblowers would be continuing now unabated?

Now, make no mistake, we still have a ways to go to ensure that whistleblowers are valued as they should be valued and supported as they should be supported. I still hear from far too many whistleblowers who have done the right thing only to experience retaliation from their Agencies as a result.

We in Congress, including this Senator, shouldn't be hearing those things at all. That is why continued oversight by Congress is so very important. Whistleblowers depend on us—you and me. All of our colleagues in this body ought to be listening to them. We ought to be supporting them and honoring them by following up on their concerns and taking action to fix serious problems when they bring them to our attention.

I thank the whistleblowers who worked with my office over the years. They are truly patriots willing to put their job on the line, willing to put their profession on the line. We have come a long way since the Whistleblower Protection Act first passed in 1989. We owe it to them to build on the progress we made and to continue to improve upon our whistleblower laws for years to come.

You can rest assured that I will be part of those ongoing efforts on this important anniversary of the Whistleblower Protection Act. I encourage my colleagues to reflect on the important role whistleblowers play in our government and to renew their commitment to the same.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

REMEMBERING FRITZ HOLLINGS

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon in honor of my good friend from South Carolina, the late Senator Fritz Hollings, who spent many, many years right here in this Chamber.

As we mourn his passing today, we remember the great impact Fritz Hollings had both in the Senate and in his home State of South Carolina, where he served as Governor, as Lieutenant Governor, as a member of the State legislature, and so forth. From 1966 to 2005, which was nearly four decades, he also represented South Carolina in Washington—right here in this body.

Born and raised in Charleston, SC, Fritz Hollings was a distinguished graduate of the Citadel and served as an Army artillery officer during World War II, for which he was awarded, among other things, the Bronze Star.

For 36 years, Fritz Hollings served alongside Strom Thurmond in the Senate, whom the Presiding Officer will remember. He was the junior Senator of his State for six terms, which made him the longest serving junior Senator in the history of the Senate. Throughout his tenure, Fritz served as a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, where I served with him. He was also the chairman of the Budget Committee and the chairman of the Commerce Committee. He was a skilled legislator and statesman.

In terms of influential policy, Fritz made quite a mark. He was instrumental in the creation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which we know as NOAA. When he was chairman of the Commerce Committee, he also helped to enact laws to alleviate childhood hunger and to expand competition in telecommunications during the early stages of the internet.

He may have spent nearly 39 years in the Senate, but his time in Washington was not all that made up his career.

Fritz Hollings served three terms in the South Carolina House of Representatives. He won his first election in 1948 at the age of 26. He went on to serve as South Carolina's Lieutenant Governor and then as its Governor at the age of 36. In 1984, while he was a sitting Senator here, he ran for President of the United States. He was a true public servant. He devoted his entire life to the betterment of his country, to his State, and to his people.

As we honor his lasting impact and achievements throughout his career, we are reminded that Fritz was what we would call a southern gentleman. With a distinguished Charlestonian southern drawl and a quick wit, Fritz was courteous and well mannered. He built his seniority with patience and respect.

I am grateful for his friendship and camaraderie over the last 40 years. Annette and I join his family as we mourn his passing and celebrate his life and the legacy he leaves behind in the U.S. Senate.

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

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

VENEZUELA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last year I made my first trip to Venezuela just 1 month before a Presidential election that by all accounts was about to be rigged by the incumbent, Maduro. His criminal regime was increasingly isolated by its neighbors in the world.

The Venezuelan people are suffering horribly—malnutrition, hyperinflation, levels of disease seen only in war zones around the world. As a result, 3 million Venezuelans have fled the country.

Neighbors in Colombia and Ecuador showed and continue to show incredible compassion to the hundreds of thousands of desperate Venezuelans who are pouring across their borders. In fact, my staff was just in Cucuta, Colombia, on the Venezuelan border, and my staff saw firsthand the humanity and patience of the Colombian people helping their Venezuelan brothers and sisters showing up desperate for food and safety, all amid the stark cruelty of barricaded bridges deliberately blocking aid trucks.

I might just add parenthetically—what a sharp contrast: the suffering in Venezuela and the people in Colombia, their neighbors who are trying to help, and what we are doing on our southern border when it comes to those who are suffering in Honduras and El Salvador and Guatemala. What a contrast.

During my visit to Venezuela last year, I told Maduro that if he went ahead with his stolen election, he would find himself isolated in the eyes of the world, and the Venezuelan people would suffer even greater hardship. I told him that in Washington both political parties don't agree on much, but they do on Venezuela.

Tragically, he ignored me and proceeded with this discredited election.

As a result, when the region's governments on both the left and the right decided to recognize the Venezuelan National Assembly President Juan Guaido as the country's interim President, as provided for under the country's Constitution, I promptly agreed. In fact, I called Guaido immediately, spoke to him personally, and came to the floor of the Senate to offer my support for his ascendancy as the leader of Venezuela.

I had met him in Caracas last year at a dinner that was kind of a secret dinner since he was in the opposition, and I remember at that dinner that five members of the National Assembly said: If you come back here in 2019 and look for the five of us, two of us will be exiled, two will be in prison, and one will disappear. That is what happened in Venezuela.

The courage they showed at that meeting and afterward should not be ignored by the American people.

As President Trump made his case that the world needed to act in Venezuela, in part because of the horrible situation and danger the Venezuelan people found themselves in, I joined in

bipartisan agreement. The danger and fear are well-placed and well-documented—armed vigilante groups, some in motorcycle gangs, that harass and beat innocent civilians; extended power outages, leaving already desperate medical care even more perilous; and arbitrary arrest and torture for those peacefully demonstrating against the Maduro regime.

Just the other week, interim President Guaido's Chief of Staff, Roberto Morrero, was arrested by the Maduro regime, and it is feared that he is enduring torture at the present time.

Judge Maria Afiuni, already cruelly jailed at a previous time and assaulted for making a judicial ruling against the Chavez regime, has now found herself facing another 5-year sentence under the Maduro regime.

Five dual U.S.-Venezuelan citizens and a U.S. permanent resident who are CITGO employees have been cruelly held hostage in a basement prison for more than a year after being tricked into going to Venezuela for a business meeting.

So amid the administration's accurate description of the misery and the danger that Venezuelans face, this administration still refuses to grant to the estimated 72,000 Venezuelans on visas in the United States—some of them students in my home State of Illinois—temporary protected status. This would be an obviously humanitarian move that would allow them to stay here until Venezuela is safe and stabilized.

In Illinois, where many Venezuelans are studying in our colleges and universities, I have heard repeatedly of their desperation. Their visas are about to expire, and unless the President—and he has the power to do it—extends their protected status in this country, they will be forced to go back to Venezuela, a country our government warns people to stay away from.

I held a townhall meeting in Illinois with my Venezuelan friends. They are heartbroken and worried about their families who are still in Venezuela to this day, and they worry about the danger and violence they are going to face. Is it any wonder, then, that many of them who are students or visitors here want to stay in the safety of the United States until this stabilizes?

I would say to the President: I know your opinion of immigrants, and I know your opinion of refugees, but don't give us a speech one day telling us how dangerous it is in Venezuela and then the next day refuse to allow these people who are here to stay safely.

Temporary protected status is not permanent. It is a short-term humanitarian measure. We ought to do it.

This temporary protected status can be granted to nationals of another country who are in the United States if returning to their country would pose a serious threat to their personal safety.

Do you know what the official line of the Trump administration is about

Americans who want to visit Venezuela now? Let me read it to you. Here is what the State Department says:

Do not travel to Venezuela due to crime, civil unrest, poor health infrastructure, and arbitrary arrest and detention of U.S. citizens. . . . Violent crime, such as homicide, armed robbery, kidnapping, and carjacking is common. . . . There are shortages of food, electricity, water, medicine, and medical supplies through much of Venezuela.

That is the official line of our government, warning people not to go to Venezuela. Yet even weeks after Senator RUBIO and I have requested it, the administration still refuses to give the Venezuelans in the United States protected status so that they are not forced to face the same thing.

Recent power outages have left the country even more desperate for basic water. Look at this photograph here. This shows people collecting water falling from a leaky pipeline along the banks of a river in Caracas. That is the desperation these people face.

How can we force people to return to Venezuela when our own State Department says it is too dangerous to travel there?

In fact, last month Senators Rubio, Menendez, and I—and 21 other Senate Democrats—sent a bipartisan letter to President Trump, urging him to take the obvious step that would match his rhetoric on Venezuela.

I have also raised this directly with Vice President PENCE and National Security Advisor Bolton.

Let me again urge here on the Senate floor that President Trump take action to grant TPS status to the Venezuelans in the United States. This would be a concrete measure that President Trump could take this afternoon with the stroke of a pen to protect tens of thousands of innocent people.

At a time when some have questioned America's real intentions toward Venezuela, this action by President Trump of granting TPS status to Venezuelan visitors in the United States would demonstrate that our true focus is on the safety and well-being of these innocent people.

This is not only the right thing to do, but it would fully align the President with his speeches.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

TAX REFORM

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, as we approach tax day, America's roaring economy keeps on speeding ahead as we continue to see the positive impact that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is having throughout Iowa and the rest of our country.

Last week, yet another outstanding jobs report was released, showing that the economy added 196,000 jobs in March—well above expectations.

Just think, since tax reform was passed, 3.2 million jobs have been created. And year-over-year wage growth remains strong at 3.2 percent in March.

After years of stagnant wage growth, we have now had 8 consecutive months in which it exceeded 3 percent.

Under the leadership of Governor Kim Reynolds, Iowa's unemployment rate is the lowest in the country and is tied for the lowest rate ever recorded in our State. I have seen the effects of tax reform firsthand in my home State, and they are paying off big time.

Thanks to Senate Republican pro-growth tax reform, a business owner in Pella, IA, has saved tens of thousands in taxes, allowing her to increase the wages of her employees, purchase new semi-trailers, and upgrade her facilities.

A small brewery in central Iowa has been able to hire a new full-time employee and purchase an additional fermenter, increasing their production by 17 percent.

In a survey of Iowa businesses last month, 87 percent of folks said they plan to make capital expenditures this quarter, and the vast majority expects sales to grow over the next year.

By lowering tax rates and doubling the standard deduction and child tax credit, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act has also helped families throughout Iowa keep more of their hard-earned dollars.

In 2018 alone, Iowans saved an estimated \$1.8 billion in Federal taxes. A single mother earning \$30,000 a year is saving over \$1,000 in taxes. Iowans earning between \$40,000 and \$80,000 are receiving an average tax cut of \$1,128 dollars.

These savings are certainly not penalties, as some of our Democratic colleagues have suggested. These tax cuts are allowing families to get ahead and save for their future.

Iowans are feeling the strong effects of the pro-growth tax cuts that Republicans passed. Folks are keeping more of their own money, and at the same time, the rising tide of our economy is lifting wages.

A couple of years ago, we were in the midst of the most sluggish economic recovery in our history. Folks, it wasn't much of a recovery. Today, thanks to tax reform, Americans are able to keep more of their own hard-earned money, our economy is booming, wages are finally rising, and unemployment is at a near 50-year low.

Tax reform has created a more competitive tax system while providing much needed relief for hard-working Iowans and job creators of all sizes. And folks, this really is only the beginning.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, as we said when we began to talk about tax reform months ago now, the purpose of tax reform was stronger families and expanding opportunities for every American. I think the facts are clear that that is exactly what happened.

Over the past year, most people saw bigger paychecks. Many of those people saw bigger paychecks because they had less money taken out of their checks. Ninety percent of middle-class Americans received a tax cut. Pay increases