invited to and how none of them would have felt as much like an authentic reunion as being inside Earth Prime did at that moment.

A man roughly my own age walked in, flanked by several children. One of them, a young girl wearing a white-and-pink Spider-Gwen hoodie, had a list in hand. She bounced on the balls of her feet as she browsed from shelf to shelf, humming quietly.

I looked away, overcome by a rogue wave of emotion. I seemed to see a thread stretching back through time, connecting Bissette, Veitch and Farrell hunting the comics racks to misfits like Giordano and Simmon finding family at a fledgling shop. That thread reached all the way to the girl in the hoodie, humming to herself in her happy place. Earth Prime was hers now more than mine, and I loved that so much that I felt a strange, damp sensation at the comers of my eyes.

As I walked away from Earth Prime, I made a mental note to text my brother. I wanted to say something reflective of the strange epiphany I'd had standing in the shop. In the end, though, I decided to keep it simple.

''Dropped by Earth Prime,'' I texted Pat. ''Still the same.''

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

IRAN

• Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing examining the current negotiations around restoring the JCPOA and our Nation's Iran policy. However, because I contracted COVID–19 and am following CDC guidance to isolate, I was not able to attend this important hearing. But I do want to state, for the record, that I believe preventing a nuclear-armed Iran through hard-nosed diplomacy is of the utmost importance to our Nation.

I am under no illusions that the deal currently being negotiated by the Biden administration would be perfect or that Iran is a good-faith negotiating partner. But when it comes to preventing a nuclear-armed Iran and creating a monitoring and verification regime that ensures Iran is sticking to its commitments, it is the only option.

Maximum pressure didn't work; more sanctions only led to Iran reconstituting its weapons program and growing its nuclear stockpile and more nefarious behavior in the region. A military response would be even worse; Iran would undoubtedly retaliate and be incentivized to ratchet up its nuclear program as it has done when its nuclear facilities and officials have been attacked in the past. Neither option achieves our goal of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

The only viable option is to continue negotiations on a nuclear deal. Doing so doesn't mean foregoing all of our other concerns with Iran. The U.S. never should and never will acquiesce in Iran's violations of international law and human rights and should continue to use all of our tools to combat its malign actions. But it would be a grave mistake to effectively green light an Iranian bomb if we are unable to convince Iran's leadership to renounce all of Iran's other bad behavior as well.

A nuclear-armed Iran would be catastrophic for the region and the world by emboldening a belligerent nation, setting off an arms race, and undermining the broader nuclear order. I urge my colleagues to join me in giving the administration the space and flexibility it needs to restore a deal that prevents such an outcome.•

MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this coming Monday is Memorial Day, the day we set aside to honor the more than 1.1 million Americans who have given their lives in military service to our Nation.

It is a solemn day of remembrance and has a special resonance in my state. One of America's first Memorial Day ceremonies occurred in Illinois. It was April 1866—barely a year after the end of America's terrible Civil War.

Three returning veterans from that great conflict were waiting for services to begin at a church in Carbondale when they saw a young woman with two infants approach a small, unmarked grave in the church cemetery, place flowers on the grave, and kneel in prayer. The veterans, deeply moved, collected wildflowers and placed them at all of the veterans' graves in the churchyard. They then arranged to host a parade of veterans to honor the war dead resting in the town's cemetery.

More than 200 veterans showed up for that parade—one of America's first Memorial Day parades. Among the marchers was General John Logan, a Civil War hero and proud son of Illinois. The following year, General Logan was appointed the commander in chief of the Grand Army of the Republic. One of his first acts as commander in chief was to call for a national day of remembrance to honor the soldiers who sacrificed their lives so that America could receive a ''new birth of freedom.''

In the Army's General Order No. 11—the ''Memorial Day Order''—General Logan wrote of his hope that the day of remembrance would be ''kept up from year to year, [as long as] a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades.''

On this Memorial Day, more than a century and a half later, we remember all of the American patriots who have fallen in battles—from Antietam, to the Argonne Forest, to Afghanistan. General Logan called their deaths ''the cost of a free and undivided republic.''

In these fractious times, when our Nation sometimes feels, again, like a house divided, may we remember the price those fallen heroes paid to preserve our Union. And may we also remember the duty we each bear to preserve the priceless gift for which they gave their lives—this Nation, free and undivided.

On a related note, I want to take a moment to wish a belated happy birthday to an American hero who returned from war. Sgt. Victor Butler is that last surviving Tuskegee Airman in his home State of Rhode Island and one of the last of that legendary Band of Brothers in our Nation. Last Saturday, May 21, Mr. Butler celebrated his 100th birthday.

When he was a young man, he and the other members of the Tuskegee Airmen helped to save the world from the tyranny of fascism—and he helped to loosen the grip of racism on America. In the weeks before his 100th birthday, Mr. Butler told family and friends all he wanted for his centennial celebration was a card. He didn't want folks to make a fuss or go to any great expense.

One of his nieces posted his wish on social media—and word spread. He thought he might receive a few cards. At last count, Mr. Butler had received more than 40,000 cards and video greetings from people in every State in the Union and as far away as Japan, South Korea, and Germany.

Last Saturday, on his birthday, his hometown held a parade in his honor. And he received a signed football and a jersey with the number ''100'' on the back, hand-delivered by the owner of his favorite football team, the New England Patriots—a well-deserved tribute to a real-life hero.

Like the tradition of Memorial Day, the Tuskegee Airmen have a special connection to my State. The first airfield where they trained—before Tuskegee—was Chanute Field in Rantoul, IL, near Champaign. The spot where that airfield stood is marked proudly today with signs that read ''Birthplace of the Tuskegee Airmen.'' And in 2016, Illinois renamed a stretch of Interstate 57 on the South Side of Chicago as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Trail. It is a fitting tribute, given how many Tuskegee Airman had roots in the Chicago area.

African-Americans have fought and died for America's freedom since Crispus Attucks became the first American to fall in our War for Independence.

As the first African-American aviators ever to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps, the Tuskegee Airman occupy a special chapter in our Nation's history. They fought in World War II, at a time when the U.S. Armed Forces were still segregated, and our Nation was still riven with racially discriminatory laws and attitudes. Their original mission was to serve as escort pilots for other American flyers, to protect them from enemy fire. The Tuskegee Airmen also flew bombing missions themselves.

Officially, they were known as the 99th Pursuit Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group. But the pilots whose flights they protected gave them a nickname. They called them the Red Tails, or the Red-Tailed Angels, due to the distinctive color on their aircraft