

family. Her husband is a U.S. citizen, and because of that both her children are U.S. citizens. Because of her faith, she had been sentenced to death.

The State Department wondered how much jurisdiction it had in this case, and so Senator AYOTTE and I sent another letter to both the State Department and Homeland Security—that agency has the ability to allow people to leave a country or come into a country.

On Monday, it looked as though the situation was moving in the right direction. She had reportedly been acquitted and was set free. She was allowed to join her husband and their children at the airport, but yesterday when they tried to leave the airport, news outlets reported she was rearrested. I hope by rearrested they mean she was detained for paperwork, but the Sudanese Government needs to let her go.

If they are so concerned about the issue of faith and don't want someone there who is willing to promote another faith—or at least live another faith—they should at the very least let her leave the country. I think asylum in the United States for her U.S. citizen husband, her U.S. citizen children, and her is appropriate. That way the danger they feel they face by someone who is willing to profess another faith would be gone.

I cannot imagine why the Sudanese Government would not allow her to leave the country, and I encourage them today to release them.

NBC News reported:

The NISS, a shadowy and feared institution, said on its Facebook page that Ibrahim and her family had been attempting to travel to the U.S. with documents from the Embassy of south Sudan, which split from its northern neighbor in 2011 after years of civil war. It said she was carrying a U.S. visa, and that her attempts to use the documents were considered a "criminal offense."

Apparently the documents were purportedly—at least according to this news report—from South Sudan. But those documents should have been enough to let her leave and should not have been considered another criminal offense.

These authorities have told reporters that Meriam Ibrahim was using a valid travel document issued by the Embassy of South Sudan, and then suddenly her valid travel documents were deemed not valid.

The State Department, I hope, is doing everything it can to work with the Sudanese Government to ensure that this family is able to come back to the United States. This continued harassment over someone's faith has to end. We need to be doing everything we can. Her husband is a U.S. citizen and her children are U.S. citizens. This is an American family and Sudan should let them leave and let them leave now.

If this were the only time something such as this happened, it would be a terrible problem, but this injustice takes place in so many countries around the world. Apparently the one

faith you can't profess is the Christian faith.

When news of Meriam's death sentence came to light, it was about the same day there were reports of another American citizen, Pastor Saeed Abedini, who had been beaten badly in a hospital in Iran. He was there because of his faith. He was taken to an Iranian prison that was notoriously known as the most dangerous prison you could possibly be in in Iran.

Last year I joined with 11 of my colleagues—at the time Secretary Clinton was leaving—urging Senator Clinton to use every resource we had to release him as well. Our government condemned the Iranian Government for his prosecution.

He converted to Christianity as a teenager before moving to the United States with his wife. He established some churches that were underground churches in that country.

In 2009, he was arrested for so-called Christian activities. He was released on bail. He agreed not to continue his work with the underground churches, but as he was traveling back and forth between the United States and Iran in recent years, he was working to establish nonreligious orphanages in Iran.

In September of 2012, he was detained after he lawfully came into Iran through Turkey. He is now serving an 8-year jail sentence on charges related to his Christian faith, and all the while he has been interrogated intensely and beaten to the point where he was taken to the hospital and then he was beaten in the hospital. After that, he was taken to the most dangerous prison you could take a person to in Iran.

The activities I have just described cannot be allowed to continue. I don't know how we can move forward with talks with the Iranians and not ask them for such a simple gesture that would allow this U.S. citizen to come back to the United States—and don't kill him in one of your prisons or hospitals. It would show a sign of a good-faith effort as we continue to have these discussions.

I hope the President will step forward, along with the Secretary of State, and talk about these grave abuses of human rights.

Last year the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported out a bipartisan bill to appoint a special envoy for the purpose of promoting religious freedom among religious minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. The House has already passed this bill.

This continued violence—particularly against Christians—against all religions that governments are in disagreement with is deeply disturbing. It defies the freedoms we hold dear.

When people's rights to their own religious beliefs are abused in the Middle East or Sudan or anywhere else, the United States of America should be the first country to step up and say: We are going to do whatever we can to ensure more religious freedom, and in this particular case, to ensure that the

Ibrahim family—in prison in Sudan—is able to leave and Pastor Abedini is able to leave Iran.

#### AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. BLUNT. The other matter I wish to talk about for just a few minutes deals with the disappointing answer Senator ALEXANDER and I got this week from a request we made several days ago about a processing center near St. Louis where the employees have stepped forward and basically said this was a processing center for the Affordable Care Act. One group that may not be able to afford the Affordable Care Act—among many others—may be the taxpayers. These employees stepped forward and said they were really not doing anything.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported this morning:

Whistleblower allegations last month that claims workers slept, read or played games at Wentzville invoked a flurry of questions from Missouri's congressional delegation.

Moving on with their story, they cite one of the whistleblowers as saying:

We played Pictionary. We played 20 Questions. We played Trivial Pursuit.

She estimated she processed six applications the entire month of December.

CMS, while not acknowledging any of those allegations, said it "has adjusted Serco's work to accommodate changing operational needs." That is sort of a nonanswer answer.

If we want the government to work more effectively, the government has to be responsive to the Congress.

Mr. President, I unanimous consent to have my letter printed in the RECORD.

This letter is dated June 17, but we had to call them yesterday to see if they were ever going to respond. They stamp-dated this a few days ago, but we certainly have not received anything.

I understand the Affordable Care Act is not going the way the administration had hoped, but that doesn't mean they can continue to pretend there are applications where there are no applications or work where there is no work or contracts that have not performed.

This is a British company that was already in trouble with the British Government that has not performed there. It appears to be one of the considerations to get a \$1.25 billion contract here.

I wish to have answers to these questions. I know many in the Congress wish to have answers to their questions. They wish to ask questions rather than to have to listen to whatever information the administration would like to give.

I think the entire Missouri congressional delegation is interested in this, as are people who are wanting the taxpayers to be protected and for people to have access to health care they can afford and that meets the needs of their family.

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

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES

Washington, DC, June 17, 2014.

Hon. ROY BLUNT,  
U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR BLUNT: Thank you for your letter regarding the recent news story about employees of Serco, a contractor to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which provides eligibility support for the Federally-facilitated Marketplace (Marketplace). CMS is committed to working with Serco, and all of CMS's contractors, to ensure that federal funds are spent appropriately and that performance expectations are clear and monitored. We closely monitor the work Serco is doing regarding the number of employees it has, including staff allocation by job function, and we are confident that the balance is appropriate.

On April 22, CMS was notified by Serco of a request for an interview with KMOV, a local news station in St. Louis, Missouri, regarding the allegations of misconduct at its Wentzville, Missouri facility. Upon learning about the allegations, CMS formally requested Serco to conduct a compliance investigation for the purpose of reviewing the allegations of inappropriate employee conduct at its Wentzville, Missouri facility as cited in the news story and to take any necessary steps to address them. At this time, CMS does not have any knowledge of similar allegations taking place at any of Serco's other facilities.

Regarding adjustments of Serco staffing levels in response to Marketplace workload, total Serco workforce numbers and patterns vary and are adjusted based on the needs of the contract. Currently, Serco has approximately 3,000 employees stationed among its four locations. The number of Serco staff is reviewed on a regular basis by CMS and adjustments to staffing levels are made as appropriate based on the workload and requirements of the contract. Over the course of open enrollment, and now after open enrollment, CMS has adjusted Serco's workforce to accommodate changing operational needs. For example, CMS adjusted the workforce to process more paper applications last fall, when HealthCare.gov had technical problems, and then again for calling consumers to help them take the necessary steps to complete their enrollment.

For oversight purposes, CMS monitors Serco's performance through a range of contractually required reports, meetings and site visits. CMS receives daily production and staffing reports from Serco, and communicates with Serco representatives daily to discuss operations and policy guidance to ensure adequate staffing levels and operational priorities. CMS has also conducted site visits across all four Serco facilities and is in constant communication with Serco's management team.

Regarding the question of oversight or other actions to ensure compliance with contract terms, in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 42.15, CMS will complete an annual evaluation of Serco utilizing the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System at the end of the base period. In the event of inappropriate activity related to payments already made to Serco, CMS would take recourse that is legally and contractually allowed.

Concerning document production and consumer notifications, since October 1, 2013, Serco has handled more than 1 million documents related to the Marketplace and made

1.4 million outbound phone calls to Marketplace applicants. Serco performs a number of duties for CMS other than processing initial paper applications. Serco workers also are involved with verifying information, processing exemptions, resolving conflicts of information, and calling consumers to obtain missing information or necessary documentation.

Finally, in consideration of whether Serco would be granted a one-year option period at the end of the contract's one-year base period, CMS will conduct a review of the quality of the work currently being performed by the contractor, determine whether the contractor has met the terms and conditions of the contract thus far, and assess if the requirement covered by the option continues to fulfill an existing government need. CMS's review will fulfill all of the conditions prescribed in FAR 17.207, Exercise of Options.

I understand your concerns and appreciate you bringing them to my attention. I will also provide a copy of this response to Senator Lamar Alexander. Once again, thank you for your letter and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further thoughts or concerns.

Sincerely,

MARILYN TAVENNER,  
Administrator.

Mr. BLUNT. I yield the floor and ask unanimous consent that we move to the quorum call and that the time be equally divided.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### THE PLIGHT OF MERIAM IBRAHIM

Mr. ALEXANDER. Madam President, the Senator from Texas is on his way to the floor to talk about Meriam Ibrahim. He has been regularly joined by other Senators, including Senators AYOTTE, RUBIO, INHOFE, SHAHEEN, and COONS and many others who share my deep concern. Hundreds of Tennesseans have written and called my office about this situation.

I am outraged by this blatant attack on religious freedom, and I join my colleagues in demanding that the President and the State Department act immediately to help Ms. Ibrahim.

Meriam found herself in this situation because she was born to a Muslim father and an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian mother. Meriam's father abandoned the family when Meriam was 6 years old, so she was raised as a Christian. Meriam later married Daniel, an American citizen, who is also a Christian. The Sudanese Government considers Meriam a Muslim, even though she is a devout Christian.

When Meriam was ordered to renounce her faith, she refused. For that crime, the Sudanese Government condemned her to death. She was convicted and sentenced to receive 100

lashes and then be hanged. To make matters worse, she was pregnant with her daughter when this happened. Her son is less than 2 years old and was forced to live in a women's prison outside Khartoum, where they were held until Monday. Monday we learned Meriam was to be released, but that was a celebration that was short-lived because yesterday she and her family were detained at the airport.

President Obama and the State Department should immediately demand that the Sudanese Government follow their own court's orders and release Meriam and her family. The harassment and targeting of this family must stop immediately. The State Department should be prepared to act quickly to help them leave Sudan as soon as possible.

Occasionally we wonder if words spoken on this floor matter, but in this case I believe they have. This is an outrageous incident that has seared the conscience of Americans and people all over the world. I know in Tennessee many families care about it. I wish to thank Senator CRUZ as well as Senators AYOTTE and RUBIO and INHOFE and SHAHEEN and COONS—Senators on both sides of the aisle—who have used this forum, this tribunal, to talk about the case of Meriam Ibrahim and her plight. It is our hope that the attention, the spotlight placed on this matter will help her be released and that our administration will continue its efforts to register our strong concern.

I am here to express the feelings of hundreds of Tennesseans but also to congratulate Senator CRUZ and the other Senators on both sides of the aisle who have done such an effective job of letting the world know about Meriam Ibrahim and her plight.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 7 minutes.

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

#### PLIGHT OF MERIAM IBRAHIM

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise today to discuss a heartbreaking tragedy that has focused the attention of people across America and people across the world. I rise today to discuss the plight of Meriam Ibrahim. Meriam is a young wife and a young mother. Meriam has two children. She has a son Martin, who is 20 months old, and she has a newborn baby girl Maya, who was just recently born.

Now, the birth of a little girl should be a cause for celebration. But I am sorry to tell you, Madam President, that Meriam gave birth to Maya while in leg irons in a prison in Sudan.

Meriam is married to a U.S. citizen, Daniel. Her two children are American citizens. Why was Meriam in leg irons in a prison cell in Sudan? She was