

grandchildren, Declan and Delaney O'Shea, and to Joe's many friends in this Nation and in Ireland. May your cherished memories comfort you in this time of sorrow.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE EXTENSION

Mr. HARKIN. Madam President, today I wish to speak about one of the most important jobs the Senate must do before we go home for the holidays—extend Federal unemployment insurance benefits. This is a program that has helped tens of millions of Americans weather the storm of the difficult economy over the last several years. It has helped workers put food on the table, kept a roof over their heads, and kept millions out of poverty.

But this program is at risk. If Congress fails to extend it, then just 3 days after Christmas on December 28, 1.3 million Americans will be abruptly cut off from their vital unemployment insurance benefits. But it does not stop there: by the end of next year another 3.6 million Americans will be cut off from unemployment insurance. That's a total of 4.9 million Americans—including 35,500 Iowans, who have spent 6 months or more trying to find new work, going out and pounding the pavement day after day, who will now have to spend this holiday season worrying about how they and their families and children are going to survive. How will they pay their heating bill, their rent, or their mortgage, much less afford gifts for their family?

Congress has a moral responsibility to continue the Federal unemployment insurance program to ensure that Americans and their families can survive while trying to get back on their feet and find new work. It is simply unacceptable for us to return to our home States to celebrate the holidays without answering our constituents' call to keep this critical lifeline going. They are depending on us.

Unfortunately, some people seem to think that the misfortune of losing a job means that these hardworking folks are to blame, or that they do not deserve this basic lifeline. But they are not. In fact, participation in the unemployment program requires that workers have a significant work history, which means they have paid into the system and earned these benefits. Collecting benefits also requires workers to have lost their job through no fault of their own, and to be actively looking for work. The fact is times are still tough and jobs are hard to come by. For every job opening there are three job seekers. That is why so many millions of workers have been searching for new work for such a long period of time. Our economy still needs more jobs, and in the meantime, we must make sure that workers who are out of luck in this economy have some basic income to make ends meet. We cannot abandon them now.

These benefits are crucial for keeping households afloat. For many, this is

their last lifeline. If Congress fails to act, millions of people will face real economic devastation. The Council of Economic Advisers found that in 2012 unemployment benefits kept 2.5 million people from falling below the poverty line, including 600,000 children.

By helping families to make ends meet, unemployment benefits are a help not just to jobseekers and their families, but to our economy as a whole. After all, one of the best ways to grow our economy and to create jobs is to support spending power. And that is exactly what unemployment benefits do. When unemployed workers can continue to pay their bills, businesses can continue to make sales and provide services, and the economy grows. The Congressional Budget Office finds unemployment benefits to be one of the most efficient fiscal policies to improve economic growth. If Federal unemployment benefits are extended through 2014, it would increase GDP by 0.2 percent and create 200,000 jobs. Those jobs could be lost if we do not extend this program.

It's important to remember who is most affected by long-term unemployment. Unfortunately, it is older workers. In a cruel state of affairs, those who have been working for decades, but who are not yet at retirement age, have the hardest time finding new work. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over half of jobseekers between ages 55 and 64 have been searching for work for over 6 months. That is compared to 42 percent of those between 25 and 54. These older workers can't yet afford the luxury of retirement. They need to continue working to support their families and hopefully one day save enough to retire with security.

Congress has a long history of acting to ensure basic security for working people during tough economic times. Over the last 50 years, during seven different economic downturns, Congress has provided Federal unemployment benefit programs to assist workers when unemployment is high. The current program was put in place in 2008 by President George W. Bush when the unemployment rate was 5.6 percent. While unemployment is falling, it is still at a high rate, 7 percent. Long-term unemployment has been at record highs for years. Currently 37 percent of unemployed workers have been looking for new work for at least 6 months. Congress has never allowed Federal unemployment benefits to expire while the long-term unemployment rate was above 23 percent. Our economy is recovering, but we are not there yet. While the duration of Federal benefits has appropriately been scaled back as the recovery has progressed, there is no question that American families are still depending on Federal unemployment benefits, and there is no justification for letting the current program expire now.

We cannot let vulnerable Americans be cut off from their unemployment in-

urance during their time of need. We cannot turn the lights out on millions of Americans. Working families deserve peace of mind and our continued support while they look for jobs during these tough times. I urge the Senate to act to extend unemployment benefits, so that families do not have to wonder how they will survive in the New Year.

MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY LEASE AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2013

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I am pleased that the Senate is scheduled, hopefully, to pass H.R. 3521, the Department of Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Lease Authorization Act of 2013, known as S. 1740 in the Senate, which I proudly cosponsored. The treatment of our country's veterans is of great importance to me, and I believe that it is the government's duty to honor the promises made to our veterans.

My constituents have written to me many times regarding the worsening conditions of the VA outpatient clinic in Tulsa. The building currently lacks the space to care adequately for the large number of veterans that receive their medical treatment at the facility. Due to the size of the facility, services such as the behavioral health services were located several miles away. Additionally, the parking lot capacity was not acceptable. It is because of my constituents that I have worked vigorously to ensure that their voices were heard.

With the passage of this bill, there will be funding to improve and expand this clinic. The new VA outpatient clinic in Tulsa would include primary care, women's health, imaging, specialty care, physical therapy, audiology, optometry, mental health, prosthetics, dentistry, and a pharmacy. The facility would then be able to provide the services that were promised to our men and women who were willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to serve in the defense of our country.

HOMEOWNER FLOOD INSURANCE AFFORDABILITY ACT OF 2013

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Madam President, I rise today to join my colleagues from Louisiana and New Jersey—who know as well as anyone about all the struggle of rebuilding after a major disaster—in calling on the Senate to pass the Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act before the Senate adjourns next week. I am deeply dismayed that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have objected to allowing the Senate to vote on this commonsense and bipartisan bill to help homeowners.

I want to especially thank Senator LANDRIEU for her strong leadership and support for families who took the worst of Superstorm Sandy—a massive storm that claimed the lives of 61 New Yorkers, shattered countless others,

damaged or destroyed 300,000 homes, and hurt a quarter million businesses.

While the road to recovery is long and hard, New Yorkers are strong. I know we will rebuild better and stronger. But we in Congress have to continue to do our part. And to this day, more than a year later, homeowners are still struggling to rebuild, facing costly repairs to storm damage and what could be even costlier flood insurance premiums.

They survived Sandy, are trying to put their lives back together, but the premium increases mandated by the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 is what threatens to force many New Yorkers out of their homes and the communities they love.

We can and must prevent this—by passing our legislation to prevent a spike in flood insurance premiums until after FEMA fulfills its responsibility, and reports to Congress with a plan to make these rates more affordable. That's just common sense, and it's the right thing to do for homeowners across the Northeast, who are still putting their lives back together in the wake of this storm. The last thing they need is another burden like this.

I hope our colleagues reconsider their objection, and allow us to vote on this bipartisan bill and join us in helping these families rebuild and stay in their homes.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN HUNGARY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, earlier this year I chaired a Helsinki Commission hearing on the situation in Hungary. Today, I would like to revisit some of the issues addressed by our witnesses.

Since the April 2010 elections, Hungary has undertaken the most dramatic legal transformation that Europe has seen in decades. A new Constitution was passed with votes of the ruling party alone, and even that has already been amended five times. More than 700 new laws have been passed, including laws on the media, religion, and civic associations. There is a new civil code and a new criminal code. There is an entirely new electoral framework. The magnitude and scope of these changes have understandably put Hungary under a microscope.

At the Helsinki Commission's hearing in March, I examined concerns that these changes have undermined Hungary's system of democratic checks and balances, independence of the judiciary, and freedoms of the media and religion. I also received testimony about rising revisionism and extremism. I heard from Jozsef Szajer, a Member of the European Parliament who represented the Hungarian Government at the hearing. Princeton constitutional law expert Kim Lane Scheppele, Dr. Paul Shapiro from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Sylvana Habdank-Kolaczowska from Freedom House presented compelling testimony.

Unfortunately, developments in Hungary remain troubling.

Even though Hungary's religion law was tweaked after the Constitutional Court struck down parts of it, it retains a discriminatory two-tier system. Moreover, the Parliament is empowered with the extraordinary and, for all practical purposes, unreviewable power to decide what is and what is not a religion.

This month, the government announced it is launching an investigation into the Methodist Evangelical Church, a church persecuted during communist times. Today, the Methodist Evangelical Church is known for its outreach to Roma, work with the homeless and is one of the largest charitable organizations in Hungary. As I noted at the Helsinki Commission hearing in March, it is also one of the hundreds of religious groups stripped of official recognition after the passage of Hungary's new religion law.

The church has now complied with submitting the necessary number of supporters required by the law and, as a reply, the government has announced an unidentified "expert" will conduct an investigation into the church's beliefs and tenets. This step only reinforces fears that parliamentary denial of recognition as a so-called "Accepted Church" opens the door for further repressive measures.

Veneration of Hungary's wartime regent, Miklos Horthy, along with other anti-Semitic figures such as writer Jozsef Nyiro, continues. In November, a statue of Hungarian Jewish poet Miklos Radnoti, who was killed by Hungarian Nazis at the end of 1944, was rammed with a car and broken in half. At roughly the same time, extremists staged a book burning of his works along with other materials they called "Zionist publications." At the beginning of December, two menorahs were vandalized in Budapest.

Reflecting the climate of extremism, more than 160 Hungarian nationals have been found by Canada this year to have a well-founded fear of persecution. Almost all are Romani, but the refugees include an 80-year-old award winning Hungarian Jewish writer who received death threats after writing about anti-Semitism in Hungary, and was stripped of his honorary citizenship of Budapest on an initiative from the far-right Jobbik party, supported by the votes of the ruling Fidesz party.

While there are many who suggest the real problem comes from the extremist opposition party Jobbik, and not the ruling government, it seems that some members of Fidesz have contributed to a rise in intolerance.

I am particularly troubled that the government-created Media Council, consisting entirely of Fidesz delegated members, has threatened ATV—an independent television station—with punitive fines if it again characterizes Jobbik as extremist. If you can't even talk about what is extremist or anti-Semitic in Hungary without facing

legal sanctions, how can you combat extremism and anti-Semitism? Moreover, this decision serves to protect Jobbik from critical debate in the advance of next year's elections. Why?

Other new measures further stifle free speech.

Unfortunately, and somewhat shockingly, last month Hungary amended its defamation law to allow for the imposition of prison terms up to 3 years.

The imposition of jail time for speech offenses was a hallmark of the communist era. During the post-communist transition, the Helsinki Commission consistently urged OSCE countries to repeal criminal defamation and insult laws entirely. In 2004, for example, the Helsinki Commission wrote to Minister of Justice Peter Barandy regarding the criminal convictions of Andras Bencsik and Laszlo Attila Bertok.

This new law, raced through under an expedited procedure in the wake of a bi-election controversy in which allegations of voter manipulation were traded, was quickly criticized by the OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media. I share her concerns that these changes to the criminal code may lead to the silencing of critical or differing views in society and are inconsistent with OSCE commitments.

Hungary was once held up as a model of peaceful democratic transition and is situated in a region of Europe where the beacon of freedom is still sought by many today. I hope Hungary will return to a leadership role in the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, today I wish to honor Lancaster County, Pennsylvania's impressive feat of preserving 100,000 acres of farmland. Lancaster County became the first county in the Nation to preserve this many acres of farmland, a full 25 percent of all land available for farming in the county. My father, Governor Robert P. Casey, served as Governor of Pennsylvania from 1987 to 1995 and signed into law the State farmland preservation program. Governor Casey made preserving farmland a high priority to ensure that Pennsylvania's farmers could continue to produce agricultural products and sustain the Commonwealth's number one industry.

Farmland preservation is one of Pennsylvania's noblest accomplishments. There are a lot of words that can describe this achievement. But the one word that I think is most important is the word sacred. This is truly a sacred act. Reflecting on this tremendous milestone, I am reminded of a line from the Prayer of Saint Francis, which reads "For it is in giving that we receive." When I think about conservation, I am inspired by the gifts which flow so directly from the preservation of land. Conserved lands purify our