

other first responders take every day. My condolences and prayers are with his wife Julie; his three children, Nicholas, Andrew, and Amanda; and his fellow firefighters.

Daniel, you are a hero to me and to the people of Chicago and Illinois. There are no words to truly describe the sorrow for your loss. I cannot, nor can anyone, thank you for the commitment you made for the safety of the people in your community.

#### FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it is interesting—the Midwest draws us together in the right way.

Last night in Springfield, IL, a typical midwestern American city, there was a gathering of people from all across the city at 5:30 on a Sunday night. It was a gathering at the Islamic Society of Springfield. A request had been made for people of all religions to come together and to pray in solidarity with our Islamic neighbors. It was billed as a peace rally originally scheduled to be held outside, even in winter weather. Although it has been warm for this time of year, it was raining heavy last night as we all arrived at the building, so everyone crammed inside the building. There was standing and sitting room only. It was a huge outpouring of support for our Muslim brothers and sisters in the Springfield community.

There were representatives of virtually every religion present, and many spoke—rabbis, ministers, Catholic nuns, and even a few elected officials—trying to let our friends in the Muslim community know that despite some of the things that had been said over the last few weeks by Presidential candidates, we in fact embrace them as part of the American family.

There was also an event this weekend that occurred far away from Springfield, in Scottsdale, AZ, where my colleague in the Senate, JEFF FLAKE of Arizona, visited a mosque. It was widely reported. He made outstanding remarks about the regret he felt over some of the political statements that had been made over the last several weeks by political candidates. JEFF FLAKE reminded us across the Nation, as I tried to remind those in Springfield last night, that America is a nation which values the freedom of religious belief.

Our Constitution speaks to only three elements when it comes to religion and our government. First, it says that each of us has the freedom and liberty to choose our own religion or to choose no religion. Second, it says our government will never establish an official state religion. Third, in article VI, it says there will be no religious test in the United States of America of candidates for public office.

It is hard to believe that those three simple thoughts have carried this Nation for more than two centuries when it comes to religion, but we have been

successful. Our Nation has been successful where others have failed. There have been times when we failed to live up to our own ideals and our own values, and when hateful statements are made by Presidential candidates, it calls on us to remember our history and to remember triumphant moments and sad moments as well.

It was May of 1939 when the ship *SS St. Louis* left Germany with 900 Jewish passengers. They were trying to escape Hitler and the Nazis. They went to Havana, Cuba, and they were turned away. Then they came to Miami, FL, asking if they could be refugees, Jewish refugees, coming to the United States, and they were turned away as well. The 900 Jewish passengers went back to Germany. According to the records of the Holocaust Museum, 200 of them perished in the Holocaust. It was about that same time when Senator Robert Wagner of New York offered a measure in the Senate—in this very Chamber—that our country would accept 10,000 Jewish children from Germany who were seeking to escape the Holocaust. Sadly, that measure was defeated.

We have other instances in history that go back to the beginning of our Nation where we have been challenged to live up to the ideals and principles of the Constitution. That challenge is with us again today.

A candidate for President of the United States—of a major political party—has called for the exclusion of Muslims from being allowed to immigrate into the United States. That is reprehensible, it is outrageous, and it is un-American. Members of both political parties in Congress have spoken out against it, as they should.

We must remember that many of our Nation's Founders fled religious persecution to come to this Nation. George Washington summed up the prevailing view when he said, "In this land of equal liberty, it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the laws." That, of course, is included in the First Amendment to our Constitution.

Throughout our history, many religious minorities have faced intolerance, often prejudice. It was once Catholics from Ireland, Italy, and my mother's homeland of Lithuania who were questioned. Today American Muslims face the same threats of similar discrimination.

In recent weeks a number of prominent Republican leaders have made these threats. But I add quickly that there has been a greater number, thank goodness, who have spoken out against these statements, even on the Republican side.

One Presidential candidate compared Syrian refugees to "rabid dogs" and said that American Muslims should not be President of the United States. The frontrunner for the Republican nomination called for a "total and complete" ban on Muslim immigrants coming to the United States and advocated

for closing down their places of worship. These comments are reprehensible and do not reflect who we are as a nation.

These comments also don't reflect the vital role that millions of Muslim Americans play in my hometown of Springfield, IL, and across the United States. There are American Muslims who are teachers, professors, doctors, police officers, first responders, and members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

I am concerned that the anti-Muslim rhetoric we have heard in recent weeks could alienate the Muslim community and harm the important relationship between the community and Federal law enforcement.

Last night, as I was leaving the gathering in Springfield, a mother pulled me aside and said she feared for her daughter who wears a hijab—a veil—and who may be the subject of discrimination because of the things that have been said by some of these Presidential candidates. It is important for us to understand her feelings, the love of her children, just as we love our own children and grandchildren, and to also realize that the feelings of the Muslim Americans are truly part of our Nation.

Last night we began the gathering in Springfield, IL, pledging allegiance to the flag—all of us—and singing "The Star-Spangled Banner." Then the first person to make remarks in the Muslim community told us he had served in the U.S. Navy for 19 years. It is hard to imagine some of the hateful things that have been said in that context.

In testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2004—not long after 9/11—FBI Director Robert Mueller thanked the Muslim and Arab American communities "for their assistance and for their ongoing commitment to preventing acts of terrorism." It has been important to the United States. He went on to say: "All of us understand that the evolving threats we face today, and those we will face tomorrow, can only be defeated if we work together."

The current FBI Director, James Comey, spoke before a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last week and said:

We've worked so hard over the last 15 years to build relationships of trust that allow us to find out who might be trouble and to stop it. That's in everybody's interest. And anything that gets in the way, that erodes that relationship of trust, is not a good thing.

The inflammatory speeches we have heard create a fertile ground for discrimination. Attorney General Loretta Lynch recently denounced the "disturbing rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric" and stated that her "greatest fear as a prosecutor . . . is that the rhetoric will be accompanied by acts of violence."

Sitting next to me last night in Springfield was the U.S. attorney for the Central District of Illinois, James Lewis—a friend and someone I am very honored and proud to have nominated to the President for this position. He

told me he spent the last several weeks traveling across Central Illinois, visiting Muslim mosques and assuring them that they were still part of America and that they had the full protection of the law. Nevertheless, there has been a dramatic increase of anti-Muslim bigotry since 9/11. In fear and anger, some Americans have wrongly struck out at Muslims.

I had my differences with former President George W. Bush, but he showed real insight, wisdom, and leadership after 9/11 when he made it clear to America that our war was with terrorists who perverted the teachings of the Islamic religion, not with Muslims who were faithful to what he called “a faith based upon love, not hate.” Congress at that time spoke with a clear voice too. I cosponsored a resolution with John Sununu, a Republican from New Hampshire, who was then the only Arab American in the Senate. Our resolution condemned anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bigotry, and said that American Muslims are vibrant, peaceful, law-abiding, and greatly contribute to American society. That resolution passed both Chambers unanimously. I hope it would pass today.

Earlier this decade, we saw another wave of anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination. In 2011 I chaired the first ever congressional hearing on the civil rights of American Muslims. That hearing documented an alarming increase of anti-Muslim bigotry. At the time, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that Muslims accounted for approximately 25 percent of religious discrimination cases, although they were less than 1 percent of the population. Mary Jo O’Neill of the EEOC said:

There’s a level of hatred and animosity that is shocking. I’ve been doing this for 31 years, and I’ve never seen such antipathy towards Muslim workers.

Unfortunately, we are again experiencing an increase in anti-Muslim discrimination. Last week Oren Segal of the Anti-Defamation League said, “We’re definitely seeing anti-Muslim bigotry escalating around the country.”

In recent weeks vandals defaced a mosque near Austin, TX; a pig’s head was thrown on the doorstep of a Philadelphia mosque; a man was arrested for breaking into a Florida mosque and damaging property; a sixth grade girl in New York City was allegedly called “ISIS” as a group of boys punched her and tried to remove her hijab; and on Thanksgiving day a Muslim cabdriver from Pittsburgh was shot in the back by a passenger who reportedly asked the driver about ISIS and whether he was a “Pakistani guy.”

Just this weekend a man in California was arrested and charged for a hate crime and arson after allegedly setting a fire in a mosque.

Last week Representative ANDRÉ CARSON—a Democrat from Indiana and one of the two American Muslims who serve in the U.S. Congress—received a

death threat. Here is what Congressman CARSON said:

You have other politicians who are joining the bandwagon and who are fanning the flames of bigotry. That concerns me because we’re putting people into the line of fire exposing them to death threats, discrimination at the workplace and assaults.

These incidents of intimidation, hostility, and violence impact the entire Muslim American community. They also play into our enemies’ warped views of the United States. Director Comey of the FBI noted last week that “the notion that the U.S. is anti-Muslim is part of ISIL’s narrative and Al Qaeda’s narrative.”

It is important to note that not only Muslim Americans are being targeted. Bigots have also targeted Arab Americans, many of whom are Christian, and Hindus, and Sikhs. After 9/11, the first victim killed in the backlash was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh American, in Mesa, AZ. I submitted a resolution, which passed the Senate unanimously, condemning bigotry against Sikh Americans.

In 2012, a White supremacist murdered six Sikhs at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, WI. Following this terrorist attack, I chaired a hearing on hate crimes and the threat of domestic extremism where we learned that the FBI wasn’t even tracking these crimes against Arab Americans, Hindu Americans, and Sikh Americans. I asked the FBI to change the policy, and they did. Clearly there is more work to be done.

Last week, a vandal spray-painted anti-Muslim graffiti on a Sikh gurdwara in Buena Park, CA. In September, a Sikh man in my home State of Illinois suffered a fractured cheekbone after he was allegedly assaulted by a man who yelled “terrorist” and “go back to your country” at him.

As we work to combat terrorism, we must also work to prevent and punish discrimination and hate-fueled violence against Muslim Americans. The rights of Muslim Americans are just as important as the rights of Christians, Jews, followers of other faiths, and nonbelievers as well.

We know the First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and the freedom of speech. But all of us, especially those of us in public life, have a responsibility to choose our words carefully. We must condemn bias and bigotry aimed at Muslim Americans and make it clear that we will not tolerate religious discrimination in the United States of America. We can protect our Nation and still be true to the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold that suggestion?

Mr. DURBIN. Yes.

#### NOMINATION RETURNED TO THE EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The papers with respect to Presidential Nomi-

nation No. 742 having been returned from the White House, the nomination will be returned to the Calendar, pursuant to the order of November 30, 2015.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. AYOTTE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nominations of Alissa M. Starzak, of New York, to be General Counsel of the Department of the Army; John Conger, of Maryland, to be a Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense; Stephen P. Welby, of Maryland, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; and Franklin R. Parker, of Illinois, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, will the Presiding Officer inform me when I have used 7 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will be notified when his time has expired.

#### STARZAK NOMINATION

Mr. REED. Mr. President, these are all able and capable individuals who have been nominated and approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee. I want to pay particular attention to the nomination of Alissa Starzak to be general counsel of the Department of the Army. I have had the pleasure of working with Ms. Starzak for several years in her current capacity as the deputy general counsel of the Department of Defense. She has done an extraordinary job. I am confident that her extensive legal experience in her current—as well as previous—position has prepared her well for the position for which she has been nominated.

Prior to her current position at the Department of Defense, Ms. Starzak worked at the CIA’s Office of General Counsel and also served as counsel on the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. I don’t need to