

It is essential that all U.N. member states and the international community, more generally, continue to condemn the violent and defiant rhetoric of Iran's President. If his aggressive words go unchecked it could signal approval of the Iranian regime's determination to undermine its international obligations.

This Congress can also take critical steps to stop or slow Iran's nuclear enrichment, but we will not be effective in doing so unless we acknowledge that the United States must be in lock-step with the international community if we are to overcome decades of mistrust and ongoing threats to our national security.

MATTHEW SHEPARD ACT OF 2007

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

On May 12, 2007 in New York, NY, Omar Willock attacked Roberto Duncanson, a gay man, on the street in Crown Heights. Willock allegedly yelled anti-gay slurs at Duncanson when they passed each other on the street. Later, Willock encountered Duncanson again and started a fist fight, eventually stabbing Duncanson. Willock is being held without bail and is charged with a hate crime.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Matthew Shepard Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

WELCOMING THE MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, it is my great pleasure to welcome the brave and courageous members of the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry back to Minnesota today. For nearly 2 years, these troops have selflessly and honorably served our State and our Nation, demonstrating a level of commitment and sacrifice beyond anything our country could ask of them.

To welcome these soldiers home properly, it is important to roll the calendar back to September of 2005, when these men and women learned that they would soon deploy to Iraq for a 12-month mission. The news was difficult for a lot of Guard troops and families in our State. Many of them had already been deployed on active duty to Bosnia or Kosovo since September 11, and they knew how hard it

would be to say goodbye once more to their families, friends, and communities.

Because of their previous service, many of these troops were not required to go to Iraq. They had already answered the call to defend this great land, and they could have let others take their turn this time, but that is not the spirit of the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry. Instead, with the same commitment that their unit has shown since the Civil War, these troops donned their uniforms, made their arrangements, kissed their moms and dads, husbands, wives, and children goodbye, and returned to the fray to serve their country.

For 6 grueling months, these soldiers conducted their mandatory "uptraining" on the other side of our country at Camp Shelby in Mississippi and Fort Polk in Louisiana. And just like their Minnesota 1st infantry comrades who mustered at Fort Snelling 144 years earlier, the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry received ratings of "outstanding," "excellent," and "perfect" on their various training demonstrations throughout the winter of 2005.

In March of 2006, when the unit had already been away from home for half a year, it was time to travel the 6,000 miles to the Middle East and Iraq. Before they left, I had the pleasure of attending their departure ceremony in Mississippi alongside my colleagues of the Minnesota congressional delegation and our Governor. There were steaks, music, beer cans, smiles, flags, hugs, and sadly, a lot of tears.

But there was one clear thing everyone had in common that day at Camp Shelby: Pride. Pride in serving their country. Pride in defending our freedom. Pride that their loved one was going to perform their duty in a manner consistent with the finest traditions of the U.S. military.

And off they went. Different units and different companies fanned out in locations across Iraq. Some of them in Fallujah and Taqaddum in Anbar Province, some at Camp Scania near Nippur, and the largest number at Camp Adder in Talil.

And the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry didn't take much time to make an impact on the ground. By the end of May, when the ink on their transfer authority had barely dried, the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry had already built a reverse osmosis water plant for the people of al-Feiz. It would be the first of many success stories they would accomplish and be proud of.

Over the course of the next few months, the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry endured the trials of a unit at war. With every successful patrol, there was a longing for far away loved ones. For every completed reconstruction project, there was anticipation of a return trip home. And on the hardest of days, there was the mourning of a fallen comrade.

And so it went with these selfless soldiers through the end of 2006 and into 2007. When the New Year broke, it brought with it a new energy and a refocused eye on their March 2007 return. But their March return was not to be, as the story of these men and women veered onto a different path.

On January 10, of this year, these soldiers and their families endured a shock that none of them expected. Afternoon reports from CNN and Fox News began to trickle through our State and Nation, indicating that the unit would be extended until this summer. When the official word from the Pentagon confirmed this fact later that day, it shook all of us to our core and left us with more questions and concerns than we could find answers to.

But like Minnesotans always do, they somehow found a way to move forward. The support of their families strengthened them. The spirit of their communities rallied around them. And the countdown from January to July gradually went from months to weeks to days while the moment that seemed like it would never get here finally did: Their return.

Their deployment kept them in Iraq 25 days longer than any other unit serving in this war. During their time, they drove over 4,500 round trip convoy missions completing 99 percent of them on time. That's over 2.2 million miles of convoys in Iraq from the south central part of the country to the Jordanian and Syrian borders. And I don't think anyone needs a reminder of the dangers of IEDs on these convoys, but just for the record, this unit discovered over 350 of them before they were detonated. In other areas they fought al-Qaida and provided critical security to our military bases, saving countless lives of their comrades in arms.

They also worked hard to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. In their time in Iraq, the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry completed over 90 reconstruction projects from water and powerplants to road construction and media expansion.

And now, after nearly 2 years of sacrifice and dedication, on behalf of a grateful State and Nation we have the privilege to welcome these fine men and women back to the North Star State. With their return will come new challenges. As MAJ John Morris, Chaplain of the Minnesota National Guard, often says, we have to support our troops before, during, and after their deployments. I look forward to joining with my colleagues in the Minnesota delegation to do our part to energize the State to bring these troops all the way home.

I have no doubt there will be plenty of handshakes, hugs, and welcome home ceremonies across our State in the coming days and weeks for this admirable group of Americans. I hope I am there to personally welcome home as many as I can, but because I know I can't make it to all of them—and because I would rather they get home and