

**STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR MICHAEL BENNET
ON THE IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT**

September 4, 2015

In 2003, Iran was operating approximately 164 centrifuges, and had virtually no enriched uranium. By 2013, Iran had become a nuclear threshold state, with roughly 19,000 centrifuges installed, 10 bombs worth of enriched uranium, and 2 to 3 months breakout time to a bomb.

In response, Congress passed tough sanctions, which I helped write as a member of the Senate Banking Committee. Led by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany, together the P5+1, came together to enforce an international sanctions regime that crippled Iran's economy. This brought Iran to the negotiating table.

This past July, the P5+1 announced an agreement concerning Iran's nuclear program. The Senate is now being asked to vote on this agreement.

After an exhaustive review of the agreement and a lengthy consultation process, which included briefings from our own defense, national security and intelligence experts, international inspection and verification experts, regional experts, former Israeli military and intelligence officials, and the P5+1 ambassadors as well as Israel's Ambassador to the United States, I have concluded that this agreement is more likely to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon than the plausible alternatives. I will vote, therefore, to support the agreement.

Based on these briefings, it does not seem possible to me that new (particularly unilateral) sanctions would result in a better deal. And it is clear that reaching no agreement would result in Iran's receiving billions of dollars of sanctions relief with no oversight of its nuclear program. That is an unacceptable result.

It is no surprise to me that there are sincere, heartfelt differences of opinion about the merits of this deal. “There are no prophets in our time,” a former Israeli military official told me. I agree. None of us knows what lies 10 or 15 years on the horizon. I have deep concerns about what the shape of Iran’s nuclear program could look like beyond this horizon, but I also believe that shortsighted decisions (including the invasion of Iraq, the counterbalance to Iran in the region) have left us with an array of bad choices. All of Iran’s malevolent acts would only be more dangerous if backed by a nuclear weapon. Therefore, I believe we must do everything in our power to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, protect the national security interests of the United States, and help our closest ally in the region, the State of Israel, defend itself.

Let me be clear: the survival of the State of Israel is essential to the security of the Jewish people, and, as far as I am concerned, Israel’s survival is essential to our humanity. For those reasons and for our own national security, we cannot allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and we must be crystal clear that we will use force to prevent it from doing so.

There are risks to the successful implementation of this agreement, and the President and Congress must now work to make it stronger. I have worked with others in the Senate to push the Administration toward that goal. Since the announcement of the deal, I have also worked with Senator Cardin to develop a legislative package to address the accumulated shortcomings of our policies towards Iran, and to strengthen the agreement.

Among other things, our legislation would ensure that:

- we track the incremental resources that Iran obtains from sanctions relief and subsequent new investment;
- we continue to work with regional partners and allies to counter conventional and asymmetric Iranian threats, including terrorist and proxy activities;

- we invest in our intelligence capabilities and provide Israel the necessary conventional deterrence to ensure Iran cannot shield covert systems and facilities, no matter how deeply they are buried; and
- we clarify better how we will respond if Iran cheats on this deal. As we implement this agreement, we must set in place a strategy with our partners to ensure that Iran appreciates the consequences of its violations, for the next 15 years and beyond.

My grandparents, John and Halina Klejman, and my mother Susanne Klejman had everyone and everything they knew taken from them in the Holocaust. Yet, as my grandmother always told me, they were the lucky ones – they had the chance to rebuild their shattered lives in a country that accepted them and let them succeed beyond their wildest dreams.

My grandmother knew what all Americans know, we are a moral nation and a beacon of hope for the world. We should never shy away from tough decisions, nor blink when evil threatens our way of life.

We live in dangerous times. Our young men and women in the military – so many Coloradans, so many Americans – have been asked to sacrifice so much. None of us can have any doubt that, if called upon again, our men and women in the Armed Forces would rise to any challenge, anywhere in the world. We honor their courage and spirit of sacrifice – and we demonstrate confidence in ourselves – by exhausting diplomatic options before we turn to military ones. This is not a sign of weakness, but a proof of strength, and it will help us rally our allies to our side if ultimately we need to act militarily.

We have the skill, strength, and tenacity to solve the problems that confront us, even those that have vexed us for years, and even in the most complicated region of a complicated world. Our primary objectives are to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon, make sure Israel is safe and, if possible, avoid another war in the Middle East. This agreement represents a flawed, but important step to accomplish those goals.