

tackling the question of why this disease is here, what are the origins of this condition.

Research is critical in supporting development tools, interventions, and evidence-based services to help provide a quality of life for people in the autism spectrum.

Over the last year, researchers funded by NIH have made significant advances in understanding the onset of autism. They have learned that brain changes that contribute to autism occur even during pregnancy and continue through the first years of life. They have also concluded that some of the possible signs of autism may begin to appear within the first 6 months it can be identified. The work at the NIH in understanding the problem cannot be understated, but far more needs to follow to better comprehend autism.

Congress also has responsibilities. One is providing resources to the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, and we need to do that. My friend Senator DURBIN has introduced legislation that would focus on ways we can provide more help that is badly needed. With sequestration and the other cuts which have taken place it has been unfair to these two agencies.

The Achieving Better Life Experience Act—also known as the ABLE Act—would improve the quality of life for individuals with autism and other disabilities through tax-advantaged savings accounts. These special savings accounts would help disabled Americans and their loved ones plan for the future by setting aside money to cover future expenses, including education, housing, therapy, and rehabilitation.

I am a sponsor of the ABLE Act and proud to stand with all advocates in celebrating today World Autism Awareness Day.

UKRAINE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon a bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives passed Senate legislation to provide loan guarantees to Ukraine and to impose sanctions on certain Ukrainian and Russian officials.

This legislation comes at a time when Ukraine's future hangs in the balance between democracy and dictatorship. The brave Ukrainians who protested across the country and at Maidan square have shown an inspiring determination to defend their freedom. Many of them endured the brutal attacks of riot police, snipers, and below freezing temperatures. Some died in the mayhem. President Putin, who has long demonstrated his disregard for international law and human rights in his own country, has now extended that sphere of repression to Ukraine by violating its sovereignty and strong-arming its citizens.

This legislation exemplifies our support for a free and democratic Ukraine. The new government will face every

imaginable economic, political, and security challenge, but the country's interim leaders have already indicated a willingness to implement austere reforms to put their country on the right track. It is important that during this time of uncertainty the people of Ukraine know that they have the full support of the United States and the international community.

In addition to the loan guarantees which will be available immediately to help facilitate the development of a more resilient economy, the legislation authorizes funds for democracy and security assistance in future years. It also imposes sanctions against various Ukrainian and Russian officials who have been identified as principles in the subversion of democracy in Ukraine and who have treated the public treasury as their own personal bank account. While efforts to recover stolen assets will not restore the entire amount that has disappeared, it will further expose President Yanukovich and other corrupt officials for the criminals that they are.

I do want to say that I am very disappointed that domestic politics prevented inclusion of provisions, included in the version of the bill that was reported by the Foreign Relations Committee, authorizing U.S. support for reforms and participation in the quota increase at the International Monetary Fund. These reforms have been widely recognized as important for global economic stability, for maintaining U.S. leadership at the IMF, and for our efforts to maximize international assistance for Ukraine. Unfortunately, the House Republican leadership decided that partisan politics at home is more important than U.S. leadership in an international organization that we were instrumental in creating.

Ukraine and Russia have a shared history, but it is clear that the people of Ukraine see their future with Europe. That is why it is imperative that we support them at this critical time, and that we send a strong message to President Putin that there are real consequences to the use of brute force to violate the territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors.

As chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds our assistance for Ukraine, my subcommittee will not only provide the budget authority to pay the subsidy cost of the loan guarantees, we will also look for other ways in fiscal year 2015 to protect it and its neighbors from further Russian aggression.

VERMONT COMMISSION ON WOMEN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Vermont Commission on Women this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. Established in 1964 by Vermont Governor Philip Hoff, the commission was established in response to a challenge presented by President Kennedy, urging every State in the country to create such commissions "to encourage

women to use their abilities, and to reduce discrimination against women." I am proud that Vermont's is one of the oldest continuously operating commissions in the United States.

The commission's work is fueled by 16 volunteer commissioners, a team of advisors and a small but energetic staff. By advocating for new State laws and strengthening old ones, the commission has fought to reduce gender discrimination, achieve pay equity, support families and create job opportunities for women in my home State. Just last year, the commission was a strong force in strengthening provisions of Vermont's Equal Pay Act, so that women move closer to the reality of receiving equal pay for equal work. The law also extended protections so that employees could ask coworkers about their pay, and perhaps learn of disparities, without fear of retaliation.

I have no doubt the commission's ongoing efforts have helped Vermont women narrow the gender pay gap, to 84 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Vermont is leading the way in this area: the national level finds women earning 77 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts. I am grateful to the commission for its ongoing support for the Paycheck Fairness Act, which the Senate will consider in the coming weeks.

The commission also serves as a needed source of information. Its handbook, *The Legal Rights of Women in Vermont*, serves as a valuable guide for women who may find themselves in need of advice on matters such as adoption, employment rights, housing and divorce. The commission also conducts research, coordinates conferences and workshops, and engages in partnerships, all in the interest of furthering gender equality.

Despite the great strides that have been made over five decades in Vermont and across the Nation, we know that many discriminatory issues affecting women still exist today, and that the need for the commission's work is still critical.

The State of Vermont is very fortunate to have such a strong group advocating for women's rights. I have been proud to work with the Vermont Commission on Women for over 15 years on Vermont's Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, an annual event in Vermont that brings women of all different backgrounds together to talk about the challenges facing women in the work place.

I am proud to acknowledge and honor the Vermont Commission on Women as it celebrates 50 years of leadership and achievement.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent from votes during today's session. Had I been present, I would have opposed the motion to table the Reid amendment to H.R. 3979 and I would have supported the motion