S. 2989

At the request of Ms. MURKOWSKI, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2989, a bill to award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the United States merchant mariners of World War II, in recognition of their dedicated and vital service during World War II.

S. 3026

At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the name of the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3026, a bill to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to expand and clarify the prohibition on inaccurate caller identification information and to require providers of telephone service to offer technology to subscribers to reduce the incidence of unwanted telephone calls, and for other purposes.

S. 3031

At the request of Mr. MURPHY, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3031, a bill to require certain standards and enforcement provisions to prevent child abuse and neglect in residential programs, and for other purposes.

S. 3060

At the request of Mr. GRASSLEY, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. AYOTTE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 3060, a bill to provide an exception from certain group health plan requirements for qualified small employer health reimbursement arrangements.

S. 3083

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the names of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) were added as cosponsors of S. 3083, a bill to provide housing opportunities in the United States through modernization of various housing programs, and for other purposes.

S. 3095

At the request of Mr. BOOKER, the names of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) were added as cosponsors of S. 3095, a bill to prohibit sale of shark fins and for other purposes.

S. 3106

At the request of Mr. REID, the names of the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) and the Senator from North Dakota (Ms. HEITKAMP) were added as cosponsors of S. 3106, a bill to provide a coordinated regional response to effectively manage the endemic violence and humanitarian crisis in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

S.J. RES. 35

At the request of Mr. FLAKE, the names of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. COTTON) and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE) were added as cosponsors of S.J. Res. 35, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the final rule of the Department of Labor relating to ''Interpretation of the 'Advice' Exemption in Section 203(c) of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act''.

S. RES. 432

At the request of Mr. CARDIN, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 432, a resolution supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia.

S. RES. 504

At the request of Mr. BOOZMAN, the names of the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) and the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) were added as cosponsors of S. Res. 504, a resolution recognizing the 70th anniversary of the Fulbright Program.

AMENDMENT NO. 4875

At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4875 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4900

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4900 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4904

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4904 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4909

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4909 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4911

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4911 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4918

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4918 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4919

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4919 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4920

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4920 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4921

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4921 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4923

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4923 intended to be proposed to S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. VITTER:

S. 3120. A bill to apply the provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act to Congressional members and members of the executive branch; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss a really outrageous abuse of power on the part of Members of this body, Members of the House, Washington officials in general. While imposing ObamaCare on everyone else, officials in Washington have largely exempted themselves from ObamaCare's most inconvenient aspects through yet another illegal Obama Executive action that created the Washington exemption from ObamaCare.

Unfortunately, this is not a new practice on the part of the Washington elite. Washington lawmakers often create or support exemptions for themselves from the laws they pass on everyone else. This undemocratic practice dates back to the 19th century at least—the Civil Service Act of 1883; the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, coming into the 20th century; the Freedom of Information Act of 1966. The list goes on and on.

As the late Representative Henry Hyde is famously quoted as saying

many years ago, ''Congress would exempt itself from the law of gravity if it could.'' That is sadly true, and this practice must end.

I have always believed the first rule of an American democracy should be that whatever Washington passes on America, it should have to live under itself—no special exemptions, no special subsidies, no special deals, no special treatment. This rule is important for two reasons. The first reason is basic fairness. It is simply not fair for a select group of elites to live by a different and more beneficial set of rules than everyone else. The second reason, perhaps even more importantly, is a key practical reason; that is, when you make the chef eat his own cooking, it almost always gets better and often in a hurry. Congress can be an effective, responsive, truly representative legislative body only when it lives under the same laws it imposes on the rest of the country.

Passing ObamaCare, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, was a huge, complicated undertaking on the part of its advocates. Related to that, it was certainly telling when then-Speaker of the House NANCY PELOSI notoriously declared: ''We have to pass the bill so we can find out what is in it.'' After passing the bill, when Members of Congress realized what was in it for them, they scurried to figure out a scheme that would protect their own elite health care, including taxpayer-funded subsidies that don't exist in the ObamaCare statute at all, much less for anyone else.

Of course, there were even more serious problems in the ObamaCare statute for all Americans. When President Obama signed ObamaCare into law in March of 2010, it consisted of poorly written language that imposed drastic and unwanted health insurance changes on countless Americans. Despite the President's promise that Americans could keep their existing insurance, the law said otherwise. The cost of complying or failing to comply with ObamaCare belied the President's false assurances.

In the following months, insurers and employers and Americans realized this through the cancellation or nonrenewals of insurance plans for millions of Americans. Ultimately, millions of American workers faced burdens, including losing their individual and employer-provided coverage, being forced into alternatives that involved paying higher premiums with unwanted or useless new coverage, and having to change doctors and health care providers against their will.

As I said earlier, simultaneous with all of this, Members of Congress started to realize what was in ObamaCare for them. When they passed ObamaCare, they had revoked Congress's own generous health care coverage and the monthly employer government premium contributions that went with it.

Prior to ObamaCare, Members of Congress and their staff received health insurance coverage through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, or the FEHBP, run by the Office of Personnel Management. It had served as the health care network for Federal workers since 1959.

In 2013 alone, FEHBP represented the country's largest employer-sponsored health insurance program, with costs approaching $32.4 billion in premiums for about 8 million enrollees. One of the benefits of FEHBP was the wide variety of health insurance policies that provided coverage for individuals and their family members. Even more important was that FEHBP provided a taxpayer-funded government contribution to each enrollee's monthly premium.

In 2013 alone, the maximum FEHBP averaged $413 a month or almost $5,000 per year for individual coverage, and $920 a month or over $10,000 a year for family coverage.

An added bonus was that these taxpayer-funded contributions counted as tax-free income to employees. This is certainly a great benefit for Federal employees, and I absolutely believe they should be treated fairly in return for the public service they provide. I also believe Congress has to follow the law as written, and that is when we get to ObamaCare.

ObamaCare very clearly and specifically changed all of this. It mandated that Members of Congress and congressional staff give up that FEHBP coverage beginning January 1, 2014, and join an ObamaCare health insurance exchange. The relevant section of the act is crystal clear. It says: ''Notwithstanding any other provisions of law, after the effective date of this subtitle, the only health plans that the Federal Government may make available to Members of Congress and congressional staff with respect to their services as a Member of Congress or congressional staff shall be health plans that are—(I) created under this Act (or an amendment made by this Act); or (II) offered through an Exchange established under this Act (or an amendment made by this Act).''

It changed our entire coverage, clearly, unequivocally. The word ''notwithstanding'' means ''in spite of,'' sweeping aside any other provision of law. It definitively dictates that section 1312(d)(3)(D) takes precedence over any other conflicting provision in the bill or anywhere in the code. Some folks may not like that, but that is the law. That became the law, clearly and unequivocally, when ObamaCare was passed into law.

It didn't have to be exactly that way. For instance, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY introduced an amendment during debate on the ObamaCare bill that would have changed this final language regarding how ObamaCare impacts Congress. The Grassley amendment clearly described which Federal employees were subject to the law and must enroll on the new exchanges. That wasn't different. It included the President, the Vice President, each Member of Congress, each political appointee, and each congressional employee, but it also permitted Federal employees to continue receiving the employer-government contributions like those received under FEHBP. However, the Senate never voted on that language, on that Grassley amendment, before ObamaCare became law. Even more telling, even more significant, after ObamaCare became law, Senator GRASSLEY again offered that language. He got a vote then, and that language was defeated in the Senate 56 to 43.

The final Obama language very clearly states Members of Congress must purchase their health insurance on a State-based or Federal exchange, and it has absolutely no provision for a rich, taxpayer-funded subsidy. That is why I followed that law. I personally signed up for health insurance on Louisiana's individual health care exchange. It definitely costs me more money, and it definitely costs my family more money, but that is what the law says we have to do.

As millions of Americans face the possibility of losing the health insurance they had that they liked and wanted to keep, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, Members of Congress faced increased expenses on their own personal new health insurance plans. Which of these two problems do you think Congress scrambled to solve? You guessed it—their own; not all of America's problems, the Washington elite's problems. They made a determined effort to find a way to protect themselves, and sadly this was a fully bipartisan, bicameral effort that ultimately led to Washington's exemption from ObamaCare.

With the January 1, 2014, deadline quickly approaching for Congress to give up its FEHBP benefits, congressional leadership scrambled for a solution. Press reports at the time indicated that top lawmakers initiated confidential talks with Obama administration officials to carve out a suitable exemption from ObamaCare.

After extended closed-door deliberations, a proposal emerged that involved using OPM, the Office of Personnel Management, to promulgate a special agency rule that only applied to Congress. During the rulemaking process, OPM admitted that ''many commenters expressed their view that a Government contribution is antithetical to the intent of Section 1312 of the Affordable Care Act, which they interpret to require Members of Congress and congressional staff to purchase the same health insurance available to private citizens on the Exchanges. Commenters asserted that Members of Congress and congressional staff should be subject to the same requirements as citizens purchasing insurance on the Exchanges, including individual responsibility for premiums and income restrictions for premium assistance.'' That was in Politico, and I certainly agree with the sentiment. That is what ObamaCare and the statute said.

Members of Congress should absolutely live under the laws they pass. Unfortunately, though, under this cleverly hatched scheme, OPM disregarded these comments and moved forward with its insider rule. Through illegal executive action—an executive action contrary to the ObamaCare statute—the final OPM rule in effect declared Congress to be a small business so that Members of Congress and staff could purchase plans on DC's small business exchange explicitly reserved under the ObamaCare statute for small businesses of 50 employees or fewer. This rule also permitted the Washington insiders to receive a generous employer contribution toward their premiums that is not noted anywhere in the ObamaCare statute.

OPM's final rule did two things: First, it allowed all Members of Congress and staff to purchase insurance on this DC small business exchange created for small businesses. It was clearly created for businesses with 50 employees or fewer. Second, it made sure that the small employer contribution would be equal to Congress's previously acquired FEHBP contributions.

With OPM's final rule, Members of Congress and congressional staff would not have to pay any extra out-of-pocket expenses like so many millions on the ObamaCare exchanges had to pay.

I guess this is great news for Congress, but there are major problems with this final rule that make it just flatout wrong and flatout illegal and contrary to the ObamaCare statute.

The first thing that makes it flatout wrong is that it was specific to Members of Congress and congressional staff—a solution for the Washington insiders when millions of Americans continued to suffer the serious negative consequences of ObamaCare.

Second, it suggested it pushed Congress into this DC small business exchange when Congress is obviously not a small business and this exchange was created for the benefit of small businesses.

Third, the relevant statute in ObamaCare says nothing about any employer subsidy for members of staff, no taxpayer-funded subsidy, and yet OPM's rule created this out of thin air.

A fourth problem is one of the most egregious examples of how big a scam this rule is. Members of Congress actually have the option to designate any or all of their staff as ''not official,'' thus allowing the staff to stay on their old FEHBP plans to avoid the exchanges altogether, which was the intent of that ObamaCare provision. This completely frustrates the crystal-clear language of ObamaCare for those staff members in a blatant way. Again, that problem is egregious and just underscores how big a scam this rule is. Those staff members use official taxpayer-funded resources. They get paychecks funded by the taxpayer. It is official. They use official letterhead, official everything, official resources, but somehow they are not official for purposes of this ObamaCare provision. That is outrageous.

In 2014, when all of this went into effect, I served as the ranking member on the Senate EPW Committee. I certainly considered all of my staff, including committee staff, to be official government employees. It is obvious they were. I made sure they were all designated as official and had to go to the exchanges. When I took over as chairman of the Small Business Committee last year, I again absolutely did the right thing and designated my committee staff, as well as my personal staff, as official. They clearly are official.

Let's go back to the OPM rule. In order for U.S. House and Senate Members and staff to enroll in this DC small business exchange, the Senate and the House of Representatives had to submit online applications. In September 2014, Judicial Watch, a government watchdog organization, asked for and eventually received several documents from the DC Health Benefits Exchange Authority in response to their Freedom of Information Act request related to Congress receiving benefits under this DC small business exchange. The documents included nine pages of applications completed and submitted online for U.S. House and Senate Members and for House staff to enroll on that DC small business exchange.

If the House and Senate completed the online applications with truthful information, they would have been automatically rejected on the computer by the DC exchange software system based on employee size and other prohibitive factors. What happened? Well, as you can see, what was submitted were blatantly false applications—applications with completely and blatantly false information. We have an example from the U.S. Senate.

First, all of the applications state that each legislative body—the House on the one hand and the Senate on the other—employed 45 full-time equivalent employees during the previous calendar year. In order to get on this small business exchange, they were asked how many employees—the U.S. House of Representatives, 45; the U.S. Senate, 45. Here is the number right here on the application. It is blatantly, obviously, and laughably false.

Second, all three applications include blatantly false employee names and birth dates that were asked to be listed.

Third, they falsified the category of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Both Federal legislative bodies were entitled as State or local government entities to squeeze onto this small business exchange.

It should be noted that the applications submitted on behalf of the House on the one hand and the Senate on the other contain these three identical misrepresentations. These identical false statements are evidence of a carefully coordinated scheme. The two forms allege exactly the same erroneous number of full-time equivalent employees—45—just under the maximum allowed of 50. They contain the exact same false employee name and birth date information. They use exactly the same false employer classification, State and local government.

The coordinated effort shown on both applications likely originated from the same source who either personally completed them or gave instructions to others on how to complete them. Knowingly filing false information on a government document is illegal. No legitimate private business would be able to get away with this—what Congress did to gain access to this DC small business exchange—without facing serious penalties and serious adverse consequences.

Maybe even more concerning than the information we see on these applications is the information we don't see because much of the documents Judicial Watch obtained—much of the information was redacted and blacked out. Redactions are a tool generally used to protect an individual's personal or confidential information. In this case, the redactions intentionally established additional obstacles for those seeking transparency and accountability regarding Congress's action. In other words, they just hide exactly who was responsible for submitting these blatantly false applications. The redacted applications are really a startling illustration of the extent to which Congress is willing to go in order to protect itself and its special perks and privileges.

As chairman of the Small Business Committee, I am authorized to investigate ''all problems of American small business enterprises.'' For a large entity like Congress to improperly take advantage of systems in place that are meant for small businesses is really doubly insulting and within our jurisdiction.

On February 3, 2015, I sent a letter to officials at the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the DC exchange authority requesting information that included copies of the nine pages of the applications we talked about unredacted. We wanted all the information with nothing blacked out.

The Chief Administrative Officer for the House of Representatives declined to respond based on the claim that the Senate Small Business Committee lacked jurisdiction to investigate ''internal operations of the House of Representatives.''

The clerk of the Senate Dispersing Office recited a background of the OPM rule and nothing more. In other words, they just stonewalled.

Finally, the DC Health Benefits Exchange Authority refused to comply on the grounds that a pending lawsuit filed by Judicial Watch prevented it from doing so. In March of 2015, officials from that authority agreed to meet with my committee staff to discuss producing the nine pages of applications in their original, unredacted

form, but at the meeting, these officials flatly refused to produce this, citing new privacy concerns.

Followup correspondence with all three entities again yielded nonresponses—basically more stonewalling.

During this time, I also sent three letters to then-OPM Director Katherine Archuleta requesting all communications between OPM and Members of Congress or officials at the White House regarding the final OPM rule. OPM failed to provide any of that information.

The only viable option I could see to move forward with my investigation was compulsory means through the issuance of a subpoena to the DC Health Benefits Exchange Authority to get the nine pages of applications in their original form, unredacted, without protecting those responsible. In order to issue a subpoena, committee rules dictated that as chairman I would need either the consent of the committee's ranking Democratic member or the approval of a majority of the committee members, which would be 10 members.

On April 23, 2015, I convened a committee business meeting that included deliberation and a vote on issuing that subpoena.

As it turns out, Members, regardless of party, are willing to go to great lengths to protect their perks and taxpayer-funded subsidies, because the motion to issue the subpoena failed by a vote of 5 to 14, with five Republican Members—just the necessary number to stop the subpoena—joining all of the committee's Democrats to block the subpoena.

Now, it is no surprise to anybody who knows me that we didn't stop there, that the committee investigation and the work didn't stop there.

In February of this year, when the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs conducted a hearing on the President's nomination of Beth Cobert to become the permanent OPM Director, I again became engaged over this issue. In my numerous attempts to engage OPM in an honest conversation about how their final rule came to be, I never received any meaningful response. So I followed up with a letter to Ms. Cobert, who is serving as OPM's Acting Director. While her office did provide some useful information, her response largely failed to answer my questions.

It is interesting that while all of this was going on, at the same time, everyone employed by Congress received a form from the IRS. It is called form 1095–C. Excuse me. It is an IRS form. It comes, in the case of the Senate employees, from the Senate Disbursing Office, and it confirms the obvious: that people who work in the Senate—Members, staff—and people who work in the House—Members, staff—are employed by a large employer.

As the Presiding Officer may know, the Internal Revenue Code requires ''applicable large employers,'' the definition of which is 50 or more full-time employees, to report information of offers of health coverage and enrollment in health coverage for their employees. So it demands this form, and everybody in the Senate and everybody in the House got this form.

Now, this IRS form, sent to all Members and all staff, shows that everything we are talking about—the lie that enabled the Senate and the House to get on the DC small business exchange—was just that. It was a lie. It contradicts everything that was represented in that category. The Senate Disbursing Office submitted an application that said the Senate has 45 total employees to the DC small business exchange, but the same Senate Disbursing Office distributed an IRS form that labels the Senate a large employer with over 50 employees.

So what is it? Well, it seems pretty clear. The IRS form is accurate. Obviously, the Senate and the House are large employers. The OPM rule allows the Senate to fraudulently claim to be a small business as part of this scam—Washington exemption from ObamaCare. OPM promulgated a rule that allows the Senate to purchase health insurance on a small business exchange. The law States that only small employers may purchase that on the exchange. The OPM rule just makes a mockery of the law and does this to establish that Washington exemption from ObamaCare.

This is a lot to take in and certainly very confusing. That is why I asked the head of the IRS and the acting head of OPM to clarify this. I wrote to IRS Commissioner Koskinen in February: ''Can you confirm that the United States Congress''—the House and the Senate—''is a large employer?''

Apparently, my pretty simple question didn't have a simple answer. The IRS responded that they had forwarded my question up the chain of command to the Department of the Treasury, and I still await Treasury's answer from February.

I also asked OPM Acting Director Cobert: ''Can you confirm the position of the OPM as to whether Congress is a small business . . . or is it a 'Large Employer' as indicated by the 1095C forms sent to Congressional employees?''

OPM's response was this: ''OPM does not take the position that Congress is a small employer, nor has OPM taken such a position in the past. Nothing in the proposed or final rule indicates that Congress shall be considered a small employer. . . . ''

Well, why the heck is Congress in a small business exchange limited under statute to 50 or fewer employees?

It is then when I decided to place a hold on Ms. Cobert's nomination to become permanent OPM Director, and I continue to block that nomination because of OPM and her clear role in this flagrant abuse of power regarding Washington's exemption from ObamaCare.

Her failure to revoke the illegal rule as well as her failure to disclose relevant information about the rulemaking process allows OPM's illegal rule to remain in place. This, in turn, allows Congress to continue to purchase health insurance on DC's small business exchange and to continue to receive a generous and illegal employer-contribution, taxpayer-funded subsidy.

My objective today remains what it has been for the last several years, and that is to flat out end Washington's exemption from ObamaCare. So I won't lift my hold on this nomination until we do that, until my colleagues have joined me in following the law, until OPM overturns its illegal rule—something of that sort. Yes, it is more expensive to purchase my health insurance on the exchange in Louisiana, but that is what the law dictates.

I don't believe this body will find the overall fix to ObamaCare until it truly has to live under ObamaCare, and that starts with no special Washington exemption from ObamaCare—no special deal, special rule, or special subsidy for Congress.

I don't particularly care if we fix this administratively or legislatively. I have certainly offered several legislative solutions in the past, but my colleagues seem to be intent on protecting their special perk and status.

Now, if it is not for themselves, many say at least it is for their valued staff. On that point, I am willing to compromise. Every time a Member of Congress objects to my past proposals, they always talk about staff. We all value staff. I get that. Certainly, I agree with that sentiment. So I am willing to take staff out of it. That is a distraction to this debate.

I am going to offer Members to take ownership and eat their own cooking—live by the ObamaCare statute, be treated as millions of other Americans are, and go to the ObamaCare exchanges with no special exemption, no special subsidy, no special deal, no special rule.

We could start today and, by holding Congress accountable, accept that important victory and, certainly, release my hold on Ms. Cobert's nomination.

With that end in mind, I have here a new bill focused on Members of Congress, the President, and the Vice President to end their special exemption from ObamaCare, and I will be formally introducing this legislation tonight. It is simply wrong for Washington insiders to carve out loopholes for themselves in order to avoid living under the laws Congress passes for the rest of America. This new bill, again, will cover Members of Congress, the President, the Vice President—not staff. We should do that as a minimum first step to live under the laws Congress passes on the rest of the country and live under the ObamaCare statute as it exists today.

Now is the time for action. So I urge my colleagues to join me in taking this

first step toward restoring the public's confidence in this body and the impartial rule of law. It is time to end the scam that is Washington's exemption from ObamaCare.

By Mr. SCHATZ (for himself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. BOOKER, and Mr. CARDIN):

S. 3122. A bill to reinstate Federal Pell Grant eligibility for individuals incarcerated in Federal and State penal institutions, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I rise today to support the introduction of the Restoring Education and Learning Act of 2016, REAL Act, legislation to improve our justice system by reinstating Pell Grant eligibility for people in State and Federal prisons. I thank Senator SCHATZ for his leadership on this issue, and I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this critical bill.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Higher Education Act of 1965, legislation that created the Federal Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are the single largest source of Federal aid that supports undergraduate students. Because Pell Grants are need-based, they primarily go to students from low-income families.

When Congress created the Pell Grant program its intent was clear—to expand access to higher education for students with limited resources. By creating Pell Grants, Congress sent an unmistakable message that our country's most valuable resource is the genius and talent of our people. In an increasingly competitive global economy, investing in the education of all Americans—young and old—helps bolster our country's leadership.

Unfortunately, far too many Americans are not eligible to receive Pell Grants simply because they are behind bars. In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act completely eliminated Pell Grant eligibility for people who are incarcerated in State and Federal correctional institutions. This is flawed policy. Rather than enhance public safety, this policy change has made our communities less safe and has destroyed the potential of so many Americans who deserve a second chance. It is time we end this failed policy of the past. It is time we work to rebuild these broken individuals and allow them to acquire the skills they need to become contributing members of our society.

Today, I am proud to join with Senator SCHATZ in introducing the REAL Act. This criminal justice reform bill would restore Pell Grant eligibility for Americans who are in state or Federal Prison. This is important because if we truly want to reform our broken criminal justice system, we need to allow incarcerated people to engage in activities that will make them more prepared for life after prison, which will in turn make them less likely to recidivate. This bill would give returning citizens the tools they need to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

Last week, President Barack Obama announced a $30 million Second Chance Pell Grant pilot program. This program will expand access to Pell Grants for over 12,000 incarcerated students at 141 State and Federal institutions. However, the president's Second Chance Pell Grant pilot program does not extend to all incarcerated people nor does it codify this policy into law. By building on the president's work, the REAL Act would codify into law that prisoners are eligible for Pell Grants.

Our criminal justice system is broken. We lead the globe in the number of people we incarcerate and we waste billions and billions of dollars locking up human potential. Passing the REAL Act would reduce staggeringly high recidivism rates because we know individuals with college degrees are less likely to commit crimes. Additionally, today, more than ever, it is clear that obtaining a college degree has become essential to obtaining employment—a key element in reducing recidivism rates.

By precluding so many people from taking college classes, we are not only hurting those who are behind bars, but we are hurting ourselves. There is an old African saying that if you want to go fast go alone, but if you want to go far go together. This bill will help so many Americans get on the right path and turn their lives around. This bill would make us all stronger.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the REAL Act. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I urge its speedy passage in the Senate.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 515—WELCOMING PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN-LOONG TO THE UNITED STATES AND REAFFIRMING SINGAPORE'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES, ENCOMPASSING BROAD AND ROBUST ECONOMIC, MILITARY-TO-MILITARY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

Mr. CARDIN (for himself and Mr. GARDNER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 515

Whereas in August 2016, as we commemorate 50 years of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Republic of Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong of Singapore will make an official visit to the United States, including a State dinner on August 2nd;

Whereas the Republic of Singapore became independent on August 9, 1965, and the United States recognized Singapore's statehood in the same year;

Whereas Singapore and the United States established formal diplomatic relations in 1966;

Whereas under the leadership of its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore became an early and continued supporter of the United States' engagement in Asia to safeguard the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region;

Whereas in 2004 the United States and Singapore implemented the U.S.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, the first bilateral trade agreement between the United States and an Asian country;

Whereas Singapore and the United States are major trading partners, with $64,000,000,000 in bilateral goods and services trade in 2014, and a United States trade surplus in both goods and services;

Whereas Singapore provided the United States access to its military facilities through a 1990 Memorandum of Understanding, supporting the continued security presence of the United States in Southeast Asia;

Whereas the United States and Singapore concluded a Strategic Framework Agreement in 2005, which recognizes Singapore as a ''Major Security Cooperation Partner of the United States'';

Whereas the United States and Singapore signed an enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2015, expanding dialogue and cooperation in areas such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, cyber defense, biosecurity, and public communications;

Whereas Singapore facilitates the rotational deployment of United States Navy Littoral Combat Ships at its Changi Naval Base;

Whereas the United States currently hosts 4 Republic of Singapore Air Force training detachments, comprising the Republic of Singapore Air Force's F–15SG and F–16 fighter jets, and Apache and Chinook helicopters, at bases in Arizona, Idaho, and Texas;

Whereas the U.S.-Singapore Third Country Training Program, established in 2012 and renewed in 2015, provides regional technical and capacity-building assistance in a wide variety of areas to assist recipient countries in reaching their development goals;

Whereas Singapore was a founding member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 and remains a key partner of the United States in ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus;

Whereas Singapore will be home to a U.S.-ASEAN Connect Center, an initiative announced at the U.S.-ASEAN summit in February 2016 to facilitate U.S.-ASEAN engagement and cooperation on energy, innovation, and entrepreneurship;

Whereas Singapore has played a critical role in enhancing shared maritime domain awareness in Southeast Asia through the establishment of the Republic of Singapore Navy's Information Fusion Center, to facilitate information-sharing and collaboration with partners, including the United States, against maritime security threats, and through the deployment of United States aircraft at Paya Lebar Air Base;

Whereas Singapore has been a cybersecurity leader in Southeast Asia, through the unified Cyber Security Agency, as the convener of the annual ASEAN CERT Incident Drill, and as host of the INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation;

Whereas Singapore was the first Southeast Asian country to join the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL in November 2014, and has contributed an air refueling tanker, imagery analysis teams, and planning and liaison officers;