

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 74) congratulating the State of Nebraska on the 150th anniversary of the admission of that State into the United States.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 74) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS AND RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night, I joined most of the Members of Congress to hear President Trump give his first address to a joint session. His speech lasted about 60 minutes, and I listened carefully, as did everyone in the Chamber, to the President's first remarks from that historic setting as he addressed a joint session of Congress.

There were some omissions, which I found very interesting. Not once—not one time—in the course of an hour did President Trump ever say the word "Russia"—not one time—even though we have been told by 17 of our intelligence agencies that Russia made an overt effort to influence the outcome of the last Presidential campaign. That has never happened before in American history. A foreign country attacked the sovereignty of the United States in the election process for the highest office in the land. I think that is noteworthy. It is certainly historic. It would certainly be worth at least a mention when a President speaks to a joint session of Congress just a few months after that election. Instead, there was radio silence, mute button, crickets—nothing about Russia.

What do we have in terms of congressional response to the possibility that Vladimir Putin was trying to pick our next President? We have the suggestion by the Republican leaders in the Senate and the House that this matter should be taken up by the Intelligence Committees.

It sounds reasonable on its face. Having served on Intelligence Committees, I can tell you it is an awesome responsibility and assignment. I can also tell you we have some extraordinarily gift-

ed, talented, patriotic members of those committees from both political parties in the Senate and in the House, but there is a fundamental flaw to this approach. If you went searching on Capitol Hill to find the room in which the Senate Intelligence Committee meets, you would come up empty. There is no sign on the door. It is basically kept clandestine, confidential, and secret. For 4 years, I entered that door, sat down in closed hearings, with no one from the public able to hear or even appreciate what we were doing. It is a lonely assignment—unlike any other committee on Capitol Hill.

I wonder: Is that what we want to do to explore the involvement of Vladimir Putin in our Presidential campaign—to go behind closed doors in secret and meet clandestinely? I think not.

There is an aspect of this that will require some intelligence gathering, some discussion of intelligence—and certainly that would be secret—but there is much more of it that is public in nature that will never be disclosed if we rely on the Senate Intelligence Committee. It is an invisible process, and that invisible process does not serve the needs of a democracy that wants the truth—the straight talk, the answers.

Secondly, the work of an Intelligence Committee ends up in a report that is classified, which means the public doesn't get to see it. We have seen some renditions of it—heavily redacted pages, where one or two words might escape being crossed out.

How do you move from a classified document on Putin's involvement in our Presidential campaign to a public document the people can understand? It takes declassification. Who makes the decision on whether we declassify the information from the Intelligence Committee investigation? The White House.

So, with the possibility—and I underline that word—with the possibility that some people in the President's campaign may or may not have been involved in this, the President has the last word as to the American people ever hearing the results of an Intelligence Committee report.

Many of us believe this is serious, and many of us believe there should be an independent, transparent commission, just like the 9/11 Commission. Let's call on people we respect, such as GEN Colin L. Powell, Sandra Day O'Connor, a former Supreme Court Justice, and many others just like them, who could get to the bottom of this and answer the basic questions: What were the Russians up to? We hear they had 1,000 trolls sitting in offices in Moscow dreaming up ways to hack into the computers and Internet of the United States and to disclose information to try to influence the outcome of the election. It is not a new tactic from Russia. They have done it over and over again.

The last couple of weeks I visited Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine. They know

these tactics oh so well. Under Soviet times and since, Russia has tried to invade their space when it comes to election decisions—overtly, covertly, through propaganda, through cyber attacks. They have done it in many countries around the world. Sadly, they are good at it. Now they have decided they can do it in the United States. They can decide who our President will be or at least try to. Are we going to take this sitting down?

November 8, 2016, election day, was a day that will live in cyber infamy in the United States. The Russians invaded the U.S. election process. The President of the United States spoke to the American people last night and never mentioned one word—not a single word—about this.

How many Republican Senators and Congressmen have come to the floor? I don't know about in the House, but I can tell my colleagues I know about the Senate. None. Not one has come to the floor to even address this issue.

So when President Trump ignored it last night, refused to even mention it, I wasn't surprised, but it is not going away. It is a fact.

We currently have an investigation underway in our intelligence agencies. I just met with former Senator Dan Coats of Indiana. He has been designated by the President to be the DNI—the Director of National Intelligence. He made a statement publicly yesterday before a hearing in Congress that he is going to cooperate with the committees and with Congress in disclosing information they have accumulated in our intelligence agencies as to this Russian involvement in our election.

We also know the Federal Bureau of Investigation is involved in this same exercise to find out exactly what happened and to disclose as much as possible and take action—prosecutorial action—if necessary.

There is a problem, though. The Federal Bureau of Investigation works for the Attorney General. The Department of Justice has the power to impede or stop any FBI investigation. Our former colleague Jeff Sessions was deeply and personally involved in the Trump Presidential campaign. He should recuse himself. He has an obvious conflict of interest on this issue. For the integrity of the office and for his own personal integrity, he should step aside and appoint a special prosecutor who can follow up, if necessary, with this FBI investigation.

This is a serious matter that was not addressed at all last night by the President of the United States speaking to a joint session of Congress.

The Associated Press went through some of the claims that were made by the President last night, and I want to give them credit for their homework on this. It is important for the RECORD that some of the things the President said be explained.

The President said:

According to the National Academy of Sciences, our current immigration system

costs American taxpayers many billions of dollars a year.

The Associated Press writes:

That's not exactly what the report says. It says immigrants "contribute to government finances by paying taxes and add expenditures by consuming public service."

The report found that while first-generation immigrants are more expensive to governments than their native-born counterparts, primarily at the state and local level, immigrants' children "are among the strongest economic and fiscal contributors in the population." This second generation contributed more in taxes on a per capita basis, for example, than non-immigrants in the period, 1994–2013.

The report [that the President unfortunately mischaracterized] found that the "long-run fiscal impact" of immigrants and their children would probably be seen as more positive "if their role in sustaining labor force growth and contributing to innovation and entrepreneurial activity were taken into account."

So to argue, as the President did yesterday, that the National Academy of Sciences, as he said, stated that our current immigration system costs American taxpayers many billions of dollars is, at best, incomplete and misleading.

The President then went on to say during the course of his speech last night:

We've saved taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars by bringing down the price of the F-35 jet fighter.

I remember when he said that.

The Associated Press says as follows:

The cost savings he persists in bragging about were secured in full or large part before he became President.

He has taken credit for something he didn't do.

According to the AP:

The head of the Air Force program announced significant price reductions in the contract for the Lockheed F-35 fighter on December 19—after [candidate] Trump, [President-Elect Trump] had tweeted about the cost but weeks before he met with the company's CEO.

The AP goes on:

Pentagon managers took action even before the election to save [this] money. . . . Richard Aboulafia, an analyst with the aerospace consulting firm Teal Group, said there is no evidence of any additional cost savings as a result of President Trump's actions.

Here is another statement made by the President last night:

We will provide massive tax relief for the middle class.

I remember that one. That is something I hope we all can aspire to, but let me tell my colleagues what the Associated Press says about that claim.

Trump has provided little detail on how this would happen. Independent analyses of his campaign tax proposals found that most of the benefits would flow to the wealthiest families. The richest 1 percent would see an average tax cut of nearly \$215,000 a year, while the middle one-fifth of the population would get a tax cut of just \$1,010, according to the Tax Policy Center, a joint project with the Brookings Institution and Urban Institute.

Here is another statement the President made last night:

Ninety-four million Americans are out of the labor force.

The Associated Press says:

That's true, but for the vast majority of them, it's because they choose to be. That 94 million figure includes everyone aged 16 and older who doesn't have a job and isn't looking for one. So it includes retirees, parents who are staying home to raise children, high school and college students who are studying rather than working.

They are unlikely to work regardless of the state of the economy. With the huge baby boomer generation reaching retirement age many of them retiring, the population of those out of the labor force is increasing and will continue to do so, most economists forecast.

It's true that some of those out of the workforce are of working age and have given up looking for work. But that number is probably a small fraction of the 94 million President Trump cited.

Another statement the President made: He said his budget plan will offer "one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history."

I will not dwell on this other than to say that the absolute number—a \$54 billion increase, or about 10 percent, is the largest single number. On a percentage basis, there have been larger increases in previous years, like 2002, 2003, and 2008.

Here is another claim made by the President last night:

Since my election, Ford, Fiat-Chrysler, General Motors, Sprint, Softbank, Lockheed, Intel, Walmart, and many others have announced they will invest billions of dollars in the United States and will create tens of thousands of new American jobs.

The Associated Press reports that "many of the announcements reflect corporate decisions that predate [Trump's Presidential] election," making it unlikely his administration "is the sole or even primary reason for the expected hiring. . . . In the case of Intel, construction of the Chandler, Arizona, factory referred to by Trump actually began during Barack Obama's presidency. The project was delayed by insufficient demand for Intel's high-powered computer chips, but the company now expects to finish the factory within four years because it anticipates business growth.

Another statement made by President Trump last night in his speech:

We will stop the drugs from pouring into our country and poisoning our youth, and we will expand treatment for those who have become so badly addicted.

The facts:

Addicts and mentally ill people who gain access to treatment programs for the first time as a result of ObamaCare—the Affordable Care Act—are worried about repeal that President Trump has called for. Repeal could end coverage for 1.8 million people who have undergone addiction or mental health treatment, cut \$5.5 billion on spending on such services according to estimates by economist Richard Frank, a former administration official under Barack Obama, now with the Harvard Medical School.

The AP goes on to say:

The key question is what will happen to Medicaid as a result of changes Republicans

are pursuing? Broadly speaking, Republicans want to transform the health insurance program for low-income people from an open-ended Federal entitlement to a system that provides States with a limited amount of financing and gives them latitude on how to spend it.

The AP goes on to say:

If Congress is too stingy with State allotments, States would be hampered dealing with the emergencies like the opioid epidemic.

The next statement by President Trump last night:

According to data provided by the Department of Justice, the vast majority of individuals convicted for terrorism-related offenses since 9/11 came here from outside of our country. We have seen the attacks at home, from Boston to San Bernardino to the Pentagon, and yes, even the World Trade Center.

The Associated Press responds:

It's unclear what Justice Department data the President is citing. The most recent government information that has come out doesn't back up his claim. Just over half the people President Trump talks about were actually born in the United States, according to Homeland Security Department research. That report said of 82 people the government determined were inspired by foreign terrorist groups to attempt to carry out an attack on the U.S., just over half [of them] were [born in the United States] native-born citizens.

The AP goes on to say:

Even the attacks Trump singled out weren't entirely the work of foreigners. Syed Rizwan Farook, who along with his Pakistani wife killed 14 people in the deadly 2015 attack in San Bernardino, California, was born in Chicago.

It's true that in the immediate aftermath of September 11, the FBI's primary concern was with terrorists from overseas feared to be plotting attacks in the United States. But that's no longer the case. The FBI and Justice Department have been preoccupied with violent extremists from inside the U.S. who are inspired by the calls to violence and mayhem of the Islamic State group. The Justice Department has prosecuted scores of Islamic State-related cases since 2014, and many of the defendants are U.S. citizens.

Another statement by President Trump last night:

ObamaCare is collapsing . . . imploding Obamacare disaster.

The AP writes:

There are problems with the 2010 health care law, but whether it's collapsing is hotly disputed.

One of the two major components of the Affordable Care Act has been a spike in premiums and a drop in participation from insurers. But the other component, equally important, seems to be working fairly well, even if its costs are a concern.

Trump and congressional Republicans want to repeal the whole thing, which risks leaving millions of people uninsured if the replacement plan has shortcomings. Some critics say GOP rhetoric itself is making things worse by creating uncertainty about the future.

The health law offers subsidized private health insurance along with a state option to expand Medicaid for low-income people. Together, the two arms of the program reach more than 20 million people.

Republican governors whose states have expanded Medicaid are trying to find a way to persuade Congress and the administration to keep this expansion, and maybe even build on it, while imposing limits on the long-term costs of Medicaid.

While the Medicaid expansion seems to be working, the markets for subsidized health insurance are stressed in many states. Also affected are millions of people who buy individual policies outside the government markets, and face the same high premiums with no financial help from the health law. Larry Levitt of the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation says “implosion” is too strong a term. An AP count found that 12.2 million people signed up for this year, despite the Trump administration’s threats to repeal the law.

I might add, that it is despite all of the speeches made on the floor of the Senate and the House, promising that it would be repealed as well.

The last point I want to make is this. I was troubled last night by a recurring theme in the President’s speech. It was a theme about immigration in the United States. We are a nation of immigrants. My mother was an immigrant to this country. I am proud to serve as a Senator from the State where she and her family settled. I am proud of the struggle they went through—coming to this country, not knowing the language, going through some pretty rough times, facing poverty, taking the dirtiest and toughest jobs. Because of that, the second generation of my family—the one I represent—has brought some great people to this world in our own families and perhaps even added to the benefits of the United States for others.

Last night, if you listened to the characterization of immigrants, it was negative, virtually from start to finish.

In the audience last night, I had a young lady as my guest. She is an extraordinary lady. Her name is Aaima Sayed. She is Pakistani, and she was brought to the United States at the age of 3 by her parents from Pakistan. They settled in Chicago and eventually moved to New Jersey. It turns out the family had its difficulties and the mother and father split and separated. When the father left, he left behind his paperwork—which was in place or at least in the process—of trying to legalize the presence of his family, and nothing was done.

It wasn’t until she was in high school that this young lady realized that she was undocumented. That creates obstacles for any young person. In her case, a special obstacle was the cost of higher education. As an undocumented child in America, she didn’t qualify for government assistance—Federal Government assistance—and limited State assistance. Yet she aspired to go on to school and to borrow the money, if necessary, at high interest rates from private sources in order to finish her education. She graduated from Rutgers University magna cum laude and then wanted to go to medical school.

There weren’t many medical schools accepting undocumented students, but there was one. I am proud to tell you that it was Loyola University of Chicago, the Stritch School of Medicine. There were about 65 undocumented young people in medical school in the United States, and 30 of them were at

Loyola in Chicago. I have met most of them. Each and every one of them is more inspiring than the next.

They opened up the competition. They didn’t give them slots to fill. They said: Compete with everyone. These students were so outstanding from across the United States that they made it to Loyola.

This young lady, in her third year, faces another 6 years of education before she completes her medical degree. When she is finished with those 6 years, it isn’t over. In Illinois, we told her she could go to school, but it was part of a contract. She could attend school, and we would reduce the interest payments at a later part in her life if she gave us 1 year of service in an underserved community in Illinois for each year of medical school. She has 6 years of school left and 4 years of serving in a rural community or an underserved neighborhood clinic in the city of Chicago or nearby.

She signed up for it. She is an amazing young person. She is determined to get this medical degree—despite the debt, despite the obstacles. The only reason she can do this is because she is protected by something called DACA.

Let me explain. Some 16 years ago, I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act. It said that if you were brought to the United States, like she was, under the age of 16, you had a good life, no criminal record or history of a problematic nature, and completed your education, you can stay in the United States and eventually work your way toward legalization.

President Obama took it up and created an Executive order called DACA and said to the young people in that situation: Come and apply, pay a \$600 filing fee, then go through a criminal background check, and if you make it, we will give you 2 years to live in the United States without fear of deportation, with a work permit.

She signed up. That is how she can go to medical school. You need to work to go to medical school. She is going through a clinical experience where she is actually working in these hospitals. Without a work permit, she wouldn’t be able to complete medical school.

The obvious question is this: What is going to happen to this program under President Trump? In fairness, the President has said positive things about DACA and DREAMers. I thanked him personally. I have only met him three times, but I thanked him personally twice for doing that. I hope that it means that ultimately there will be some path for the 750,000 young people, just like her, who are simply asking for a chance to be educated and be part of America’s future.

I hope that, as people who listened to the speech last night think about immigrants to the United States, they will think about this young woman, as well, who has worked so hard her entire life to better herself and to be able to help others at a later point in life.

She is an extraordinary person, and there are so many more just like her.

They are immigrants to this country. In this case it is Muslim immigrant to this country who someday will be an exceptional doctor, who is going to give 4 years of her life back to my home State and then is going to help others all across the United States. That, to me, is an image of immigrants that shouldn’t be lost with the negative connotations that were raised last night.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

MINERS PROTECTION ACT

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I rise today to call for immediate action on the Miners Protection Act. Today, as we sit here, 22,600 miners have received letters. This is a copy of the letter, and I am going to read it to you. This is a letter they received today letting them know their healthcare benefits will be terminated at the end of April. This letter basically says:

The UMWA 1993 Benefit Plan notified you in December 2016—

This is one of multiple letters they received. Can you imagine getting a 4-month extension? Then by law you have to have 90 days before they can terminate you. Every time you get an extension, within 30 days you get another letter saying you are going to be terminated. That is the inhumane treatment our retired miners and mostly widows are receiving—

that the U.S. Congress had passed the Continuing Health Benefits for Miners Act, which provided for the transfer of federal funds to the Plan to cover the health care benefits you receive through April 30, 2017. The Plan cautioned that further Congressional action would be necessary in order for the Plan to provide health care coverage to you after April 30. At this time, Congress has not taken the action needed to continue your benefits. Unless Congress acts before the end of April, the 1993 Benefit Plan will not be able to provide you with the health benefits that you have been receiving from the 1993 Plan, and those benefits will terminate effective May 1, 2017. In addition, your Funds’ Health Service Card will no longer be valid.

Can you imagine a 75- or 80-year-old woman—a lady, a widow—who has lost her husband, probably because of black lung, and all the work he did for our country and for himself and his family, and she has received that three times or more now—not knowing what in the world or why they can’t do something that we promised, something that was done in 1946, where the Krug amendment and the Krug act basically said that we would take care of our miners so that they would have permanent healthcare and a pension. It was not done by taxpayers’ dollars. It was done by the coal they mined. For every ton of coal, there would be so much set aside. Then we had the bankruptcy laws happen in the 1980s, which basically destroyed a lot of companies for paying into it. Then we had the crash of 2008, which took it further down.

Now we stand here today, and we have a fix coming out of the AML, the

abandoned mine lands, coming, again, from coal that was mined to pay for the miners' pension and benefit plan, and we can't get it done.

I will tell you, if that piece of legislation was allowed to be voted on tonight, we would have well over 60 votes, bipartisan. My Republican colleagues and all of our Democrat colleagues here understand the importance of the working people.

President Trump is speaking about this every time. Last night he shouted out to miners. I was so pleased. I have not heard that since I have been here—anyone saying: Thank you for the job you have done. We are not leaving you behind. You have given to this country the energy we have, the superpower of the world. You have produced the energy through the toughest of times, and we appreciate that.

I was very, very appreciative to see that type of recognition. I can't tell you how much more appreciative I would be right now to see us as a bipartisan group—Democrats and Republicans—standing up for the working people that we talk about every day and saying: Listen, as to the pension guarantee act, which basic to the Miners Protection Act, we are going to pass that. We are going to put this aside. We don't have to worry about this anymore. We have done it.

That is all we are asking for. Everybody who has joined me in this journey understands that we are all fighting for the working people, which is what we were sent here to do, from your wonderful State of South Carolina to my beautiful State of West Virginia. They depend on us. The retired miners are walking our halls. Maybe you have seen them. If not, I am sure they will come by and say hi to you. They are very appreciative of the consideration we are all giving them. They are hoping we finally get this done.

I am doing it for them and for their families and what they have done for our country. The 4-month extension is not even humane. I have said that. My reason for saying that is that these people can't comprehend it. I can assure you that, when I go back to my office after I leave the floor, I will get phone calls: JOE, they are going to take my healthcare again. What am I going to do?

I keep saying: Ma'am, please, trust us; hold tight.

We could have had this fixed before. We kicked the can down the road 4 months. Now I have been told—and we all seem to accept it—that they are going to do a permanent healthcare fix. I am appreciative of that. The bottom line is that we have pensions out there hanging, which is going to be a bigger albatross around us if we don't something, and we have a chance to fix it all and put that aside.

I spoke to President Trump, and I am hopeful that he will speak out on this, and he has spoken out. He has told me that he supports it.

I said: Please, Mr. President, speak to our friends on the other side—our

leadership—and let them know how much you support this, and let us put this behind us because we can fix it once and for all.

We were told to get a legislative hearing, and we did that. We were told to go through regular order. We went to the Finance Committee, and it was passed out—bipartisan, overwhelmingly bipartisan.

I know we have the 60 votes. I was told we have to reintroduce it again. So here we are. I reintroduced it, and we have bipartisan support again. We are ready to go.

Why do we put these people through this type of agony? I don't know. We have so many other challenges, and we have to come together. This is one we have already agreed we are together on and can't move it.

I know you have always been a dear friend and supportive, and you know the hard work our people have done, and I appreciate that. However, it is time to act. It is time to get this done. If we wait until April, that is exactly when our continuing resolution is coming up, and, basically, we have no budget to work off of. So we have to do another extension until we can get something more permanent. They could get caught up in that CR again. We are going to say: We are sorry; we couldn't get it done, but we will give you another 2, 3, or 4 months.

I can't go home and continue to tell these wonderful people who have been so good and so patient that I am sorry, but we just have to wait another few months.

When is enough enough? When are those few months going to be up and we do the right thing? I am asking all of you; I am asking all of my colleagues: Please, this is one time when we can do something and feel good about it and go home over the weekend and go back to our constituents and tell them that this one is finished, that we fixed this.

I am asking for that vote. I would encourage all of my colleagues to do the same, to speak to the leaderships to make sure that we can move the miners protection and make sure the miners get the healthcare and the pension benefits they were guaranteed and they have been promised and which has been kept until now, and that we are not going to let them down.

With that, Mr. President, I thank you, and I thank all of my colleagues for the support we have been receiving. I am asking the majority leader to please let us have this vote and put it on the floor. Let's go from there and see what happens. I am willing to do that.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FAMILY PLANNING PROVIDERS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, thank you, and thank you to some of my colleagues who are going to be joining me on the floor this afternoon.

The day after President Trump was inaugurated was one of the most inspiring I have ever gotten a chance to be part of. Millions of people, men and women, marched in Seattle, in Washington, DC, and in cities and towns in between. They carried signs, they chanted, and they made it absolutely undeniably clear that when it comes to women's rights and healthcare, people across the country do not want to go backward. Since then, they have continued to speak up and stand up.

But we are here today because Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress simply are not getting the message. I want to discuss one crucial example in particular—the possibility that in a matter of days, Senate Republicans could roll back a rule protecting family planning providers from being discriminated against and denied Federal funding.

Let me start by explaining a bit about what family planning providers mean to our community. These providers—part of the Title X program, which has bipartisan history—deliver critical healthcare services nationwide but are especially needed in rural and frontier areas. In 2015 alone, Title X provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services, such as Pap tests, breast exams, birth control, and HIV testing, to more than 4 million low-income women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers. In my home State of Washington, tens of thousands of patients are able to receive care at these centers each year. They often have nowhere else to turn for healthcare. In fact, 4 out of 10 woman who receive care at health centers funded by Title X consider it to be their only source of healthcare.

Taking resources away from these providers would be cruel. It would have the greatest impact on women and families who are most in need. But that is exactly what the law passed in the House, which is now on its way to the Senate, would mean. It would undo a valuable effort by the Obama administration to ensure that healthcare providers are evaluated for Federal funding based on their ability to provide the services in question, not ideology. In doing so, the bill would make it even easier for States, led by extreme politicians, to deny family planning providers Federal funding, not because of the quality of the care they provide or the value to the communities they serve but based on whether the politicians in charge agree that women should be able to exercise their constitutionally protected rights to safe, legal abortion.

It is the 21st century. It is time for politicians to stop telling women what they can and can't do with their own bodies. That is what the women and men who have been marching and speaking up all over our country believe. That is what I believe. It is what Democrats believe.

If Leader MCCONNELL thinks he can rush this harmful legislative effort through without a fight, we are here to say he is wrong. He can expect Democrats and maybe even some Republicans who are concerned about losing healthcare providers in their own States to fight back. So today I am calling on the leader to commit right now to drop this effort and agree not to bring this bill to the floor. It is well past time that extreme Republicans end their damaging political attacks on women. I think the opportunity to start that is right this minute. So we urge him to take this action and not bring this to the floor. We want him to know that we are going to fight back every step of the way if he does.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I came to the floor to join my colleague and friend Senator MURRAY to say that I, too, am ready for this fight to oppose S.J. Res. 13, which would allow the discrimination against Title X family planning providers. This is a misguided measure that would leave millions of women and families with fewer healthcare options. It would drastically decrease women's access to basic primary and preventative health services, including lifesaving cancer screenings and HIV testing.

Make no mistake, as Senator MURRAY said, the primary target of this legislation is Planned Parenthood. For years now, Republican leaders in Congress have tried to keep women from choosing Planned Parenthood as their healthcare provider—this at a time when Planned Parenthood serves millions of women nationwide, including nearly 12,000 women in New Hampshire, my home State. Most of the women in New Hampshire have incomes below or near the poverty line. Many of those women live in rural areas where they don't have other options for healthcare coverage.

The sad irony of this attack on Planned Parenthood is that study after study has shown that cutting back access to birth control and to other family planning methods actually increases the number of abortions. So I understand that opponents are interested in supporting this legislation because they think Planned Parenthood provides abortions, but the coverage Planned Parenthood is providing to women in New Hampshire and across this country with Federal dollars does not allow for abortions. So what we are doing is taking away women's access to contraception and to other family planning services and saying: You have no choice now.

More than ever right now, facts matter. Research matters. Talking away women's access to birth control and family planning will lead to more abortions, not fewer abortions. Yet this legislation is part and parcel of a broader national campaign against Planned Parenthood, whose clinics have been the target of vilification, of threats, and of violence. In October of last year, the Planned Parenthood clinic in Claremont, NH, was vandalized not once but twice. The second attack, a breaking-and-entering incident, caused extensive damage. It forced the clinic to close for 5 weeks.

I have great admiration for the courage of doctors and other healthcare providers at the Claremont clinic. Despite threats and attacks, they are determined to continue serving women across the Connecticut River Valley, many of whom have no alternative to the Claremont clinic. They are typical of the dedicated healthcare professionals at Planned Parenthood clinics all across our country.

The good news is that, according to poll after poll, the American people across the political spectrum—from Independents, to Libertarians, to Democrats, to Republicans—strongly support Planned Parenthood and oppose efforts to take away women's ability to choose Planned Parenthood as their healthcare provider.

At last night's Presidential address to Congress, I was honored to have as my guest Jennifer Frizzell of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. Jen knows exactly what is at stake for women if President Trump and Republican leaders succeed in closing hundreds of Planned Parenthood clinics across the United States.

So let's be clear again: Supporting family planning clinics is not about abortion, which by law is never funded by taxpayer dollars—something that I think is often misrepresented by some of our colleagues here in Congress. What this is about is ensuring that American women have access to the basic healthcare they need. For 40 percent of women, their visits to a family planning center is the only care they receive annually. In 2015 alone, Title X provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services, such as Pap tests, breast exams, birth control, and HIV testing, to more than 4 million women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers.

I am sure that every one of our colleagues is receiving letters and emails and phone calls from constituents on this issue. They are pleading with us not to take away their access to Planned Parenthood and the healthcare they trust and depend on.

I received this message from Caitlin Parnell of Hampstead, NH. She said:

As a young mother of a 2-year-old, my husband and I knew we wanted to wait to have more children. We were both working full time but barely making ends meet. The companies we worked for offered health insurance, but they were small companies, and the monthly cost was well more than we could afford. So we went without. With no

insurance, I turned to Planned Parenthood for birth control. With the sliding pay scale, I was able to get exams and birth control within my budget. We were able to decide the best time to have more children, which also allowed us to responsibly manage our finances as well. An unplanned pregnancy at that point would have destroyed the little financial stability we had. I don't know where our family would be without Planned Parenthood.

Karla Canderhoof is a stay-at-home mother in Newfields, NH. She wrote this:

After being diagnosed with ovarian cyst issues that caused debilitating pain, I turned to Planned Parenthood for treatment. In my case, the treatment for ovarian cysts was birth control. At the time (during my college years) I could not afford the cost of birth control due to my lack of insurance. But Planned Parenthood gave me birth control free of charge.

Amanda Arel of Rochester, NH, sent this message:

During the ages of 22 to 25, I utilized Planned Parenthood for my annual exams and birth control. As I did not have insurance and was in college, I was not able to afford most medical care. Planned Parenthood not only provided me with essential care, they made it very comfortable for me and were very knowledgeable and answered any questions I had. They provided birth control for me that, if it wasn't for them, I would not have been able to get, at a cost I could afford.

I still support Planned Parenthood because they provide safe, affordable healthcare for all, and that is so important.

We need to listen to our constituents, those who are speaking out in passionate support of Planned Parenthood and other family planning clinics.

As Senator MURRAY said so eloquently, this is about respecting women's access to healthcare services, including those millions of vulnerable women who have nowhere else to turn for essential care. This is also about respecting women's constitutionally protected right to make our own reproductive choices. We must not allow Congress to strip away Federal investments in family planning clinics by allowing States to discriminate against providers like Planned Parenthood.

I urge our Republican colleagues, don't bring S.J. Res. 13 to the floor. If it does come to the floor, I certainly intend to join in the fight with my colleagues—Senator MURRAY, Senator BLUMENTHAL, and so many other Democrats and, I believe, Republicans—to defeat this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am proud and honored to follow my very distinguished colleague from New Hampshire, Senator SHAHEEN, and Senator MURRAY of Washington in this cause which invokes a line that I think the President used last night in his address to us, pledging cooperation for causes where we can make a common cause.

Surely no cause is more important than healthcare, no goal is more important than preventive services for

women so we can all avoid the costs not only in dollars and cents but the cost of human suffering and foreclosed futures that will come when women are denied these kinds of basic services.

I met this morning with a group from Planned Parenthood, patients and providers working in clinics across New England. They told me their story—some of them patients, some of them service providers and volunteers—about the kind of transformative effect that primary care, examinations and screenings, can have for women who would otherwise lack those services. The community health centers cannot substitute for them.

Family planning programs under title X are often the only Federal programs dedicated to providing comprehensive services in family planning but also in related preventive health services.

Over the past year alone, title X providers have provided cancer and HIV screenings, contraceptive services, and other primary and preventive services to over 4 million women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers in New England and across the country. This network of healthcare providers is a safety net. They compose a network, the title X network, including providers of State and local health departments, federally qualified health centers, and family planning councils. They create a network that provides a critical source of healthcare to people who otherwise would be denied it. They are trusted providers who are willing to serve the uninsured, the uninsured and low-income individuals who risk losing all access to healthcare if it was not for this network.

These clinics are often the only healthcare providers in rural areas and other parts of the country. So the political attacks on providers that provide abortion services would mean a loss of access to all family planning and preventive healthcare in these parts of the country—rural, metropolitan, suburban. Not only are these services necessary, but family planning services are really good investments, especially when it comes to the money that otherwise would be spent when illnesses or diseases become more serious.

In 2010, the \$1.14 billion that was spent in this country on family planning resulted in more than \$8 billion in gross savings. That is a clearly worthwhile investment.

The resolution that passed the House last month that Senator MCCONNELL is considering bringing to the Senate floor would eliminate protections that prevent discrimination against these very providers, discrimination based on facts or sometimes nonfacts that have nothing to do with the quality of care or the worthiness of the investment in these clinics and healthcare providers.

The regulation that Republicans are seeking to eliminate ensures that no qualified providers will be excluded from eligibility for Federal funding for discriminatory reasons outside of that

provider's ability to provide care. That is really the criterion that matters. The ones who want to eliminate this regulation apparently would rather risk limiting access to healthcare in order to score political points. Unfortunately, it is really that simple.

At a time when Republicans continue to try to push ahead with repealing the Affordable Care Act, which also includes essential support for preventive healthcare, they also want to disrupt the country's healthcare system for this kind of women's healthcare.

Just last night, after President Trump claimed he wanted to work with Members of both parties to invest in women's health, we are threatened with this step to eliminate an important regulation that protects women's health. I ask the President and my colleagues across the aisle to join in this common cause, which should unite us on a bipartisan basis. If they want to continue these attacks, we are ready for the fight, but we would much rather cooperate and collaborate in the cause of women's healthcare.

I urge my Senate colleagues to listen to the kind of providers and patients whom I met with this morning, the kind of provider that Senator SHAHEEN brought with her last night as her guest, the kind of providers and patients and volunteers who work in these clinics all across the country, whether it is Planned Parenthood or other kinds of clinics. I ask them to listen to the advocates here, supporters, like the National Coalition of STD Directors, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the ACLU, and the American Medical Student Association. They are just a few of the stakeholders who advocate strongly that this regulation be continued and who oppose the step the House passed and that the majority leader may bring to the floor.

These people have dedicated their lives and their careers to assisting the vulnerable, whether they are providing healthcare or legal services or other kinds of support, and they are saying to us: Do not eliminate this regulation. I think we ought to listen to them. I hope my colleagues will.

I am determined that we will fight tooth and nail if we need to do so, but I would much rather that we follow the President's offer and that we collaborate to stop the elimination of this regulation, which is so important to making sure that women's healthcare is based on quality, not on discriminatory reasons based on political motive.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I rise to oppose S.J. Res. 13, which is a Congressional Review Act resolution to undo the regulations which protect title X health centers. I believe this resolution, although well meaning, will have the opposite effect of its intention.

I particularly want to discuss the organization known as Planned Parenthood, but, more generally, these women's health centers, these title X health centers, No. 1, provide many healthcare services to women, particularly low-income women. They are the choice of those women. They are a place they have chosen to go to receive their healthcare treatment.

I do think that one of the problems with this whole debate is the use of the term "funding" of Planned Parenthood. What we are talking about here is not funding, as in a budget line or a budget provision that says: Planned Parenthood gets \$58 million or \$100 million or \$10, whatever it is. That is not the way it works. What we are talking about is reimbursement for women's healthcare services provided on an individual, case-by-case basis, and this does not include abortion. It does not include abortion.

These organizations in Maine—Planned Parenthood, for example, serves 10,000 people. Ten thousand women choose to get their healthcare services from Planned Parenthood.

The other piece of this debate I have never understood is why those who are opposed to abortion would be so opposed to organizations that allow women to make choices about pregnancies and provide contraception and contraception advice, which statistically we know reduces abortion.

In Maine, because of the access to organizations like Planned Parenthood and other women's healthcare clinics, we have seen our teen pregnancy rate drop 58 percent in the last 20 years or so—58 percent. That is a significant reduction, and it is attributable, at least in some significant part, to the availability of the services provided by these organizations.

It has always struck me as ironic, in the extreme, that someone who says they are against abortion should be against an agency that provides contraception and family planning services that prevent pregnancy and therefore prevent abortion.

I subscribe to President Clinton's formulation that abortion should be safe, legal, and rare. It should not be something that is chosen just casually—and of course it isn't. This is a terribly difficult decision for a woman, but that is not the subject today. The subject today is curtailing the reimbursement for women's healthcare services to an organization or organizations that may also provide abortion services.

It is contrary to the very idea of trying to prevent abortion, but it is also denying healthcare services of choice to thousands of women in Maine and millions across the country.

I have sat in this body for 4 years and heard people talking about how consumers and patients should be able to choose their physicians, they should be able to choose their healthcare options. This was a basic principle. It is one of the arguments we have heard as we have been discussing other healthcare

issues in this body. This Congressional Review Act provision would take away that choice. I think that is a great disservice to those citizens, many of whom are low income, many of whom are covered by Medicaid, many of whom do not have private health insurance. To take this step that this resolution would entail would be very shortsighted, and I believe it is a violation of the rights of those people to choose their healthcare providers.

It also does not achieve the ends that the sponsors want to achieve. That is why I believe that this resolution—although it may be denominated as something to do with being anti-abortion, I think it is just the opposite. If this resolution passes and these healthcare centers under Title X, including Planned Parenthood, are unable to deliver these services, there will be more unwanted pregnancies and more abortions. I think that is a sad and unfortunate outcome to be perpetrated by people who say they are trying to oppose abortion.

Planned Parenthood provides women's healthcare services. It provides contraceptive services. I know the people in Maine who work for this agency, and I know this is a terribly controversial issue, but I believe that if what we want to do is minimize the number of abortions, then it makes no sense whatsoever to somehow indiscriminately strike out at the funding of the agencies that provide healthcare services.

Nobody in this body is talking about Federal funds for abortion. That is not what the issue is. If that were the issue, this would be an entirely different debate. The issue is taking reimbursement away from the Planned Parenthood clinic or Title X clinic for mammograms, cervical exams, or other women's healthcare services. Why would we want to do that in the name of achieving some other goal that won't even be achieved? In fact, it will be made a more widespread issue.

I hope the Senate will realize that whatever the motivation behind this provision is, it just makes no sense. It makes no sense from the point of view of preventing abortion. It makes no sense in terms of the taxpayers. Preventive services, contraceptive services, cost about \$200 a patient; a Medicaid birth costs about \$10,000. If it is a Medicaid patient, those are taxpayer dollars. We are talking about saving taxpayers money.

This goes to the healthcare system in general: Why would we want to undo prevention, whether prevention of unwanted pregnancies or prevention of a disease? Prevention is part of the solution to the healthcare crisis in this country because of the excessive cost.

Here is a specific case. Again, we are not talking about funding abortions. We are not talking about funding Planned Parenthood. We are not talking about funding these Title X health centers. We are talking about protecting them in terms of their reim-

bursement for women's health services delivered. That is what this vote is about. If you vote for this, you are voting to take away reimbursement for health services that are necessary to protect the health and well-being of women across this country.

I hope my colleagues will vote no on this resolution, and I believe it will serve the public and it will even serve those people who are concerned most deeply—and I understand—about abortion. If you want fewer abortions, fund Planned Parenthood. It seems to me that is a fairly clear correlation, and it is one we should respect. But we also should respect the rights, needs, and choices of those millions of women who rely on these clinics for their healthcare needs aside from the issue of reproductive rights, just straight healthcare needs. That is what this vote is all about.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am here today for the 158th time to ask this Chamber to wake up to the mounting evidence of climate change. The sad truth is that, in Congress anyway, this issue has turned starkly partisan thanks to a torrent of dark political money that the fossil fuel industry uses to both threaten and reward the Republican Party in a dirty, dark money game of stick-and-carrot. Republicans in Congress ignore climate change for the simple reason that the fossil fuel industry has become their political life support system. It does not have to be this way.

Outside this Chamber, even Republicans see things very differently. In the investment sector, where people have to make decisions based on real facts and where duties to shareholders limit overly creative accounting, the Republican signal is clear.

An impressive group of Republican former Treasury Secretaries and Republican former Presidential economic advisers recently proposed a conservative, market-based climate solution. Republican Presidents trusted these folks with the conduct of the U.S. economy. Jim Baker was Secretary of the Treasury under President Reagan, Hank Paulson was Secretary of the Treasury under President George W. Bush, and George Shultz was Secretary of the Treasury under President Nixon,

in addition to other distinguished offices that they held. Joining those three were Martin Feldstein, Chairman of President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers, and Greg Mankiw, who held that position for President George W. Bush; Rob Walton, the former chairman of the board of Walmart, the world's largest retailer and employer; and Tom Stephenson from Sequoia Capital, the venture capital firm out in Silicon Valley. This Republican group proposed a "carbon dividends" plan. It combines a carbon tax on fossil fuels—which reflects harm from carbon emissions which market economics ordinarily requires to be built into the price of the product—with a big dividend returning all of the revenues to the American people, and a reduction of regulations, which may be mooted by a good enough carbon fee. This idea is actually not so different from my own American Opportunity Carbon Fee Act.

In their report, they all note that the "mounting evidence of climate change is growing too strong to ignore." Many would say that it grew too strong to ignore a good decade ago, but it is important that these Republican leaders have acknowledged this.

They also said: "Economists are nearly unanimous in their belief that a carbon tax is the most efficient and effective way to reduce carbon emissions."

This report lines up with many other Republicans outside Congress who support a revenue-neutral carbon fee. It is the favorite climate solution in conservative economic circles. Indeed, it is the only widely accepted climate solution among Republicans.

The Niskanen Center, a Libertarian think tank that spun off from the Cato Institute, last month wrote this:

The case for climate action is now so strong that one would be hard-pressed to find a serious academic economist who opposes using market forces to manage the damage done by greenhouse emissions.

Like the Treasury Secretaries, economists and investors throughout the financial community are saying loud and clear: We can no longer ignore climate change.

Goldman Sachs, for instance, in 2015 did a report on the low-carbon economy. It was called: "Goldman Sachs equity investor's guide to a low carbon world, 2015–2025." So unless somebody here is going to say that Goldman Sachs is in on the hoax, Goldman Sachs is taking this pretty seriously.

Last year, the investment firm BlackRock, with more than \$1 trillion in assets under management, issued a report titled: "Adapting Portfolios to Climate Change."

I don't think investors trust \$1 trillion to a firm that falls for hoaxes. BlackRock, like Goldman, knows that climate change is real and is helping its investors plan for the economic fallout.

BlackRock warns in its report: "Investors can no longer ignore climate

change. . . .” Parenthetical editorial comment: That is the job of Republicans in Congress.

BlackRock also had something to say about a price on carbon. They said this: “Higher carbon pricing would help address [externalities from fossil fuels] and would be the most cost-effective way for countries to meet their Paris agreement pledges.”

So in the real world, where real decisions are being made by very smart people backed by real money, they are telling their clients: You must take climate change seriously, and you must take carbon pricing seriously.

The BlackRock report had this data on prices that companies are setting on carbon internally—in their own internal accounting—across sectors, including healthcare and energy and utilities. As we can see, the price per metric ton ranges from a low of about \$10 in information technology, up to over \$350 per metric ton—internal costs of carbon accounting in these industries.

The point ought to be pretty clear. The business community is acting, investors are insisting on it, and a price on carbon is a key part of the program.

The legendary Wayne Gretsky’s rule was to “skate to where the puck is going to be.” These major firms recognize where the carbon economy is heading. We should too. We would, if it weren’t for the political mischief wreaked in Congress by the fossil fuel industry.

BlackRock and Goldman Sachs are not alone. The insurance and reinsurance industry is one of the world’s biggest investors, as well as one of the world’s best analyzers of risk. Munich Re and Swiss Re, and others in property casualty and reinsurance, warn us that climate change is real and portends huge costs for society. Munich Re’s head of risk accumulation in the United States said in 2015: “As a nation, we need to take steps to reduce the societal impact of weather events as we see greater variability and volatility in our climate.”

One of the biggest investors in the housing market is the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, Freddie Mac. Freddie Mac has warned about climate change impact on the real estate sector: “The economic losses and social disruption may happen gradually, but they are likely to be greater in total than those experienced in the housing crisis of the great recession.”

When we think of what we went through in the housing crisis of the great recession, wow, Freddie Mac is warning that the economic losses and social disruption from climate change in our housing markets are likely to be worse.

These are all serious investors and they have serious warnings for us, and ignoring all of them just to please fossil fuel industry patrons is a big, big mistake.

Even President Trump’s nominee to head the Securities and Exchange Commission, Jay Clayton, thinks we need

action. For years, his law firm has encouraged clients, including ExxonMobil, to disclose climate change-related risks to the SEC and to investors. If he is confirmed, I hope he will enforce the SEC’s existing disclosure requirements for climate risk and clarify that public disclosures should include asset valuations based on global compliance with international treaties. Investors need climate change risks disclosed against a “reality check” baseline that assumes international compliance with the Paris climate commitments. An assumption that we fail should not be acceptable.

Slowly, investor disclosures are improving. Last year, New York attorney general Eric Schneiderman forced Peabody Energy to restate its disclosures. Just last week, Chevron acknowledged to its investors in an SEC filing that, lo and behold, some of its products “may be considered pollutants,” noted “new conclusions about the effects of the company’s operations on human health or the environment,” and they acknowledged “an increased possibility of governmental investigations and, potentially, private litigation against the company.”

It is better late than never, I suppose. Now it is time for the rest of the industry to report fully and fairly, first on the risks that shareholders bear from assets that are wrongly valued now—that are falsely valued in their reports—and, second, on the company’s potentially culpable behavior in climate denial.

Institutional investors are joining in those efforts. Our Rhode Island pension fund, managed by our treasurer, Seth Magaziner, is pushing for greater transparency on political and lobbying spending at large energy companies like Exxon, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, and Devon. For the resolution filed at ConocoPhillips, Rhode Island was joined by over 20 other cofilers, including the State of Connecticut, Senator MURPHY’s home State, whom I see here on the floor.

Just recently, the G20 nations—the 20 biggest economies in the world—set up a group called the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures. It is made up of 32 members from large banks, insurance companies, asset management companies, pension funds, credit rating agencies, and accounting and consulting firms—you know, liberal extremists. And they are saying: Here it comes; let’s get ready. They have asked that companies begin to come clean on the climate risk they face.

The big energy companies need to come clean on how much they are spending to deny climate science and where they are spending it, because, ultimately, it is their own investors who will be hurt by their irresponsibility. Ultimately, all the phony climate denial they pay for is a fool’s errand because the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology aren’t going away, and a day of reckoning for all this mischief

and nonsense they have paid for inevitably will come.

We in the Senate have a duty to the American people to find a way to combat climate change. I realize this body will need help in that task. We will need help from the business community, which can apply its understanding of market forces and risk analysis to this challenge. It would help if the fossil fuel industry would focus on the long term health of its shareholders rather than on short-term gain. The fossil fuel industry should stand down the relentless political opposition it has maintained to any climate solution, and it should stand down the phony climate denial operation it continues to support.

It will take all of us coming together—companies, investors, regulators, governments, citizens, Republicans and Democrats—to achieve Donald Trump’s once-stated goal of combating the “catastrophic and irreversible effects of climate change”—his quote: “catastrophic and irreversible effects of climate change.”

I did not misquote President Trump, although he was Donald Trump then. It was 2009, and this full page advertisement was taken out in the New York Times declaring that the science of climate change was “irrefutable” and the consequences of climate change would be “catastrophic and irreversible.” It was signed by none other than Donald J. Trump, as well as his children, Donald Trump, Jr., Eric Trump, and Ivanka Trump. They were right then. If they get back to this, they will be right now.

The evidence and the science have only piled up since 2009. It is time for all of us to heed the advice of our universities, our scientists, and the people who actually know what they are talking about, and put the arguments of the fossil fuel industry where they belong—in the trash bin of history. We need to wake up before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, last night, President Trump began his speech with an appropriate reference to the anti-Semitic attacks that have occurred all over the country. Two bomb threats were called into a Jewish community center in the New Haven area in Connecticut. I visited that center and the staff and the kids of that center, who are now being housed in a nearby synagogue. He also condemned, in strong terms, the murder of a young man in Kansas City, the victim of an apparent hate crime, targeted for simply being a foreigner or being of a different religion. We can’t know exactly what the reason was, but it was an attack based on hate.

I want to tell my colleagues a little bit about that young man, to begin with, as a means of, once again, coming to the floor of the Senate to tell my colleagues about the victims of gun violence in this country—the 86 or so

people every day who are taken by guns, suicides, and murders and accidental shootings; the 2,600 people a month whose lives are taken through gun violence, and the 31,000 a year. By the way, that number is just the number of people who are killed. Those are the lives that are eliminated. There are another 75,000 every year who are injured by gun fire, whose lives are irrevocably altered by that act of violence.

Srinivas Kuchibhotla was a 32-year-old engineer. He was working for Garmin. He was just hanging out at a bar. It was Austin's Bar and Grill, and he was enjoying the company of friends. Witnesses saw a man enter the bar. He was agitated, and he was drunk. He was a patron of the bar. He had left and he reentered, and he began shooting at Srinivas and his friend. Witnesses say that the shooter told Srinivas to "get out of my country" before killing him and then critically injuring his friend and an unbelievably brave bystander who tried to stop the shooter.

Hundreds of grief-stricken family members and friends gathered in his hometown in India for this young man's funeral. In accordance with Hindu tradition, his body was carried on a carriage and his ashes were laid to rest. Friends said that his mother was absolutely wailing as the carriage went by.

His mother had wondered whether America was a safe place for her son. Months before the shooting, she asked him to return to India if he was feeling insecure, but he told her he was safe, that he was fine. His wife also wondered how safe it would be to stay in the United States, but she said that Srinivas always assured her that only good things could happen to good people.

He undoubtedly was a good person. His family members remember him as the kindest person you would meet. He was, in their words, "full of love, care and compassion for everyone. He never uttered a word of hatred, simple gossip, or a careless comment."

His friends and family members remember him as "brilliant, well-mannered and simply an outstanding human being."

He was "a very sharp, top-of-his-class kind of guy," said one of his classmates at the University of Texas at El Paso where Srinivas earned a master's degree in electrical and electronic engineering. He was also an avid cricket player and a big fan of cricket as well.

He was 32 years old. He was sitting at a bar, enjoying time with his friends when a man who was at the bar, who probably saw Srinivas, thought that he looked different from him and, filled with hate, walked back into the bar and shot and killed him.

That is only one story from that day. On average, there are 85 other stories across the country in which people lose their lives to gunfire. What made me so mad last night was that after that moment—that appropriate moment in

which President Trump talked about this horrible shooting—moments later, he referenced the daily slaughter that happens in our cities. He spoke in front of the joint session for, it seemed, nearly an hour and a half and offered absolutely no solutions to do anything about the cascading gun violence that is enveloping our Nation.

Irony of all ironies, the same week that he is lamenting, eulogizing Srinivas's death in Kansas City, he is signing a law passed by this body that would allow for more people with serious mental illness to get their hands on guns.

We don't know the full story of Adam Purinton yet, but you have to imagine that this was someone who was deeply disturbed. Maybe he was just drunk, but in order to decide to pull out a gun in a bar and shoot someone just because they look different than you do probably means that there is something going on—more than a few beers. Mr. Purinton probably had some stuff going on. He might have been mentally ill.

When I got here, I thought that one of the few things we agreed upon—Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives—was that if you were seriously mentally ill, you probably shouldn't be able to buy a weapon, not because people with a mental illness are inherently dangerous—that is not true at all—but because erring on the side of caution when it comes to someone who is seriously ill would probably be the safe thing to do. That used to be a bipartisan commitment.

A few weeks ago, this body passed a law to allow tens of thousands of people who have serious mental illness, who have been judged by a government agency to be so sick that they can't manage their own financial affairs, they literally can't cash a check, their Social Security check has to be sent to someone else because they can't manage their affairs—we passed a law to allow those people to buy guns.

Spare me your concern for the victims of gun violence if you are not willing to do anything about it and, in fact, you are going to take steps to make gun violence more likely rather than less likely in this country. So 31,000 people a year, 2,600 a month, 86 a day—there is no other country in the world in which this happens. There is no other country in the world in which these numbers of people are dying from guns. It is our fault because week after week, month after month, year after year, we do nothing about it, and now we are making it worse.

In the 4 years after Sandy Hook happened, I went back to tell people that we had done nothing. That was embarrassing enough. Now I have to go back to the families of Sandy Hook and tell people that when Congress thinks about gun violence, we think about making changes in the law to make gun violence more likely, to put more guns into the hands of dangerous people. We are going backward now.

Teresa Robertson owned a floral shop in a beauty shop in Fairfax, OK. Fairfax is a really small town, a really tight-knit community. It is still on edge because about a week ago, Teresa's estranged husband walked into the store, started shooting at Teresa, and then barricaded himself inside city hall, firing shots at the local police, who returned fire, fatally killing Teresa's husband.

She had filed a protective order against her husband about 2 weeks before because she feared for her life. She filed for divorce a week later, and a week following that, he shot her.

Laws can protect against something like that, right? We have the power to stop that. In Connecticut, if you file a protective order against a spouse who you believe is going to harm you, the police have the ability to take those weapons away for the period of time in which you were adjudicating that protective order.

If that law had been in effect in Oklahoma, maybe Teresa Robertson would still be alive today and maybe her husband would still be alive and maybe their two kids—ages 13 and 16—wouldn't be without both of their parents.

The fact is, every single day, domestic partners—women primarily—are killed or are shot by boyfriends or estranged husbands. It often plays out just like this: protective order, divorce filing, murder. That is on us.

We have the ability to protect women from their estranged husbands. There are laws. We can't stop every shooting, but it certainly can cut down on these numbers.

Two days later, emergency responders found 26-year-old Michael "Shane" Watkins bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound to the head on Berkshire Avenue in Bridgeport, CT. He died shortly after arriving at the hospital. The police are still investigating the shooting, but they believe that Shane was an innocent victim of a robbery that went bad.

His friends said that Shane was someone who was always laughing, who was always smiling, who had a good heart, was a caring person. A neighbor said that Shane was "always upbeat, always joking, always smiling." This was a good kid.

He was a dedicated family man. He was a long time employee of the local Stop & Shop. He was 26 years old. This was a robbery gone bad. Shane Watkins was one of those 86.

Twelve-year-old Kanari Gentry Bowers was playing basketball with friends in Chicago, IL, at Henderson Elementary School. A stray bullet hit her on February 11. For 4 awful, agonizing days, Kanari sat lying unconscious in the hospital with a bullet lodged in her 12-year-old spine before she died on February 15.

Her family released a statement that said: "Please keep your children close and do whatever it takes to protect them from the senseless gun violence in our city."

That doesn't sound exceptional, does it? "Please keep your children close and do whatever it takes to protect them." Think about that idea. Think about the idea that you can't let your children get far away from you in Chicago today because they are not at risk of getting lost; they are at risk of being shot.

The little girl had dreams of becoming a judge. That is not something that a lot of 12-year-old girls are thinking about, but Kanari wanted to be a judge. She was described as a vivacious young girl.

I hear President Trump talk about Chicago all the time. He talks about Chicago as though he cares, but he doesn't propose anything that would reduce the trajectory of gun violence, the horror of living in neighborhoods that you can't let your child stray more than a few feet from you without fearing for their lives. He has proposed nothing to do with making that city safer.

People say Chicago has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation, yet it is one of the most violent places. Exactly, exactly: Chicago has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation. New York City has some of the toughest gun laws in the Nation. They are still violent places. Why? Because the vast majority of guns in those cities, the illegal guns that spread throughout the city like poison ivy come from outside of Chicago. They come from Indiana. In New York, they come from South Carolina. They come from North Carolina. They come from places in which it is easy to buy a gun without a background check at a gun show or on the internet. They flow into these cities and become used in murder after murder.

If you don't have a Federal requirement that background checks have to be conducted wherever you buy a gun, no matter how strong the laws of Chicago are, they can't be protected; 12-year-old girls can't be protected.

This was all in February, by the way. This was all in the last 3 weeks.

On February 20, some friends got together at a local church in Pomona, CA, and all of a sudden, gunshots started firing through the windows and the walls of this church—a drive-by shooting.

You know who was dead at the end of that? An 8-year-old little boy named Jonah. He was adopted from an orphanage in Taiwan. He had been in the United States for only 3 years. His adoptive parents and his friends—you should read what they say about this kid: "He had an infectious smile and loved everyone and everything."

He was still learning English, but with his playful demeanor, he had adapted almost immediately to life in the United States. He loved wrestling with his adoptive dad, running, laughing. He loved superheroes. He was always injuring himself jumping off of something. He loved living in this country.

He was a 5-year-old in an orphanage in Taiwan, and then he was in the United States with a dad and with superhero action figures, and now he is dead because somebody fired bullets randomly into a church in Pomona, CA.

Why don't we do anything about this? We are not so coldhearted as to be unable to understand what life is like for a mom and a dad who lose an 8-year-old child. We are not so brain-dead as to not be able to comprehend the fact that every time someone is shot, there are at least 20 people whose lives are permanently altered.

The post-traumatic stress involved in one shooting has enormous ripple effects. I have talked at length on this floor about the constant grief that envelopes my town of Sandy Hook because of what happened there. It will never end.

Now, instead of defending the status quo, we are talking about making it easier for deeply mentally ill people to get guns. A bill was just introduced on the floor of the Senate this week that would allow for someone to carry a concealed weapon anywhere in the Nation, regardless of what that local State jurisdiction wanted. If you had a concealed weapon permit in Texas, you would be able to walk into Manhattan without any way for the local police to check you out. There is even an effort to make silencers legal.

Mr. President, 31,000 a year, 2,600 a month, 86 a day. I have come down to the floor I don't know how many times—certainly not as many as Senator WHITEHOUSE but many times to tell the stories of the victims. I told a few more this afternoon because if the data doesn't move you—again, only in this country; in no other country in the world does this happen—then maybe the stories of these victims will move you. Maybe being able to put yourself in the shoes of a mom who lost a child, of a husband who lost a wife way before their time, will move you to action.

This is only controversial here. Ninety percent of the American public wants us to move forward with the universal background checks. The majority of Americans think these super-powerful military weapons should stay in the hands of the military and law enforcement. Everybody out there wants to give law enforcement the tools and the funding necessary to carry out the existing law. It is not controversial out in the American public; it is only controversial here.

It is about time that we do something about this epic level of carnage that continues to plague our Nation and have some response to these voices of victims that seem endless.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to enter into a colloquy with the Senator from Delaware.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I am here to discuss, along with the Senator from Delaware, the issue of Russia. I know it has been at the forefront of much of the debate that is ongoing in this country. I wanted to begin by commending the Vice President and Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of State for the strong message of support for NATO. That includes the President last night and their strong support, by the way, for the Transatlantic Alliance that these individuals outlined during their respective visits to the Munich Security Conference and meetings with allies in February.

At that Munich Security Conference on February 18, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said: "I hope [he means the world] will choose a democratic world order, a post-West one, in which each country is defined by its sovereignty." I think that based on recent history, it is clear that when a Russian leader says "post-West," we should interpret that as a phrase to mean post-America.

So I would ask the Senator with regard to this, what are his views with regard to Vladimir Putin's desire to establish spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East, create divisions with our allies. How should we view the Russian world view as it compares to the national interests of the United States?

Mr. COONS. I would like to thank my friend, the Senator from Florida, my colleague on the Foreign Relations Committee and on the Appropriations Committee. I would like to answer his question by saying, it seems clear to all of us on the Foreign Relations Committee who have had the opportunity to travel to Eastern Europe to visit with our NATO allies that Vladimir Putin has a world view and an agenda that is in sharp contrast with our own.

Vladimir Putin dreams of returning Russia to the days of the Russian Empire, to reexerting influence over a broad geographic region from the Baltic Sea and Poland and Ukraine to the Caucasus and Central Asia. He has internally used the West and NATO as a scapegoat for Russia's internal economic woes. He has, as we know, launched invasions or extended his influence through forces and supported illiberal and separatist fighters in Georgia and Ukraine and Moldavia, former Soviet republics, and has launched cyber attacks and propaganda campaigns and coordinated the use of all his tools of state power against our NATO allies in the Baltic region and Central and Western Europe.

All of these things suggest a very different world view, a different set of values than we have in the United States and a different set of values in a way that really worries me. As my colleague from Florida has suggested, when Foreign Minister Lavrov talks about a world order defined by sovereignty, he is challenging us. He is challenging what the West really stands for, what we in America stand for.

I believe what we stand for is the universal values on which we forged the Transatlantic Alliance more than 70 years ago, a Transatlantic Alliance that has been a force for stability and good in the world, a Transatlantic Alliance that has secured peace in Western Europe, North America ever since the close of the Second World War but a Transatlantic Alliance that is rooted in values, values of freedom of speech, freedom of press, rule of law and democracy, and in opposition to authoritarianism.

We support American leadership because a stable and prosperous world makes us safer and more economically secure. So I would ask my friend from Florida what he views as the agenda or the objective of Russia and whether we can be hopeful, in any way, that Vladimir Putin's Russia has an agenda that is harmonious with ours, that can be put in the same direction as ours or whether it is fundamentally at odds.

Mr. RUBIO. To answer that question, I would begin by reminding everyone that when we are talking about Russia, we are not talking about the Russian people. We are talking about Vladimir Putin and the cronies who surround him and their goals for the future. We have no quarrel with the Russian people, who I actually believe would very much want to have a better relationship with the United States and certainly live in a world in which their country was more like ours than the way their government now runs theirs.

The second thing I would point to is, it is important to understand history. At the end of the Second World War, Nazism had been conquered, and the Japanese Empire and its designs had also been ended, fascism defeated. The United States and the world entered this period of a Cold War, a battle between communism and the free world. The United States and our allies stood for that freedom. At the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet bloc, the fall of communism, the world we all hoped had entered into this new era, where every nation had a different system—maybe some had a parliamentary system, maybe some had a republic, such as ours—but in the end, more people than ever would have access to a government responsive to their needs.

That was the growing trend around the world, up until about 7, 8, 10 years ago. We now see the opposite. We see a rising arc of the totalitarianism, and within that context is where I believe Vladimir Putin's world view is constructed. He views the values we stand

for, which some may call Western values, and perhaps that is the right terminology, but I really believe in universal values: the idea that people should have a role to play in choosing their leader, that people should have a freedom to worship as they see fit, that people should be able to express their opinions and ideas freely without fear of retribution or punishment by the government.

These are the values I think we have stood for and that our allies have stood for and that we had hoped Russia would stand for in this new era, but Vladimir Putin viewed that as a threat. In particular, over the last number of years, he has decided the best way for him to secure his place in Russian politics is through an aggressive foreign policy in which he views it as a zero-sum game.

That is not the way we view it. We actually view the world as a place where we can help rebuild Japan; we can help rebuild Germany. They are stronger, and we are stronger. It isn't one or the other.

He does not see it that way. He views the world as a place where in order for Russia to be greater, America has to be less; in order for him to be more powerful, we have to be less powerful, and it is a world in which he has to undermine democratic principles and try to expose them as fraudulent.

That is why you saw the Russian intelligence services meddle in our elections in 2016. One of the main designs they had was to create doubt and instability about our system of government and to not just discredit it here at home but to discredit it around the world.

I just returned from Europe a week ago. Germany and France, which both have upcoming elections of their own, are seeing an unprecedented wave of active measures on the part of Russian intelligence to try to influence their elections. In the Netherlands, we have seen some of the same. So this is very concerning.

Our European allies are very concerned about the weaponization of cyber technology to strategically place information in the public domain for purposes of undermining candidates, steering elections, and undermining policymaking.

I want everybody to understand this is not just about elections. The exact same tools they used in the 2016 Presidential election, they could use to try to influence the debate in the Senate by attacking individual Senators or individual viewpoints and using their control over propaganda to begin to spread that.

I will give you just one example, and that is in May of 2015, the German intelligence agencies reported an attack on the German Parliament, on energy companies, on universities. They attribute that to Russian hackers.

In Montenegro, the Prime Minister has sought membership in NATO, an action we have supported in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which

both of us serve on, but Russian intelligence has plotted at a very aggressive level to disrupt their elections late last year.

Moscow has used TV and Internet outlets like Russia Today, or RT, and Sputnik to launch propaganda campaigns to galvanize anti-EU extremists ahead of the Dutch elections. The list goes on and on. There is no shortage of them.

The point is, we are in the midst of the most aggressive, active measures ever undertaken by a foreign government to not just meddle in American policy debates and American elections but in those throughout the free world, and it is deeply concerning.

I think another matter that I would love to hear the Senator's opinion on is on the issue of human rights violations because, on top of being a totalitarian state, what goes hand in hand with totalitarianism are human rights violations. In fact, totalitarianism is, in and of itself, a human rights violation; that there can be no dictatorship, no repressive regime, no totalitarian leader who can maintain themselves in power without violating the human rights of their people.

So I would ask the Senator—I would love to have his comment on whether or not, indeed, Vladimir Putin is a serial human rights violator and what our policy should be in terms of outlining that to the world.

Mr. COONS. We have worked together on a number of bills in this area. Let me respond to my friend the Senator by saying it is clear that Vladimir Putin's Russia has been a serial human rights violator. When we talk about human rights, we talk about things that belong to everyone, and they are necessary as a check on state power. When nations break these rules, we believe they should be held accountable.

Russia continues to engage in efforts, as my colleague said, that undermine democracy in free elections throughout Europe. We have shared concerns about the upcoming elections—the Dutch elections, French, and German elections—where there are overt actions and covert actions by Russia to influence the outcome of those elections, but part of why they are doing that, part of why they are violating these norms around Europe is because they are seeking to distract from their brutal rule at home.

The reality is, many of the critics of Putin's regime end up dead or incapacitated.

Boris Nemtsov, a Russian politician who supported the introduction of capitalism into the Russian economy and frequently criticized Vladimir Putin, was assassinated 2 years ago, on February 27, on a bridge just near the Kremlin in Moscow.

Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian politician and journalist, was apparently poisoned last month, the second time in recent years. He had been actively promoting civil society and democracy in Russia.

Back in September of 2012, Putin threw USAID out of Russia altogether, claiming that U.S. efforts were undermining Russian sovereignty when, in fact, we had been working in Russia since the nineties, supporting human rights, independent journalism, and promoting fair elections.

Most importantly, in my view, Russia doesn't just violate the human rights of its own citizens, it exports brutality.

Russia's support for Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime and brutal war in Syria continues. Their military has targeted hospitals, schools, and Syrian first responders. They have blocked the provision of food and medicine to starving families and children. Russia's diplomats have vetoed any efforts at the United Nations to act to stop the suffering in Syria. Also, Russia, having illegally invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, continues to promote violence and instability in eastern Ukraine, in the Donbas region, leading to the deaths of thousands.

All of these human rights violations within Russia and in countries around its sphere of influence, in its region, suggest to us that they need to be held accountable for these violations of basic human rights.

Like the Senator from Florida, I led a codel to Eastern and Central Europe. Mine was not last week. It was last August, but with two Republican House Members and two Democratic Senate Members, the five of us went to the Czech Republic, to Ukraine, and to Estonia. We heard widespread concern about this record of human rights and a disrespect for democracy in Russia and about this aggressive hybrid warfare campaign that threatens Ukraine's very stability and existence, that puts Estonia, our NATO ally, on warning, and that is putting at risk Czech independence and Czech elections all across Central and Western Europe.

We have heard from Ambassadors, experts, those who have testified in front of committees on which we serve, about a Russian campaign—a brutal campaign—to undermine human rights within Russia and to undermine democracy throughout Western Europe, with a larger strategic goal of separating the United States from our Western allies and undermining the Transatlantic Alliance that has been so essential to our peace, security, and stability for 70 years. We cannot let this stand.

There is no moral equivalence between Russia and the United States. If we believe in our democracy and if we believe in our commitment to human rights, we must stand up to this campaign of aggression. So I ask my colleague what he believes we might be able to do on the Foreign Relations Committee, on the Appropriations Committee, or here in the Senate, what we might do, as voices working in a bipartisan way, to stand up to these actions undermining democracy and human rights?

Mr. RUBIO. That is the central question. The first is what we are doing now, which is an important part: shining the sunlight on all of it, making people aware of it. For example, we know in France two of the leading candidates have views that I think the Kremlin would be quite pleased with, if that became the foreign policy of France—a third, not so much. He is a very young candidate running as an independent. His last name Macron. Suddenly, as he began to surge in the polls, all these stories started appearing, ridiculous stories about his personal life, about his marriage, things that are completely false, completely fabricated. Fortunately, French society and the French press understands this and has reported it as such.

It is important for us. This is happening and is real, and it is unprecedented in its scope and in its aggression. So shining a light on the reality and understanding, as I always tell my colleagues—I said this last October, that this is not a partisan issue.

I am telling you that—to my Republican colleagues who might be uncomfortable about discussing Russian interference—this is not about the outcome of the election; this is about the conduct and what happened throughout it. And what they did last year, in the fall, in the Presidential race, they can do against any Member here. If they don't like what you are saying, if they think you are getting too far on policy, you could find yourself the target of Russian propaganda in the hopes of undermining you, perhaps even having you eliminated from the debate because they understand our political process quite well.

The second is to do no harm. There is this notion out there—and I think on paper it sounds great, right—why don't we just partner up with the Russians to defeat ISIS and take on radicalism around the world.

The problem is this: No. 1, that is what Russia claims they are already doing. Vladimir Putin claims he is already doing that. So if he is already doing it, why would we have to partner with him? He is already doing it. Obviously, the answer is because he hasn't. This has been about propping up Assad.

Here is the other problem. When you partner up with someone, you have to take responsibility for everything they do and all the actions they undertake.

Senator COONS just outlined a moment ago, he said: Well, we talked about the bombing in Aleppo.

Think about it. If we had partnered with Russia in Syria and they were bombing Aleppo and they were hitting hospitals and they were killing civilians and they were our partners, we have to answer for that as well. We would be roped into that.

The third is to understand their strategic goal is not to defeat radical elements in the Middle East; their strategic goal is to have inordinate influence in Syria, with Iran, potentially in other countries at the expense of the United States.

We have had two Presidents—a Republican and a Democrat—previous to the current President who thought they could do such a deal with Vladimir Putin. Both of them fell on their face because they did not understand what they were dealing with. It is my sincerest hope that our current President doesn't make the same mistakes.

In addition to that, I know there are a number of legislative approaches that we have worked on together, as members of both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, and I would ask the Senator from Delaware if he could highlight some of those legislative matters that we have been talking about: resolutions, laws, and public policy that we have been advocating.

Mr. COONS. Well, briefly, if I could. Two bills that are currently gathering cosponsors—and which I hope our colleagues will review and consider joining us in cosponsoring—one is S. 341, the Russia Sanctions Review Act of 2017, which currently has 18 cosponsors. The other is S. 94, the Counteracting Russian Hostilities Act of 2017, that has 20 cosponsors—10 Republicans and 10 Democrats. In both cases, we are proud to have a very broad range of both Republicans and Democrats engaged in this important legislation, which ensures that Russia pays a price for breaking the rules. It starts by taking action to support the sanctions against the Russian Government for its occupation, its illegal annexation of Crimea, for its egregious human rights violations in Syria, and for meddling in the U.S. election. It prevents the lifting of sanctions on Russia until the Russian Government ceases the very activities that caused these sanctions to be put in place in the first place. It supports civil society, pro-democracy, anti-corruption activists in Russia and across Europe to show that many of us are determined, as members of the Foreign Relations Committee, as members of the Appropriations Committee, as Senators—not as partisans—that we intend to fund the tools that will enable the United States and our NATO allies to push back on Russia's aggression. Most of these tools come from the international affairs budget: State Department and foreign assistance accounts.

I want to commend you, Senator, for giving a strong and impassioned speech on the floor today about the importance of our keeping all of these tools in our toolkit so that as we confront our adversaries around the world, we have the resources and the ability to partner with and strengthen our allies as well.

We have no quarrel with the Russian people, but we are here because there is nothing Vladimir Putin's regime would love more than to see his actions divide us in this Chamber and divide us in this country from our vital allies in Europe and divide the whole North Atlantic community that for seven decades has brought peace and stability to

Europe, has brought prosperity to the United States, not as an act of charity but as an investment in the best interests of security.

We are here to say with one voice that we will stand up to Russian aggression that undermines democracy and violates human rights.

I am grateful for my colleague, for the chance to join him on the floor today, and I look forward to working together with any of our colleagues who see these issues as clearly as my friend and colleague, the Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. I thank the Senator for joining me in this endeavor here today. It is important that we speak out about this.

In a moment, the majority leader will be here with some procedural matters that will, I guess, take the Senate to a different posture.

Before that happens, I wanted to close by not just thanking him for being a part of this but by making a couple more points.

The first is, I want you to imagine for a moment, if you are sitting at the Kremlin and you are watching on satellite television the debate going on in American politics today, you are probably feeling pretty good about yourself. You have one group arguing that maybe the elections weren't legitimate because the Russians interfered. In essence, there have been news reports about a tension between the President and the Intelligence Committee. You have these reports every single day back and forth. You are looking at all this chaos, and you are saying to yourself: We did a pretty good job. If what we wanted to do was to divide the American people against each other, have them at each other's throats, arguing about things, and sowing chaos and instability into their political process, I think you look at the developments of the last 6 weeks and 6 months, and if you are in the Kremlin, you say: Well, our efforts have been pretty successful with that. I think that is the first thing we need to understand.

The second thing is, this should all be about partisanship. I am a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee. It is probably known that we are undertaking an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 elections. I want everyone to know—I speak for myself and I believe almost all of my colleagues when I say, on the one hand, I am not interested in being a part of a witch hunt; on the other hand, I will not be part of a coverup. We are going to get to the truth. We want to get to the truth. We want to be able to deliver to this body and to the American people a document with truth and facts, wherever they may lead us, because this is above political party. Our system of government and this extraordinary Republic has been around for over two centuries. It is unique and it is special, and with all of its blemishes and flaws, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

I want people to think about that. The next time you wonder and say to yourself that things are so tough in America and things are going so poorly, well, with whom would you trade places? I am not saying we don't have problems, because we do, but I ask, in what country would you rather be? I promise you that you won't say China if you know anything about China. I promise you that you won't say Russia if you know anything about Russia. There is no nation on Earth we would trade places with, and there is no process of government I would trade for ours. It is not perfect.

One of the strengths of our system is our ability to stand up here in places like the Senate and discuss our differences and our problems and make continuous progress forward even if the pace is slower and more frustrating than we wish. That is what is at stake in this process and what is at stake in this debate. That is what none of us can allow to see erode because of interference by a foreign government, especially one that is a thug and war criminal in every sense of the word.

So our quarrel is not with the Russian people and it is not with Russia. I have extraordinary admiration for the Russian people. I have extraordinary admiration for the sacrifices and contributions they have made throughout history to our culture and to the world. But, unfortunately, today their government is run by an individual who has no respect for his own people and no respect for the freedom and liberty of others, and it is important for our policymakers on both sides of the aisle to be clear-eyed and clear-voiced in what we do moving forward.

I thank the Senator for being with us today and allowing us to engage in this discussion. I hope we will see more of that in the weeks and months to come so we can speak clearly and firmly in one voice that on issues involving America and our sovereignty and our system of government and decisions we must make, we will speak with one voice as one Nation, as one people, as one country.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the sesquicentennial anniversary of the founding of the University of Illinois, a nationally recognized institution of higher education with a long record of innovation and discovery and the home of the Fighting Illini.

In 1867, 150 years ago, my home State of Illinois established the University of Illinois with the purpose of fostering access to higher education for the working people. It would become one of 37 public, land-grant institutions established as a result of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln.

Over the past 150 years, the University of Illinois and those associated with it have been responsible for pushing the boundaries of human knowledge, scientific discovery, social justice, and equality.

In 1941, David Blackwell, the son of a railroad worker from southern Illinois, received his Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Illinois. In 1965, Dr. Blackwell became the first African American elected to the National Academy of Sciences, whose members advise the President and Congress on matters related to science and technology. Dr. Blackwell is regarded as the most famous African-American mathematician in history.

In 1948, the University of Illinois became, and remains to this day, the most accessible campus in the world for individuals with disabilities. Timothy Nugent founded the first comprehensive program of higher education for individuals with disabilities at the University and helped create a campus that allowed individuals with disabilities to move about freely and independently. While the availability of buses with wheelchair lifts, accessible street curbs, and comprehensive collegiate programs for those with disabilities all have become the national standard, they started at the University of Illinois.

The University of Illinois has long been a leader in groundbreaking research and innovation in science. In the early 1970s, Paul Lauterbur discovered magnetic resonance imaging—better known by its initials: MRI. For his pioneering work, he was awarded a Nobel Prize in 2003.

Today the university is one of the premier public research universities in the world. It ranks in the top 50 universities in America for research and development dollars spent in science and engineering. It is also home to one of the world's most powerful supercomputers, known as Blue Waters. Blue Waters is the fastest supercomputer located on a college campus in the world.

What began 150 years ago as a small building on the Illinois prairie between