

We have also heard from unions that have backed him as well. In their words, Acosta is an “advocate for the middle class,” a nominee with “strong credentials and an impeccable reputation,” and someone they can work with “to protect and make better the lives of working men and women across America.”

Acosta’s leadership at the Labor Department will serve as a much needed change from what we saw under the previous administration, when, too often, onerous regulations that stifled instead of encouraged growth were given high priority, which came at a disadvantage to the very workers the previous administration claimed to be helping.

Of course, much work remains when it comes to providing relief to middle-class workers, but today’s vote to confirm Acosta represents another positive step in that direction.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING LEGISLATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final issue, as we know, talks on government funding legislation have continued throughout the week on a bipartisan, bicameral basis. The House has introduced a short-term funding bill that we expect to pass before Friday night’s deadline so that a final agreement can be drafted and shared with Members for their review prior to its consideration next week. This extension will also protect thousands of retired coal miners and their families from losing the healthcare benefits I have fought for throughout this entire process, as I continue to lead the fight to secure them on a permanent basis.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the Acosta nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of R. Alexander Acosta, of Florida, to be Secretary of Labor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I think I have 15 minutes to speak. When I get to about 13 minutes, would you raise your thumb or something and tell me, please.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair certainly will.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Thank you.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT’S OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL

Mr. President, I come to the floor today to spotlight a potential failure of leadership at the Defense Department’s Office of Inspector General in that a large number of hotline cases have been set aside, neglected, and possibly forgotten.

The hotline plays a very critical role in the inspector general’s core mission of rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse. The hotline is the command and control link between whistleblowers on the one hand and investigators on the other hand. To succeed, hotline tips need quick and decisive action, but speed is not one of the chief assets of this unit. Without a quick response, the full value of whistleblower information is lessened.

Last year, at my request, I was given a 12-page spreadsheet dated November 8, 2016. It listed 406 hotline cases that had been open for more than 2 years or over 730 days. Frankly, I was stunned by what I saw on this spreadsheet. I counted 240 cases—over half of the total—that had been open for more than 1,000 days. Many had been open for more than 1,300 days. Some were right at a 4-year marker; that is 1,460 days. The oldest is now pushing close to 1,600 days. Even—if you can believe it—5-year-old cases are not unheard of. So we can see why working quickly on these investigations—taking tips from whistleblowers and pursuing them on waste, fraud, and abuse—is very important, and we shouldn’t have this time wasted.

When cases remain open for years, they become stale. Inattention breeds neglect. Work grinds to a halt. Cases slowly fade from memory. This is unacceptable, and my colleagues ought to consider it unacceptable, and the Secretary of Defense ought to consider it unacceptable. The hotline, then, with this waiting period, loses its full value.

The deputy inspector general for administrative investigations, Mrs. Marguerite C. Garrison, is in charge of the hotline, so she is accountable for the backlog. The backlog shows a lack of commitment to the hotline creed and the plight of whistleblowers. Here is why: Hotline posters are displayed throughout the Department of Defense. They are a bugle call for whistleblowers. They encourage whistleblowers to step forward, and they do that at considerable risk. In return, then, these patriotic people ought to deserve a quick and honest response.

Allowing their reports to slide into a deep, dark hole, in limbo for 2, 3, or 4 years—and even more, as I have pointed out—leaves whistleblowers exposed, leaves them vulnerable to retaliation, and of course distrusting of the system that is designed to protect the whistleblowers. So, in the end, this kind of treatment will discourage others from stepping forward in the future.

Hotline officials, including Mrs. Garrison, were questioned about the backlog on December 15, 2016. They attempted to deflect responsibility elsewhere and showed little interest in the problem. After numerous followup inquiries, a second meeting was requested.

So at a March 30 meeting this year, Hotline officials were singing a whole different song. They tried to dispel the notion that a surge in cases closures were triggered by my inquiry. To the contrary, they said, it was part of routine, ongoing “cleanup of the hotline mess” that began way back in March of 2013. They reported that 107,000 cases were swept up, including the so-called bad dog cases from 2002.

This explanation may be fiction.

Mrs. Garrison should know that the 406 cases date back to 2012 and 2013. After sitting on the hotline docket for up to 4-plus years, these cases are anything but routine. They are tough nuts to crack, of course, and very difficult to resolve—sort of like the bad dogs way back in 2002.

What they needed was clear direction from the top. They needed to be handed off to a tiger team, but that didn’t happen. Priorities became an afterthought, and the hotline mess got more nourishment.

Then, finally, the “routine, ongoing” cleanup reached the 406 most egregious cases—the worst of the worst. The ones that bring me to the floor today.

Since January, I received five updated spreadsheets trumpeting the closure of 200 of these so-called bad dogs—done with due diligence, I hope. Though late and incomplete, the surge shows what is possible when management starts doing what we expect management to do; in other words, managing. The backlog can be controlled and eliminated.

Why did it take top managers so long to see the light and get on the stick doing their job? Maybe they just didn’t care—at least not until the Senator from Iowa started asking questions. Then and only then did they indicate what had been characterized as “aggressive management oversight.”

Well, praise the Lord. Those words—“aggressive management oversight”—warm my heart, but the deputy IGs need to exercise aggressive oversight at all times, not just when a Senator steps in and not just when embarrassing revelations get some daylight. Good managers don’t need a Senator looking over their shoulders to know what needs to be done. That is no way to run a railroad, as we say. The managers responsible for the hotline mess need more supervision.

One of Mrs. Garrison's other directorates—the whistleblower reprisal investigations, or what we call the WRI unit—is always crying out for help. It is facing its own hotline-style tsunami. It has a staff of 56 personnel, but only 28 of those 56—or about 50 percent—are actually assigned to investigative teams. They complete 50 to 60 reports per year. With some 120 cases under investigation at any one time, a large number inevitably get rolled forward from year to year. The backlog could easily double or triple over the next few years.

In November, 38 cases were beyond acceptable limits. As of March 28, the oldest one was 1,394 days old. While many of these cases were recently closed, new ones keep popping up on the list. Despite very substantial increases in money and personnel since 2013, the deputy IG still seems overwhelmed by the volume of work.

While beefing up the whistleblower reprisal investigations may be necessary, Mr. Fine and his deputies need to do more with what they have. With an annual budget of \$320 million and a 1,500-person workforce, efficiencies can be found.

Some units are said to be top-heavy and ripe for belt-tightening. The investigative processes are notoriously cumbersome and could be streamlined.

The audit office, with 520 workers, turns out mostly second-rate reports. It needs strong leadership and it needs redirection. The Obama administration never seemed to take these problems very seriously. I hope this new administration coming in to drain the swamp will do better.

Weak leadership gave us the hotline backlog. Weak leadership is giving us the continuing mismatch between the workforce and the workload. Both are messy extensions of a much more harmful leadership problem—a festering sore that is eating away at integrity and independence.

This is what I am hearing:

Top managers have allegedly been tampering with investigative reports and then retaliating against supervisory investigators who call them to account. This is sparking allegations that a culture of corruption is thriving in the Office of the Inspector General. I gave my colleagues a glimpse of this problem in a speech on April 6 of last year. I used the fifth and final report of Admiral Losey's investigation to illuminate this problem.

That report was allegedly doctored by senior managers. Investigators were allegedly ordered to change facts and remove evidence of suspected retaliation.

Can my colleagues believe this?

Mrs. Garrison even sent a letter that cleared the admiral long before investigators had even completed the review of the evidence. This was a very serious error in judgment, giving the appearance of impropriety.

Was this then a coverup to facilitate the admiral's pending promotion?

Thankfully, Acting Inspector General Fine intervened. He showed real courage. After taking a firsthand look, he backed up the investigators, overturning some—but not all—unsupported charges. He helped to bring evidence and findings back into sync. I thank Inspector General Fine from the bottom of my heart.

But Mr. Fine still has more work to do.

The alleged doctoring of the Losey report, I am told, is not an isolated case. There are at least five others just like it—and probably more—that all need oversight.

As I understand it, the Office of Special Counsel is contemplating a review of these matters and could rule in favor of whistleblower reprisal investigations. They blew the whistle on all of the alleged tampering going on—and do my colleagues know what these patriotic people got for it? They got hammered for it. They got hammered for protecting Federal workers.

If top managers are tampering with reports and retaliating against their own people who report it, then how can they be trusted to run the agency's premier whistleblower oversight unit?

All of the pertinent issues need to be resolved, and they demand high-level attention. So I call on the new Secretary of Defense and the acting inspector general to work together to address these problems.

No. 1, the hotline needs to be brought up to acceptable standards under stronger management; No. 2, all potential solutions to the workload-workforce mismatch need to be explored, including internal realignments; No. 3, an independent review of all cases where alleged tampering occurred should be conducted, to include an examination of the Garrison letter clearing an admiral in the midst of an investigation. If tampering and retaliation did in fact occur, then the culprits should be fired.

I look forward to receiving a full report.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

U.S. MILITARY READINESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, our military and our intelligence community grapple with intersecting issues that aren't wholly unique to this day and age. Our national security has always been imperiled by foreign threats, from the Revolutionary War to two World Wars, and we previously faced a seemingly unsurmountable debt burden following World War II.

The challenge seems to be, as it always is in a democracy, that people of different views differ on the sense of urgency on priorities and the means to address both those threats and our financial house in order to be able to pay for what it takes to keep America safe. What is unique is the range and complexity of the problems we face and their scale.

I am reminded of a sobering quote from the former Director of National

Intelligence during a hearing just last year, former Director James Clapper, who served 50 years in the U.S. intelligence community. He said: "In my time in the intelligence business, I don't recall a time when we have been confronted with a more diverse array of threats." I agree with him.

On top of that diverse array of threats, never before has our country been at war for such an extended period of time since 9/11, and never before have we done so much with an all-volunteer military force stressed by repeated deployments, while at the same time defense spending has been cut by nearly 15 percent over the last 8 years.

So the United States is at a crossroads when it comes to meeting the diverse threats we face today, while simultaneously preparing for the ever-evolving future threats headed our way tomorrow.

I wish to first provide a little bit of context about our lack of readiness to meet those threats by framing the challenges our military and our Nation faces, and then I wish to offer some thoughts about how we can rise to meet these challenges and maintain our military preeminence and leadership in the world.

First, there are the challenges abroad. We face a range of adversaries unlike any other in our history. In the Middle East, even as ISIS forces are pushed back in Iraq, their ideology spreads like a contagion through their so-called cyber caliphate, and it continues to permeate the West and attract the vulnerable and the disillusioned. FBI Director Comey has said that his agency has open investigations into home-grown jihadists in all 50 States.

Iran, under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is a breakout nuclear threat and remains the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world. At the same time, it is rapidly growing its ballistic missile arsenal and has regained much of its financial strength following sanctions relief under the JCPOA.

Then there is Syria. Since the Syrian civil war began, 400,000 have died in a bloody civil war, while Bashar al-Assad, a brutal dictator known to repeatedly use chemical weapons on his own people despite redlines drawn, enjoys Russian and Iranian support and protection.

In addition to its meddling in the Middle East, Russia has invaded eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea. It routinely threatens NATO member states and has ramped up its use of "active measures"—a program of both overt and covert action that leverages propaganda, cyber espionage, social media, and a sometimes gullible mainstream media both here and abroad—to influence and undermine public confidence in the very foundation of our democracies, which are our free and fair elections.

In the Pacific, China seeks to advance its regional dominance by making claims to former sandbars and reefs

that it has now built into strategic military bases—complete with a 10,000 foot runway—in the South China Sea.

Finally, as we learned more about yesterday at the White House in the briefing from the President's national security advisers, North Korea continues to develop and test its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities with the threat of soon being able to combine the two to threaten the continental United States and wreak death and destruction.

Many before me have observed that American strength on the world stage is a deterrent and a stabilizing influence, while weakness is an invitation to our adversaries and inherently destabilizing. I think that proposition has never been more evident than it is today.

But to address these threats—to maintain the peace and fight, if we must—we need a capable, ready, and modern military force. But the truth is we are not ready. While I believe America will always rise to the challenges once roused from our national complacency, it makes a dangerous world even more dangerous.

U.S. military readiness and modernization—already under great stress and stretched thin around the world—has suffered 15 years of continued operations and simultaneous budgetary restrictions and deferred maintenance and investment. That has led to some very real consequences for our military. Let me just illustrate a few of those consequences.

According to General Walters, the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, more than half of all Marine Corps fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft were unable to fly at the end of 2016. Let me say that again. That is a shocking statistic. More than half of the Marine Corps' fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft were unable to fly by the end of 2016. These aircraft are in constant operation overseas and are absolutely necessary to continue the fight against ISIS and terrorism, yet half of them are unable to take off.

The Navy fleet currently stands at 275 of the 350 ship requirement. Law mandates an inventory of 11 aircraft carriers and has a stated force level goal of 12. But today, the Navy requires a waiver in order to operate just 10, currently. As we all know, these carrier strike groups deploy worldwide, and, as the Navy likes to say, they act as “100,000 tons of diplomacy that doesn't need a permission slip.”

Of our 58 Army brigade and combat teams, only three are considered fully ready for combat. These are the main building blocks of the Army that support the majority of Army operations, and only three are fully ready. Keep in mind, too, that our Army is smaller than at any time since before World War II, as a result of draconian cuts in defense spending.

Finally, when it comes to our Air Force, General Wilson, the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, recently testified:

“Sustained global commitments and funding reductions have eroded our Air Force to the point where we have become one of the smallest, oldest equipped, and least ready forces across the full-spectrum of operations in our service history.” The Air Force currently has 5,500 aircraft in its inventory. That is down from 8,600 since 1991. The average aircraft in the U.S. Air Force is 27 years old. For example, I was at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, TX, just last week, viewing some of their B-1 bombers, which is a plane first flown in 1974.

Then, of course, there is the grandpa of our aircraft fleet, the B-52—that is still in operation—first introduced in the 1950s.

The Air Force is also experiencing a pilot shortage crisis due to the pressure on the force, including quality of life issues and, of course, increased demand and competition from the airline industry.

So our military faces these internal issues as well. No one would argue that in order to keep the peace and to protect our national vital interests, we must have a credible and modern force. But the hard truth is that we don't currently meet that standard, and we can't afford to ignore the problems.

So why, I ask, do we continue to do so? More importantly, the question is this: Where do we go from here? How can we assure that our military can maintain its competitive edge and ensure it is ready to meet these and future challenges? I have a few suggestions.

First, we must fund our military to meet the threat environment, not do what we can to meet the threat environment with what we funded for the military. In other words, the threat should determine the resources necessary to meet that threat. So I would suggest we should start by eliminating sequestration of Department of Defense funding under the 2011 Budget Control Act. The truth is that the Budget Control Act was never meant to cut military spending. It was meant to spur action. Remember the supercommittee and the hoped-for grand bargain? Instead, the BCA took a meat ax to our defense budget. Allowing the Budget Control Act to keep making automatic cuts to our military until 2021 does not serve the national security interests of the United States. It does the opposite. These cuts add risk not just to our national security but also to our service-members and their families—who, as I said, have been fighting the longest war in our Nation's history—and it does so by undermining their training, readiness, and modernization.

At a time when our growing national security threats require greater investment in technology, we are tying the hands of our military and simply hoping for the best. So if we want to return to a strong American military after years of stress and inadequate funding, we need to start with ending the Department of Defense sequestration.

Of course, the next logical question becomes this: If we do away with the defense portions of the Budget Control Act, how do we control overspending, deficits, and unsustainable national debt, which is a serious problem?

That brings me to my second point. A bipartisan Congress and the Trump administration must address our budget priorities by looking at and addressing all government spending, not just the 30 percent or so represented by discretionary spending. Right now, about 70 percent of Federal spending isn't even appropriated by the Congress. It simply runs on autopilot, and it grew last year at the rate of 5.5 percent, while discretionary spending has remained relatively flat. Until we have the political courage on a bipartisan basis to tackle our structural financial problems, we will never adequately fund the military or our other national priorities.

We also need a bipartisan commitment to ending continuing resolutions and the self-destructive drama and narrative of potential government shutdowns.

Most importantly, perhaps, the Defense Department needs to be able to plan, not just for the duration of the next continuing resolution, but it needs to be able to plan long term and to spend the money that is appropriated to it in an efficient way.

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Goldfein, captured the point well 2 months ago, when he said: “There is no enemy on the planet that can do more to damage the United States Air Force than us not getting a budget.” This sentiment is shared by all the service chiefs, and I wholeheartedly agree.

In a Department as big, as large, and as unwieldy as the Department of Defense, there is no doubt that there is room to streamline, improve efficiencies, and reduce duplication. We can all agree on that. But the truth is we need to take a hard, strategic look at our budgetary and fiscal needs across the Federal Government. Endless continuing resolutions aren't the answer. Continuing resolutions actually limit an agency's ability to be efficient and flexible, and they prevent the establishment of new programs and the retiring of the old and obsolete programs.

At the end of the day, the only way we can rein in spending, get a handle on our debt, and ensure our military stays ready for the threats facing it every day is to clearly articulate our country's needs and how we plan to meet them. That way, we can restore constitutional oversight responsibilities to Congress.

Finally, Congress has a tremendous opportunity, working with the Trump administration, to propose a strategy to modernize our military and prepare for the next generation of warfighting. Both readiness and modernization have been encumbered by the lack of a coherent national security and foreign

policy strategy in recent years, in addition to the blanket restrictions placed on defense spending.

Too frequently, modernization has simply been pushed aside by myopic views of how to deal with our financial challenges, which place greater risk on the warfighter and our collective security. You had better believe that, not hamstrung by redtape and regulations or continuing resolutions or deep cuts in defense spending or national security spending, our enemies take full advantage of our reluctance to deal with our challenges on a bipartisan basis. All the while, the United States operates on platforms engineered decades ago to fight the last generation's wars.

I can't think of a better example than our nuclear weapons program. This is the preeminent deterrent to war. Our country is the leading pioneer in science and technology, but instead of modernizing our nuclear weapons to provide a safe, reliable, and dependable deterrent, we, in effect, merely extend the service life of outdated and ancient weapons.

Clearly, we need a coherent national security strategy from President Trump and his Cabinet to do that. I know Congress is committed to working with them to make that happen.

By doing away with the Budget Control Act, putting the Pentagon on a dependable and predictable budget and developing a coherent national security strategy, we can maintain our status as the top military in the world. Along the way, we can deter our enemies and reassure our allies. We don't need to rewrite the playbook. We need to go back to the basics of government, providing for our national defense and keeping our fiscal house in order, all in light of the challenges and threats these times present.

My hope is that we will get out of the rut we have been in the Senate and in the Congress for the last few years and we will actually capitalize on this moment—and rally around a bipartisan commitment that a strong, modern, and ready military is really a nonnegotiable item—to lay the foundation for a modern military that will continue to keep our Nation safe for generations. I am committed to working with the administration and all of my colleagues in order to accomplish these goals.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I enjoyed hearing my friend and gym colleague talking about defense. I agree with him; we need a strong defense. I agree with him that deficits are an enemy of getting the defense spending that we need. I hope when we consider tax cuts, we will hear that same view that we can't go deeply into deficit. I appreciate my colleague's great comments.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING BILL

Mr. President, I wish to talk first about some good news: the appropri-

tions process—our negotiations to keep the government open. The President has backed off his threat to hold government funding hostage over the wall and over cutting healthcare funding for millions of Americans. This healthcare funding is essential to ensuring that millions of Americans will not see their premiums skyrocket and that they will not be kicked off their plans. Make no mistake, we will watch the administration like a hawk to make sure they follow through on their promise to continue this funding.

We are very happy that they have seen the light that Democrats have tried to show them for weeks. Threatening to hurt Americans for political gain is a loser.

Much like the administration's withdrawal of their demand for wall funding, which Democrats laid out a month ago as a condition for successful bipartisan negotiations on the appropriations bill, this decision brings us closer to a bipartisan agreement to fund the government and is good news for the American people.

The tendency of this administration has been to go at it alone. What these negotiations show is that when the Trump administration takes into account the Democratic position and is willing to move in our direction, they can make progress on issues as we have on the appropriations bills.

On those appropriations bills, of course, there are a few remaining issues to be settled. The most vexing are poison pill riders. We will not accept them, but I believe we are close to final agreement. Our side will continue to work in good faith to see that an agreement is reached to keep the government open by tomorrow's deadline.

I hope that this is something of a metaphor for the future, that the administration will not put together its plan and say that bipartisanship means you support our plan without any Democratic consultation, input, and, more importantly, taking into account our values, which we believe are close to where American values are—much closer than some on the other side.

THE PRESIDENT'S TAX PLAN

Mr. President, yesterday the President released—and this is not as good news, unfortunately—a one-page outline of his plan to change the U.S. Tax Code. Even from the very limited details that were released, the President's priorities are clear: Give massive tax breaks to folks like himself—the very, very wealthy in America.

The top rate would come down; taxes that disproportionately affect the very wealthy would go away, while middle-class and working families would be denied some of the most useful deductions. This isn't simply the Trump plan to lower taxes. It is the plan to lower the taxes of Trump and those with enormous wealth, similar to his.

The prime beneficiaries of the Trump plan would be his Cabinet. Secretary Mnuchin, one of the architects of the plan, could not guarantee this morning

that the middle class will not pay more under the Trump tax plan. If, on one sheet of paper, you can guarantee that corporations pay less and you can guarantee that the wealthiest Americans pay less but you can't guarantee that hard-working, middle-class Americans pay less, you don't have a good recipe for changing our Tax Code. And, for the good of America, you are to go back to the drawing board.

This proposal falls short, far short of the mark in several ways: First and foremost, it mostly benefits the very wealthy. In the Trump tax plan, corporations and the very wealthy get a huge tax break through lower rates and the elimination of things like the estate tax. In fact, the proposal the President put out yesterday is actually even more of a giveaway on the estate tax than his proposal in his campaign. In the campaign, President Trump promised to repeal the estate tax for estates up to \$10 million, retaining it for the wealthiest of estates. This proposal would eliminate the tax completely, particularly on those multimillion- and even billion-dollar estates. The result would be that the 5,200 wealthiest families in America would each receive, on average, a \$3 million windfall, and many would receive much, much more than that.

Also, because the Trump plan lowers the tax rate on the so-called passthrough entities to 15 percent, wealthy businessmen, like President Trump, will be able to use passthrough entities to pay 15 percent in taxes while everyone else pays in the twenties and thirties. This has implications for something we don't need—the carried interest loophole. President Trump promised to get rid of this in his campaign. Instead of using the carried interest loophole under the President's bill, Wall Street funds could file their taxes at a new passthrough rate of 15 percent, which is even lower than the present tax on carried interest.

Ironically, the President's tax plan would indeed get rid of the carried interest loophole only by making it lower than the present rate and making it permanent—a total, total reversal of what he pledged in his campaign.

It all goes to show that those who stand to benefit most from this proposal are folks like the President and those at his level of wealth, while tens of millions of American middle-class, working families are hurt and could very well pay more.

This brings me to my second point, which is that the Trump plan hurts middle-class and working Americans by eliminating their most popular and useful deductions. Take the elimination of the State and local tax deduction, for instance, which is used by so many middle-class families in my home State of New York. As it was cited in the *Syracuse Post Standard*: "The loss of the deduction will cost New Yorkers an average of \$4,500 per year for those who file itemized returns, totaling about \$68 billion per

year that State residents will no longer be allowed to deduct from Federal returns."

I saw in *Newsday* this morning that a number of our Long Island Republican colleagues said they couldn't be for this. We hope they will stand up to anything that gets rid of State and local deductibility because, let me repeat, that is \$4,500 a year that New Yorkers would no longer be able to deduct on average—massive tax cuts for the very wealthy, crumbs at best for everyone else.

Third, the Republican plan is steeped in hypocrisy. Even without filling in the details, Trump's plan is already impossible to pay for. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that Trump's tax cuts will cost about \$5.5 trillion over 10 years, as much as \$7 trillion. That is a huge amount of money in our economy.

CRFB projects that "no plausible amount of economic growth would be able to pay for the tax plan." The Republican plan would explode the deficit.

For the last 8 years, all we heard from our Republican colleagues was that Obama was raising the deficit and we needed to cut programs that benefit the poor and the middle class; cut the entitlements, Social Security, Medicare because of the deficit. All of a sudden, now with a Republican President and a proposed tax cut for the wealthy, we are hearing from the other side of the aisle that deficits don't matter.

Our Republican colleagues certainly believe the admonition that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

Fourth, the Trump tax plan would explode the deficit and, thus, endanger Social Security and Medicare, which may well be the nefarious, ultimate goal of the hard right.

Sadly, I know it can happen. I have seen it before with the Bush tax cuts. President Bush pushed a big tax break for the wealthy. It blew a hole in the deficit and racked up debt, and then he and his Republican colleagues tried to pursue deep cuts to the social safety net to balance the ledger.

If Trump's tax plan were to pass, you can be sure, America, that a few years down the line—maybe even not that long—the deficit will be so large that our Republican colleagues will throw up their hands and say: We have no choice but to come after Social Security and Medicare and other important programs for the middle class as a way to address the deficit they created by showering tax breaks on the very rich.

They will resume the cry they had in the Obama years: Cut the deficit—which seems to apply to the programs that help the middle class but never to the ones that benefit the wealthy.

Just from the bare-bones skeleton the administration outlined yesterday, we can already surmise that this plan is not much more than a thinly veiled ruse to give away trillions to the wealthiest among us, starve the government of resources, balloon the def-

icit, and then cut Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare to make up the difference.

This plan will roundly be rejected by taxpayers of all stripes. The American people are once again learning that what President Trump promised to working America in his campaign and what he is doing are totally at odds.

TRUMPCARE

Mr. President, on TrumpCare, very briefly—on the new version of TrumpCare that may soon be headed for a vote in the House, let's not forget the reason that Americans were against the first version of TrumpCare. They are still in the second version. This version is worse, and there has been a lot of focus on a few of the changes.

The fundamental nastiness of the TrumpCare proposal—raising the rates on people 50 to 65, 24 million people uncovered, difficulty in covering pre-existing conditions—is still in this bill. In fact, it is even worse. The new TrumpCare will allow States to decide whether insurers have to cover Americans with preexisting conditions. It is hard to come up with a crueller bill than one that would have resulted in 24 million fewer Americans with healthcare coverage, but this new TrumpCare manages to do it. It would hurt even more Americans and bring us back to the days when an insurance company could deny you coverage exactly when you needed it most.

I say to the more moderate Republicans in the House: If you didn't like the first version, you surely shouldn't like this version. Frankly, you will pay a huge consequence in the 2018 elections if you vote for it. We hope you don't vote for it because we know how many people it would hurt. Even if it passed the House, the chances for survival in the Senate are small. We don't even know if the new version would survive under the rules of reconciliation, the amendment to allow States to drop preexisting conditions. The fulcrum of the new changes very possibly violates the Byrd rule and would be kicked down here and need 60 votes, which they won't get for such a nasty provision.

A warning to all those voting for it in the House: It may well be a chimera, all to save face for the President in his first hundred days.

THE PRESIDENT'S FIRST ONE HUNDRED DAYS

Finally, Mr. President, we are only a few days from President Trump's 100th day in office, and by all accounts, this has been a vastly different Presidency than was promised during his campaign. So far this week, we Democrats have highlighted how this President has broken or not fulfilled promise after promise to the working men and women of America.

Today, I would like to focus on a particularly stunning reversal this President made in the first 100 days on one of the central pillars of his campaign: his promise to drain the swamp. President Trump repeated this phrase at

every campaign rally. In many ways, it summed up his "outsider" campaign. Make no mistake about it—the President ran as a populist outsider, not as a traditional, hard-right, conservative Republican. He challenged the establishments of both parties and pitched himself as a change agent, someone who could shake up the status quo. "Drain the swamp" was his tag line.

We Democrats disagree with this President on many things, but we agree with him that the very wealthy, powerful special interests have far too much power in Washington. Large corporations that have the resources to make unlimited, undisclosed campaign contributions, that have resources to hire lobbyists on issue after issue, hold far too much power in this Nation's Capital, and that structure has created a system where the wealthy and powerful are advantaged in DC, while average, hard-working Americans have a much smaller voice.

Draining the swamp would be a good thing, but unfortunately, despite the many times he pledged radically to change the power structure in Washington in the first 100 days, the President has abandoned the mission. He filled his government with billionaires and bankers laden with conflicts of interests. He has broken with the practice of the Obama administration by ending the publishing of visitor logs to the White House, so the press and the American people don't know who has the ear of the President and his top people. He has even granted waivers to lobbyists to come work at the White House on the very same issues they were just lobbying on, and he has kept those waivers secret.

A President who truly wanted to drain the swamp wouldn't have taken a single one of those actions. What are the American people going to think? He campaigned on this and totally reversed himself within the first 100 days. What are they going to think of him? It is no wonder his popularity ratings are low and sinking.

President Trump ran as a populist, but at the 100-day mark, he hasn't even tried to change the power structure in Washington and has in many ways rigged the government even more to benefit corporate special interests. This is one of the biggest broken promises he made to the working men and women of America. That is how we Democrats sum up the first 100 days—broken and unfulfilled promises to the working people of America. And when it comes to draining the swamp, he has not done it.

One final point. The events yesterday have further proven our point. The President promised one thing in his campaign and is now doing another. On his new healthcare proposal, he has shown his hand: Promise something for the working people but deliver legislation that only helps the very wealthy. On his new tax plan, which still benefits the rich: Promise the working people; deliver for the wealthy. The President has made our point better than we

could this week. After these two bills, his promises to working people are in tatters.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I thank the leader for his remarks, especially with respect to the new addition of the healthcare bill. It is a disaster for Americans. It is immoral. It doesn't work. It doesn't address any of the problems that remain in the underlying healthcare system. Hopefully the Senate can rise above it and work together to do something better for the American people.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. President, I rise today because tomorrow President Trump is going to become the first President in about 30 years to address the National Rifle Association. He will address the NRA tomorrow, and I thought it would be appropriate to come down to the floor to talk a little bit about the epidemic of gun violence in the context of this speech.

A lot of us were thrown off by the tone of the President's inaugural address. It was very different from a lot of inaugurals we have heard—not uplifting, really. There was much more of a dark, dystopian picture of America, one that was frankly unfamiliar to a lot of us. Maybe the most memorable line from the President's inaugural address was that after describing this dystopia that he believed most persons lived in, he said: “This American carnage stops right here and it stops right now.”

I wanted to come down to the floor today to talk about that idea of American carnage, what it really is. I mean, this is American carnage. It is 31,000 Americans, mostly young men and women, who die every year from gunshot wounds—2,600 a month, 86 a day. That is an enormous number. There is no other country in the first world, in the industrialized world, that has numbers like this. They happen for a variety of reasons. Two-thirds of those are suicides. That is an epidemic in and of itself. A lot of them are homicides. A number are accidental shootings. But America has this problem uniquely. There is no other industrialized competitor where this happens. That is the face of American carnage.

President Trump is going to address the National Rifle Association tomorrow—an organization that is, frankly, dedicated to continuing this real carnage that is happening in America. You can't explain these numbers through mental illness. There is just as much mental illness in all of our economic competitors around the world. You can't explain this through exposure to violent content on TV or movies or video games. There are plenty other countries that have rates that are much lower than this and the kids see that same content. You can't explain this away by law enforcement. We spend an awful lot of money put-

ting cops on the streets. What we have in this country that is different from any other nation is loose and lax gun laws that allow for criminals and people with serious mental illness to get their hands on weapons that are more powerful than those that are available in other nations. That was the case in Sandy Hook, too—enormous destruction in a short amount of time.

I want to talk a little bit today about two things—first, about the real scope of this carnage, and second, about the real story of gun owners.

The President is going to go talk to the NRA—a group that is increasingly wildly out of step with gun owners not just in my State but across the country.

First, I want to talk about this idea of carnage in America—the central focus of the President's inaugural address. I commend to my colleagues an article that appeared earlier this week—maybe late last week—called “What Bullets Do to Bodies.”

We don't like to talk about that a lot because today the popular image of a gun is almost divorced from its actual function. People collect them. People buy them in order to convey a certain image or lifestyle. People certainly have weapons to protect themselves, but very few Americans actually understand what these guns are designed to do. They are designed to kill people. They are designed to gravely hurt people. In particular, the AR-15 and AR-15 variants are dedicated to killing people as fast and as gruesomely as possible.

This article, “What Bullets Do to Bodies,” follows a trauma surgeon in Philadelphia. I want to read a few paragraphs from this article. It says:

The main thing that people get wrong when they imagine being shot is that they think the bullet itself is the problem. The lump of metal lodged in the body. The action-movie hero is shot in the stomach; he limps to a safe house; he takes off his shirt, removes the bullet with a tweezer, and now he is better. This is not trauma surgery. Trauma surgery is about fixing the damage the bullet causes as it rips through muscle and vessel and organ and bone.

The bullet can stay in the body just fine. But the bleeding has to be contained, even if the patient is awake and screaming because a tube has just been pushed into his chest cavity through a deep incision without the aid of general anesthesia (no time; the patient gets an injection of lidocaine). And if the heart has stopped, it must be restarted before the brain dies from a lack of oxygen.

It is not a gentle process. Some of the surgeon's tools look like things you'd buy at Home Depot. In especially serious cases, 70 times just at Temple last year, the surgeons will crack a chest right there in the trauma area. The technical name is a thoracotomy. A patient comes in unconscious, maybe in cardiac arrest, and Goldberg has to get into the cavity to see what is going on. With a scalpel, she makes an incision below the nipple and cuts 6 to 10 inches down the torso, through the skin, through the layer of fatty tissue, through the muscles. Into the opening she inserts a rib-spreader, a large metal instrument with a hand crank. It pulls open the ribs and locks them into place so the surgeons can reach the inner organs. Every so often, she may have to break the patient's

sternum—a bilateral thoracotomy. This is done with a tool called a Lebsche knife. It's a metal rod with a sharp blade on the end that hooks under the breastbone.

The surgeon in this case is Dr. Goldberg.

Goldberg takes out a silver hammer. It looks like—a hammer. She hits the top of a Lebsche knife with the hammer until it cuts through the sternum. “You never forget that sound,” one of the Temple nurses told me. “It's like a tink, tink, tink. And it sounds like metal, but you know it's bone. You know like when you see on television, when people are working on the railroad, hammering the ties?”

“It's just the worst,” one nurse told the writer of this story. “They're breaking bone. And everybody—everybody—has its own kind of quality. And sometimes there's a big guy you'll hear, and it's the echo—the sound that comes out of the room. There's some times when it doesn't affect me, and there are some times when it makes my knees shake, when I know what's going on in there.”

The article goes on to talk about what happens to those who survive.

The price of survival is often lasting disability. Some patients, often young guys, wind up carrying around colostomy bags the rest of their lives.

They go to the bathroom through a stoma, a hole in their abdomen.

“They're so angry,” Goldberg said. “They should be angry.” Some are paralyzed by bullets that sever the spinal column. Some lose limbs entirely.

AR-15s are designed by the military in order to kill people even more quickly so that you don't ever have the chance of going to an emergency room. That is what happened at Sandy Hook. What is remarkable is that not a single one of those kids ever made it to a trauma surgeon. All of those kids died on the spot—20 of them.

You sort of have to think about bullets like running fingers through the water: When you run your fingers through the water, it causes ripples, it causes disruptions in the water around them. Well, a bullet coming out of an AR-15 rifle moves three times faster than a bullet coming out of a handgun. So just look what happens when you run your hand through water. You run it through at this speed versus running it through at that speed. The ripples and the disruptions get bigger, right? And they spread further. That is what happens when the bullet from an AR-15 enters the body of anyone, but it certainly does something different when it enters the body of a 6-year-old. One trauma surgeon said that when it hits bone, it likely will just turn it to dust. If a bullet from an AR-15 hits the liver, well, this surgeon says that “the liver looks like a Jell-o mold has been dropped on the floor.”

I know some people think AR-15s are fun. They are fun to show off to your friends. They are neat to fire. But that is carnage. A little kid's bones turning to dust in the middle of a first grade classroom is not sport; that is American carnage. Do you know what? A lot

of gun owners get this. A lot of gun owners understand that this has gotten out of hand.

There was a poll that was conducted just about 2 weeks ago of gun owners across the country. Eighty percent of them support requiring a background check before you buy a gun. That is pretty similar to the number you would find when you ask gun owners and nongun owners, but the gun owners in my State were frankly just as shocked and horrified at what happened in that classroom at Sandy Hook as my nongun owners were.

Gun owners in this country increasingly are not represented by the National Rifle Association, the group Donald Trump is going to go talk to this week, because the National Rifle Association, which claims to be speaking for gun owners, opposes background checks. They don't want a single additional gun sale to go through a background check. They are just fine with the fact that almost half of all guns sales in this country occur without a background check, meaning criminals and people with serious mental illness can get a gun so easily in this country that they don't even have to make much of an effort.

Eighty-six percent of gun owners in this poll support prohibiting anyone who is convicted of stalking or domestic abuse from buying a gun. The NRA opposes that. Eighty-five percent of gun owners support prohibiting those who are on the Federal terror watch list or no fly list from buying a gun. The NRA opposes that.

Eighty-eight percent of gun owners believe you should have a permit to carry a concealed handgun in a public place. The NRA opposes that. So it is no secret that 67 percent of gun owners feel the NRA used to be an organization dedicated to gun safety, but it has been overtaken by lobbyists. Fifty percent of gun owners feel the NRA does not represent their interests.

When President Trump goes to talk to the NRA tomorrow, I hope he understands they are not advocating for the views of gun owners in my State, they are not advocating for the gun owners in most all of your States. They are a radical political organization. They have to start answering for why they don't square with the views of gun owners.

Finally, here is a story of American carnage. Keon Huff, Jr., was 15 years old when he was shot on March 17 of this year in Hartford, CT. Here is what Keon said to one of his mentors in the North End of Hartford. He said: "I'm either going to go on to college and play basketball or I'm going to die on the streets."

Can you imagine there are kids who think that in this country? Can you imagine there are kids in this country who think their choices are to go play basketball in college or die on the streets of Connecticut? Most Americans cannot imagine a little kid saying that, but Keon thought that. He was

right—because he was a great basketball player. He lived at the North End YMCA. He devoted all of his energy to basketball. He wanted to be the next Michael Jordan. If you told him otherwise, he just did not want to hear it. He was committed to playing basketball in college, but it was the other one that got him. He died in the hallway of his apartment complex when he was shot in the head on Friday, March 17. He died on the streets of Hartford. He did not end up going to college to play basketball. He is just one of 2,600 a month who die from guns, 31,000 a year, 86 a day.

A lot of gun owners in this country get that. They understand the flow of illegal weapons into our streets. They understand there are some weapons out there that are way too powerful that do those terrible things to bodies when the bullet enters.

When Donald Trump talks to the NRA, I hope he takes them on and asks why they refuse to stand up for policies that will end this American carnage that the President talked about in his speech and why they will not start actually representing the views of American gun owners.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SUL-LIVAN). The Senator from Wyoming.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, people around the country know the world continues to be a very dangerous place. It became more dangerous over the past 8 years. I believe that is particularly related to what I saw as unwise and unsound policies by the Obama administration, certainly when it comes to foreign policy.

Every President's foreign policy should secure America's national interests and demonstrate America's leadership around the world. That was not the case under President Obama. The last President and his team followed a policy, what has been called strategic patience—strategic patience—when dealing with hostile countries all around the world: Iran, North Korea.

Any time there was a belligerent, aggressive, cunning dictator on the move, President Obama's position was strategic patience. It was a terrible approach—a terrible approach for us in dealing with reckless regimes.

I always thought President Obama was completely focused on signing a nuclear deal with Iran, not because it actually was a great deal but maybe because it might reflect well on his legacy. I thought he wanted a deal so badly that he ended up getting a deal that was a bad deal. Well, as part of the deal, the former President accepted Iranian demands—and he accepted all of them—to lift an arms embargo that the United Nations had put into place.

This was an embargo that said that Iran was not supposed to be selling weapons to other countries. The embargo was going to disappear in 5 years, whether Iran complied with it or not. We already know Iran has no in-

tention of playing by the rules. They haven't played by the rules all the way through. Last week, the Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, said Iran has already been violating the embargo. That is why I believe they have no intention of playing by the rules.

The Secretary of Defense tells us they are not playing by the rules now. He said we have seen Iranian-supplied missiles—our Secretary of Defense said: We have seen Iranian-supplied missiles being fired into Saudi Arabia by the rebels in Yemen. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was even more clear. He said last week that Iran is "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism."

He said that Iran is "responsible for intensifying multiple conflicts"—"intensifying the conflicts and undermining U.S. interests in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon." Now, this is a direct result of President Obama spending 8 years being strategically patient. It is the result of sending the signal that Iran would be rewarded for its bad behavior.

So let's look at what happened last year when the Obama administration was bragging about the nuclear deal—and they were high-fiving, bragging about the deal.

Just when the deal went into effect, President Obama arranged to send to Iran \$1.7 billion in cash—\$1.7 billion is an astonishingly large amount of money. It is a million and a million and a million—it is 1,700 piles of \$1 million. Remember—try to visualize this. You may remember the news reports about pallets of cash stacked up going to Iran. President Obama sent \$400 million as a downpayment.

Within 24 hours, the Iranians agreed to release a group of Americans whom they had been holding hostage. The Obama White House said it was not a ransom payment to free the hostages. The Obama administration actually thought the American people were naive enough to believe it was just a coincidence in timing. Well, you can bet the Iranians did not believe it was a coincidence because they actually said it was not a coincidence.

The Iranians described the money as for the release of the hostages. We know from experience that the Iranians see hostage-taking as a valid way of conducting their own foreign policy. Right now, North Korea also has taken hostages—three American hostages written about today in the papers.

We know from experience the Iranians see hostage-taking as a valid way to conduct foreign policy, and they have also gotten the message, at least from the previous administration, that it can be a very profitable policy as well. President Obama played right into their hands. There is something else President Obama did that we just learned about, and that is why I wanted to speak about this today.

Politico had a major expose on Monday of this week. The headline was: "Obama's hidden Iran deal giveaway"—

the “hidden deal giveaway.” Around the same time President Obama was sending cash to Iran, he also released seven Iranians who had been arrested by the United States. The President downplayed the crimes these individuals had committed. He said it was a “one-time gesture” to help grease the skids for his Iran deal.

Now, according to the documents obtained by Politico, the Obama administration also dropped charges and international arrest warrants against 14 other individuals. Some of them were wanted for serious threats to our own American national security. One man was charged with trying to buy thousands of assault weapons—thousands of assault weapons—and send them to Iran.

Another was charged with conspiring to get from Iran thousands of pieces of equipment with nuclear applications. The scheme included hundreds of U.S.-made sensors for uranium enrichment centrifuges in Iran. Centrifuges were a big reason we were concerned about Iran's nuclear program in the first place. Yet, according to President Obama, this doesn't seem to be a problem.

According to the article that came out Monday, “As far back as the fall of 2014, Obama administration officials began slow-walking some significant investigations and prosecutions of Iranian procurement networks operating right here within the United States.”

As one expert told Politico, “This is a scandal.” She said: “It's stunning and hard to understand why we would do this.” Republicans in Congress warned about this kind of thing from the very beginning. President Obama was so interested in getting a deal that he got one that in my opinion, has been very bad for the United States—not just for the United States, bad for the world because Iran with a nuclear weapon makes the world less safe, less secure, and less stable.

President Obama has this as part of his legacy, but I will tell you strategic patience has failed. Secretary of State Tillerson said so last week, and I agree with him completely. I am glad to hear our top diplomat recognized this, and I am glad to see the Trump administration doing a comprehensive review of the Iran nuclear agreement.

The last President put international opinion first when it came to foreign policy. We see this all around the world. This President, President Trump, is showing that we will put America's interests first. It is not just Iran where we have the problem. I was recently in Asia over the break, along with a group of Senators. We went to Tokyo, we went to Beijing to meet with the leaders in China. We went around that region. We met with the Premier of China, who is the No. 2 person in China, and we met with the No. 3 and the No. 4 to talk specifically about the problems of North Korea and the region.

For a long time, North Korea has been called the land of lousy options,

but there is new urgency as we see the increasing capacity of North Korea now with their rockets not just propelled with liquid fuel but now with solid fuel that allows for quicker launches. The launch vehicles are no longer on wheels limited to the roads in North Korea, they are now on tracks and they can go anywhere.

North Korea has increased their nuclear capacity as well as their missile deliverability, and they are working on intercontinental ballistic missiles that can hit the United States. That is why we were at the White House yesterday for this secure briefing. That is why it is so critical that we focus on North Korea and we have a President who is focused on a peaceful resolution but is not afraid to use force, as we have seen in Syria and in Afghanistan, because if you want to use deterrence, you have to have a capacity—which we have had in the United States, which is incredible—through the Presidents over the years. You have to have a commitment to use that capacity, and we have seen from President Trump a commitment to use that capacity in Syria, in Afghanistan. You have to communicate a willingness to use that capacity, as President Trump is doing today.

Last week, Vice President PENCE traveled to the demilitarized zone between South Korea and North Korea. He said very clearly that when it comes to North Korea's nuclear weapons program, “the era of strategic patience is over.”

North Korea has been allowed to get away with too much for too long. It continues to test nuclear weapons. It continues to test missiles. It continues to use hostages as a way of getting what it wants from other countries.

Over the weekend, we learned that North Korea arrested an American professor who was in that country. North Korea, like Iran, has a history of taking hostages and using them as leverage to get what it wants. We now know three Americans are being held in North Korea.

The leadership of countries like Iran and North Korea need to understand that this kind of action will not succeed.

No one wants a fight with Iran. No one wants a fight with North Korea. The way to avoid the fight is to show that there is a limit to the patience of civilized countries of the world, which is why the age of strategic patience is now in the past.

There is new leadership with negotiation, deterrence, and, as a final option, the use of force, if necessary, which has not been the case in the last 8 years, where the use of force, the message sent by that administration was: We have no commitment to use the capacity which the United States has.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, there is probably nobody in the Senate I admire more than the Senator from Wyoming,

except maybe his colleague, MIKE ENZI, who is also from Wyoming.

I come to the floor not to talk about these issues but to talk about others. I feel compelled to respond to some of what he said.

There's no need for Senator BARASSO to remain. So don't feel as though you have to, but thank you just the same.

Mr. President, a little background: As the Presiding Officer knows, having spent some time in the military—'06, the Marine Corps; the Navy salutes the Marine Corps. I am a retired Navy captain, three tours in Southeast Asia in the Vietnam war. I served as a P-3 aircraft mission commander right at the end of the Cold War. The month I stepped down as a Navy captain, I led a congressional delegation back into Vietnam. Six of us—Democrats, Republicans—went at the behest of former President George Herbert Walker Bush's administration to find out what happened to thousands of MIAs to see if we could get information about them and to provide that information to their families for closure. That was the beginning of an effort in the House, mirrored by the one over here led by JOHN MCCAIN and John Kerry, to move us toward normalized relations to see if the Vietnamese would cooperate with us in providing information that we wanted and the families wanted and deserve.

In fact, a year ago, I learned, along with President Obama, that we are there to kind of close the circle on our relationship with Vietnam, which has changed a lot over the last 30 years. Interestingly enough, we are Vietnam's best trading partner, and they are a very good trading partner to us.

When we were there, they announced they were going to buy something like \$10, \$12, \$14 billion worth of our aircraft—not fighter aircraft, not military aircraft, but civilian aircraft from, I believe, Boeing.

I learned about some polling data. They had taken two polls, two surveys of the Vietnamese people early last year, and the question asked of Vietnamese people was: How do you feel about other countries, the people from other countries? How do you feel about the Chinese, the Russians, Filipinos, Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis, Americans, and others? How do you feel about them? In one survey, 85 percent of the Vietnamese people said they had favorable opinions toward America and Americans—85 percent, the highest of any other nation surveyed. Another survey said: No, no, 95 percent of Vietnamese have favorable opinions of the United States, which is higher than their opinions of any other nation.

The reason I mention Vietnam—they were a bitter enemy of this country. The names of 55,000 men and women with whom I served in Southeast Asia are on a wall just down 2 miles from here, down by the Lincoln Memorial. While we were bitter enemies, we resolved those differences in the 1990s.

We are now close trading partners. We don't agree with them on every single thing, but they like us a lot. We have much more of a relationship than we have ever had in the past, and it is a much better economic relationship than we have ever had in the past.

The reason I mention Vietnam is that there are some corollaries here with Iran. In 1978, that was when some will recall—the pages are too young to remember this. But in 1978, Iranians, led by their religious leader, captured, took control of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. They held our folks for a year or two as part of their cultural revolution or religious revolution.

When they did that, do you know what we did? We seized a lot of their assets in this country, in other countries as best we could. And that was not just a couple of dollars, not just a couple million dollars; it was hundreds of millions of dollars, and, man, maybe even more. Maybe it was even billions of dollars.

We held those assets, and we kept the Iranians from reclaiming those assets for, gosh, over 30 years—maybe close to 40 years. They have litigated in court. They say that they feel they should have access to what is theirs, what was theirs.

We are told by lawyers—I am not a lawyer—but we are told by some pretty smart lawyers on our side and others that they had a very good chance of getting all that and more in court if we didn't settle.

What we did, at the end of the day, when the Iranians agreed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, which was reached with not just the United States but with the Germans, the French, the Brits, the Chinese, and the Russians—the idea was to make sure that Iran didn't have a quick path, a fast track to continuing their development of nuclear weapons. They were clearly wanting to do it, and we wanted them not to do that.

So we ended up negotiating this agreement. Part of the agreement was to settle these claims from almost 40 years ago, financial claims, valuable assets that we basically seized and refused to return.

It turns out, we have to mention how highly the Vietnamese people think of us today. As it turns out, Vietnam is a very young country, very young. So is Iran.

Iran has about 80 million people. In Iran, the majority of the people are under the age of 25. They like this country a lot, but they have people over there who are more in line with the old regime, who don't like us. The Revolutionary Guard, some of the military leadership—they don't like us.

They have newly elected leadership from 4 years ago, President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Zarif, and others who, frankly, want to be able to work with us, if they can. They are willing to agree to what I think is a very harsh agreement to ensure that they don't move forward on developing weapons

and developing nuclear weapons. If they do, then we are going to impose these really stringent sanctions on them, shut down their economy—double-digit rates of inflation, economy in the tank. Finally, they said: OK, uncle. We will agree to this agreement.

Since then, the Iranians have done what the Vietnamese did a year ago; they have a more abundant civilian air fleet. Their civilian aircraft are old, decrepit, and they need new ones. They are doing what the Vietnamese have already done: buying a lot of American-made aircraft, passenger aircraft by Boeing. We are not talking about just a couple billion dollars' worth but certainly more than \$10 billion worth.

I think they have already taken orders on one and have made one of the very first ones, and there is more to come. I think they are also going to buy a bunch of airbuses. I think more than half of the airbuses have components made in America, and that is another boost to our economy.

I don't remember who said it, but a Chinese military leader once said: The greatest victory of all is the one that we win without firing a shot. That is what he said: The greatest victory of all is the one we win without firing a shot.

Well, for a Navy guy who has seen some time in a combat area and the Presiding Officer, who knows a little bit about this stuff as well—I think he probably agrees with me that if you can win one without shooting anybody or getting anybody killed, I think that is worth doing.

The other thing I would say is, that doesn't mean we just trust Iran that they are going to do what they said they are going to do in the deal. There is an agency—I think it is called the International Atomic Energy Agency. They are all over them in terms of monitoring the deal and making sure that what the Iranians agreed to do, they actually do. What is it, trust but verify? That is really what the Iranian deal is all about: trust but verify. We will see how it all works out.

Color me hopeful. A lot of times when we vote on stuff, we vote our hopes as opposed to our fears. Sometimes we vote our fears, as opposed to our hopes. On the Iran deal, I voted my hopes. We will see how it goes, and I am hopeful.

BORDER WALL

Mr. President, that is not why I came to the floor. There is a lot of talk about a wall. I heard a song by Pink Floyd the other day: "All in all it was just a brick in the wall."

The President wants us to build a wall on our southern border with Mexico. It is about 2,000 miles between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf Coast. I have been down there any number of times as the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee and still as the senior Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee. The ranking member is CLAIRE MCCASKILL of Missouri.

I have not been on every square mile of the border with Mexico, but I can

tell you that there are some places on the border where a wall makes some sense, and there are frankly a lot of places where it doesn't, including where you have hundreds of miles of river where it doesn't make any sense.

Also, I have heard from folks from Yuma down there, where the Border Patrol told me—where they had an area where they had some wall. I think the wall was maybe 15 feet high, and they kept finding like 18-, 19-foot ladders on the other side of the wall, where people would come up with a ladder to the wall and go over and above the wall. So you can go over a wall. You can even go over a high wall with a ladder that is high enough. A lot of that has been done.

You can go under a wall, tunnel under. A lot of people tried to get out of Mexico into the United States by tunneling under the wall.

As it turns out, walls in some places make sense. Fences in some places make sense. Boats in some places, like on the river that happens to be our border, the Rio Grande border with Mexico—boats make sense. Sometimes fast boats, really fast boats make sense. Sometimes it makes sense to build a ramp so you can get boats into the water in different places. Sometimes it makes sense to build a road on our side of the border to give us mobility. Sometimes it makes sense to put surveillance equipment in drones. Sometimes it makes sense to put surveillance equipment in helicopters. Sometimes it makes sense to put surveillance equipment in fixed-wing aircraft and also not just binoculars to try to find people.

There is something called VADER. It is an acronym for Vehicle and Dismount Exploitation Radar, to find people. It is very highly sophisticated surveillance equipment to go on our drones, go on our helicopters, and go on our fixed-wing aircraft.

What is so special about this? It can see at night. It allows us to see dozens of miles into Mexico at night—through fog, through rain. We have a system and if we need to, rather than just send out aircraft or drones or whatever without that kind of surveillance equipment, let's put the surveillance equipment on it. That makes far more sense than building a 2,000-mile wall.

Other things that make sense are surveillance towers. We have to go 100 feet up in the air, 200, 300 feet. Some of them are mobile. Some of them are stationary. We have motion detectors. In some places, that makes a lot of sense.

There is no shortage of ideas that make sense. What I like to do to try to figure out what to do is I ask people like the Border Patrol: What do you think makes sense? And what they pretty much say is an "all of the above" approach.

We have an "all of the above" approach in energy. If we are smart about securing our border with Mexico, I think we have gotten smarter as we

have gone on. We certainly have a lot more people down there than we had before that. We have 20,000 people, our men and women in the Border Patrol. They work hard and do a good job.

It is an "all of the above" approach. So I wanted to get that off my chest.

Does it make sense to spend \$25 billion to build a wall that we may need less than 100 miles? Probably not. Absolutely not.

The people who are coming across our border with Mexico are not Mexicans. They used to be. There are more Mexicans going back into Mexico from the United States than are coming into the United States from Mexico. The places where a lot of illegal immigration is coming from are three countries: Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

Here is why they come. It is because they live lives of desperation. They live lives without economic hope, economic opportunity, murder, mayhem, some of the highest murder rates in the world. I think El Salvador—I don't know if we have the numbers here. They have a number of different routes they take from the three countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, mostly coming into the United States right here. They don't so much go over to El Paso. They certainly don't head over here on land to get in on the western side of our border. Some try to come by air, but mostly they come by—it used to be by train, now mostly it is by land, and they are dangerous missions. The reason they come is because there is not much hope there.

Frankly, the reason there is not much hope there, in part, is because of us. There used to be a comic strip called "Pogo." The Presiding Officer remembers "Pogo." One of the lines from "Pogo" is, "I found the enemy, and it is me."

We are the enemy. The chairman of the Homeland Security Committee said many times, the root cause of what is going on down there is our addiction to drugs in this country. The drugs are trafficked through here, they come into the United States, are sold, and the money from the drugs goes back there along with guns. When we deport the bad guys, what do we do? We take the bad guys who were selling the drugs, and we put them right back down here. It is a toxic mix of guns, weapons, and bad guys. They make life down here miserable for people.

As it turns out, Colombia, a few years ago, was a miserable place to live too. One time, about 20 years ago, a bunch of gunmen in Colombia rounded up the supreme court justices of the Colombian supreme court, took them into a room and shot them to death—shot them to death.

There was a time when the FARC, the rebel groups, the leftist groups, and the drug gangs were trying to take down the Government of Colombia, and it looked like they could. And some great people in Colombia stood up and

said: Not on my watch. This is not going to happen on my watch. They came up with Plan Colombia in order to make sure this didn't happen. President Clinton and a guy named Joe Biden, who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, led an effort to—not for us to fully fund Plan Colombia, but they basically said: This is on you. You can do it like at Home Depot. You can do it. We can help. They did the heavy lifting. They did most of the raising of revenues, and we played our role. We continued to play our role for 20 years and Colombia is a different place today.

The same thing can happen to these three countries down here. Joe Biden was playing a significant role as Vice President. I was helpful, as was Jeh Johnson, former Secretary of Homeland Security, and others as well. These folks, along with these three countries, came up with something they called the Alliance for Prosperity. It is really like Plan Colombia—find out what works, do more of that. Plan Colombia worked, and they are trying an approach like this down here. The idea is to restore the rule of law, to focus on infrastructure, to focus on making good government work and be effective, to really tamp down on the corruption they have there, the obstruction that goes on with small businesses. The idea is to create a safer, better place. Most people don't want to leave here. I talked to plenty of them. They want to stay there. Some of them want to come up here and work but then go home. This is their country, and they love their country, like we love ours.

Finally, as we have been joined on the floor by one of my colleagues, I ask him to allow me just maybe another minute or two.

NAFTA

Mr. President, there has been talk about NAFTA. There has been talk—and I don't know if these are alternative facts coming out of the White House or what—that the President is going to pull out of NAFTA.

I would just state this. I met with Robert Lighthizer, who is going to be our Trade Rep—and I understand that he will be a good one. He will succeed Michael Froman, who was an excellent Trade Rep for a number of years. When I met with Mr. Lighthizer in my office a couple of months ago, he talked about renegotiating NAFTA. When we negotiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership with 11 other countries around the world—40 percent of the world's markets—we did that over the last couple of years, we were renegotiating NAFTA. We fixed a lot of things in NAFTA that needed to be fixed, not just in the Mexico part of NAFTA but also Canada.

One of the things that needed to be fixed was in our top market—we raise a lot of chickens in Georgia, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and other places. Our top market for poultry is Mexico. Canada doesn't buy our chickens. They

keep us out. The Trans-Pacific Partnership renegotiated NAFTA, not just for poultry but for a variety of other commodities we want to sell.

So my friendly advice to the President is, before he goes ahead and pulls out of NAFTA, why doesn't he and the administration take a closer look at what we renegotiated in the Trans-Pacific Partnership when we renegotiated NAFTA. I think we will find a lot of what we need to do, want to do, and what we can agree to do.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, I want to talk about healthcare reform. The Republicans came up with a really good idea in 1993. It was introduced by John Chafee, the Senator from Rhode Island, and co-sponsored by 23 Senators. It was an alternative plan to HillaryCare in 1993. The Republicans got the ideas from the Heritage Foundation, and they turned out to be good ideas.

One provision they included was that every State would have an exchange. If people couldn't get healthcare, they could buy their healthcare coverage as a part of a large purchasing pool called an exchange. The Republican idea from Chafee and others not only had exchanges but had sliding-scale tax credits for buying down the healthcare for lower income folks to buy down the cost of coverage for lower income people. When their income reached a certain level, the tax credit went away. That was in 1993, the alternative plan to HillaryCare, with the individual mandate. Basically, many folks had to be covered, and there would be a fine if they didn't get coverage. We can't make people get coverage, but the idea was to get people to get coverage.

The employer mandate was the fourth concept. The fourth concept said employers of a certain size—I think it was employers with 50 to 100 employees—were to provide healthcare to their employees.

The last piece was that insurance companies could not deny coverage to people because of preexisting conditions. That was the 1993 proposal, courtesy of the Heritage Foundation.

When Mitt Romney was Governor of Massachusetts, he took that game plan, lock, stock, and barrel, and established RomneyCare and it worked out pretty well. When we did the Affordable Care Act, we took RomneyCare and built on that.

I will close with this. The piece that needs to be fixed and repaired, not repealed but fixed, out of the original Republican idea is the idea that the insurance companies need a stable insurance pool of healthy people, not just old people and sick people but healthy people and younger people as well. There are some ways we can fix that. It is one of the fixes we need to make. It isn't all that hard. It isn't all that hard, and I will talk about that some other day.

I appreciate my friend from one of those Dakotas—South Dakota—for being patient and waiting. Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. President.

My colleague and friend, the Senator from Delaware, is also a former Governor, and it is always enjoyable to listen to the experiences and clearly the understanding about a number of the issues we have in common in terms of things that concern us.

I remember back in 1993, as well when we were looking at healthcare reform in South Dakota, we actually, in our process, adopted the vast majority of what was considered to be the recommendations from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners—guaranteed renewability of policies, guaranteed to be able to move from one group insurance product to another group insurance product, a minimum amount of premium versus maximum amount of premium by any carrier in any single group of policies in one plan. Those provisions actually worked for us for a period up until 2009, when ObamaCare became the law of the land, and at that point we suffered through the same problems most of the rest of America is suffering through right now.

But there are some things that really do bind us together, and one of them is trying to make and produce the best healthcare products for the citizens within our different States that we possibly can. I think in the U.S. Senate there are enough of us who truly believe we can fix, repeal, replace ObamaCare. I think Democrats would like to say we are going to fix it. I think Republicans recognize that we are probably going to do more of a start-over because the basic concept of ObamaCare, which was moving more and more into a single-payer system, will not work.

For those of us who believe in the free market, what we want to do is take away the regulations at the Federal level, give them back to the States, and allow the States to actually experiment and make a more competitive healthcare product. That allows for businesses to be able to insure more individuals to help pay for their costs. It also means, then, you can actually get more individuals to receive the benefits of private healthcare rather than being responsible for or at least expecting that the Federal Government is going to subsidize with Federal taxpayer money their healthcare costs. I think that is part of what we need to be concerned with here today.

REGULATORY REFORM

Mr. President, we all want a strong economy. We want more jobs being made available. One of the reasons I am here on the floor today is to talk about not just the healthcare regulations that impact the ability of employers to hire employees, but we should also be talking about the regulatory environment in the United States.

That is what I really want to talk about today, is this tremendous suc-

cess we are beginning to have in just the first 3 months that President Trump has taken office. We have been successful in undoing a number of the regulatory hurdles that have been hindering job growth and prosperity in the United States.

It has been 3 months now since the President took office, with a Republican-led Congress in place ready to help him advance policies that grow our economy and allow hard-working Americans to keep more of their paycheck each month.

We are going to be talking a lot about tax reform, but we shouldn't forget about regulatory reform as well.

One of the items with tax reform, some folks actually suggested a tax on items being brought into the United States—a border adjustment tax. One of the reasons for that was they thought we would be buying more American goods if we made those goods from other countries more expensive by putting a tax on them, which would be passed on to the consumers. I think that is the wrong approach.

What we should be doing is allowing our consumers the availability of a less expensive American product, and the way you do that is we allow manufacturers in the United States to become more competitive. We do that by reducing their input costs, including a regulatory impact that is huge.

We believe we should be creating an atmosphere in the United States for products to be produced at a cost that is less in the first place. We shouldn't have to increase the cost of other people's products coming into the United States. We should be making it less expensive for our producers to compete with them. The way we accomplish this, first and foremost, is by reducing the regulatory environment in America, which is way too intrusive, duplicative, and overreaching.

If anyone is wondering how bad the regulatory environment is in the United States today, well, regulations cost the American people \$1.9 trillion annually, the bulk of which is handed down to consumers. Businesses don't absorb it, they pass it on.

How are the consumers paying for it? Through higher prices on products and goods produced in the United States. If you are wondering why it is such a big deal, it is because we want our manufacturers, our producers, and our businesses in the United States to be able to compete with our competitors overseas, the ones that don't have the crippling regulatory environment we have here at home. Right now, our businesses and job creators are crippled by Federal regulations that limit their ability to expand and grow, to create more job opportunities, and pay higher wages.

If the \$1.9 trillion we spend annually on regulations were a country, it would be the 10th largest economy in the world, about the size of India or Russia's economy. Get this. We pay more as consumers for the cost of regula-

tions at \$1.9 trillion than we as taxpayers pay in personal income taxes on April 15. On April 15, we pay about \$1.4 trillion in personal income taxes, and yet we pay \$1.9 trillion—one-half trillion more in the costs of regulations.

No other country in the world even comes close to this sort of unhealthy, costly regulatory environment. It is putting us at a competitive disadvantage in the international arena. While there has been a lot of focus this week on reforming our tax policy to get us back to the level of global competitiveness that we need, we must not lose sight of the need to reform our regulatory environment to one that invites growth and innovation. Both are needed. We have to reform our tax policy, and we absolutely have to reform our regulatory policies.

Already in the first 3 months that President Trump has been in office, we have made progress in stopping harmful regulations from taking effect. Under the Congressional Review Act, the Senate has passed 13 resolutions so far this year to undo Obama-era regulations. The Congressional Review Act allows us to disapprove certain regulations that basically were approved by the administration or created by the administration over the last 6 months. The reason we are able to do it is because we can do it with just a majority vote. It is a privileged motion in the U.S. Senate. It is a majority vote in the House and takes a majority vote in the Senate. It doesn't require 60 votes, so we are actually able to, with a majority vote, undo these regulations that were going to be imposed on the American public over the last 6 months. I think that is a step in the right direction. This is a program which in the past has been used only one time since it was created in the 1990s. We have done it 13 times in just these first 3 months. The Congressional Review Act, or CRA, is truly an important oversight tool that allows Congress to undo Federal regulations issued by unelected bureaucrats at Federal agencies by this simple majority vote.

For example, we have been able to reverse the Obama administration's education mandate which would have imposed Federal education standards to assess schools at the State and local level. We think that should be done at the State and local level.

We also stopped an Obama regulation that would have imposed burdensome new restrictions on internet service providers that would do nothing to increase privacy protections for consumers. If you follow some of the misinformation that has been put out there, some people have suggested that we were taking away privacy that had been put in place by the last administration. Not true. Actually, what happened was that the courts had already stopped these provisions before they were ever put into effect.

So, for the people who like the policy protections that are in place today,

they are still there. This was a new regulation that they were going to impose that took an entirely different approach to managing privacy. We were able to stop it. We have told the agencies to go back, to start over again, and to start following a similar course of action to what was already in place and that people already liked.

The savings that come from undoing these and other regulations that we have stopped under the Congressional Review Act, combined with the President's Executive actions and rule delays, will save Americans, approximately, 52 million hours of paperwork annually and, if you accumulate what the costs are over an extended period of time, over \$65 billion in regulatory compliance costs. To the President's credit, he has also been busy using the tools he has available in order to undo burdensome regulations that are crippling growth.

The new administration put a halt to the overreaching waters of the United States—or WOTUS—rule, requiring the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to review the WOTUS rule in order to make certain it promotes economic growth and minimizes regulatory uncertainty. I would suspect that this time around, rather than the last time around, they will actually be required to use sound science in making those determinations.

It also stopped the Obama administration's costly Clean Power Plan, which would have required States to completely rework their electric grids and would have led to dramatically higher electricity bills for every single American in the country.

Now, I am not suggesting that all rules are bad. Some rules are necessary for a government to operate in an orderly fashion and keep Americans safe, but too much regulation is costly and clearly stifles innovation. For the past 8 years, Americans have seen an unprecedented number of new rules and regulations that have been issued by unelected, unaccountable Washington bureaucrats.

We are committed to changing that "Washington knows best" mentality because, at the end of the day, over-regulation hurts families the most because they are the ones who are forced to pay more for goods and services when businesses are forced to spend exorbitant amounts of money just to put their products on the market.

It is time for America to retake its position as a world leader in innovation. It is time for America to get busy on production again—creating new job opportunities, selling more of our products at a competitive advantage overseas, affording young people new job opportunities and the ability to stay here in the United States, inviting more capital to come in because there is a better return on capital, which, once again, gets reinvested in the United States and, thus, grows our economy and allows us to be able to

enjoy the services that economy supports.

It is time to take a second look at regulations. It is time for the United States to be a leader again and for the American people to have the ability to have influence on the laws that are being created. Those laws should be voted on by their elected representatives, not imposed on them by unelected Washington bureaucrats.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to follow up on the remarks that have just been made by our friend from South Dakota.

During his first 100 days in office, President Trump has wasted no time in fulfilling one of his key promises and one of those promises that is hard to appreciate because, if bad things do not happen to you, it is hard to realize they did not happen. Yet there were many bad things in store for the American people and frankly a lot of bad things that have happened through the very kinds of regulations, over the last years, that Senator ROUNDS was talking about.

Over the last 8 years, any time I had been traveling in Missouri, one of the top-of-mind issues with group after group had always been a different and more troublesome and more burdensome recent regulation by the Federal Government. I had heard about healthcare, but often I had heard about healthcare with regard to the irrational regulations that were being put out as part of the bill, and I had heard about taxes. Yet I would say that the No. 1 issue I had heard about for the whole 8 years was that of out-of-control regulators who were clearly also not responsive to anybody and did not need to be. Frankly, in the second 4 years of that Presidency, the regulators were even less responsive than they were in the first 4 years, and I think that is something that happens way too often.

I hear from families, farmers, and job creators who tell me that the biggest barrier to job creation and economic growth is exactly what we are hearing about here this morning; that people do not think out the real consequences of the regulations.

According to regulations.gov, Federal agencies finalized more than 4,000 new regulations in 2016 alone. That was an average of 11 new regulations a day in the final year of the Obama Presidency. Let's think about that. Every one of those 4,000 regulations was a regulation that the country had lived without for the entire history of the country and that the Obama administration had lived without for 7 years.

A number of those regulations had been done so late that we had had a chance to look at them through the Congressional Review Act because they were still available to the new Congress. That is how late they happened. One of them went into effect on Janu-

ary 18, and the Obama administration was over at noon on January 20.

They handed down a record-breaking 600 major new regulations that imposed more than \$700 billion in costs on our economy. Senator ROUNDS just mentioned the estimated total annual compliance costs for regulations of \$1.9 billion—almost \$2 trillion. Imagine. If half of those regulations are either duplicative or unnecessary, talk about a stimulus, if somehow we go back and figure out how to eliminate the half that does not need to be done so one can really focus on the half that needs to be done. I am for every regulation that we absolutely have to have, but I am not for regulations that we do not absolutely have to have.

What is worse is that the completely unnecessary aim of these regulations is frankly the amount of effort some of them require.

There is a \$12.3 billion regulation on efficiency standards for central air conditioners. Now, one has to find a lot of efficiency to find \$12.3 billion in savings. That is a lot of efficiency. There is a \$4.4 billion regulation that sets standards for ceiling fans. I like ceiling fans as much as the next person, but when you add \$4.4 billion to standards, that has to be paid for by somebody just like the \$3.6 billion in regulations of the control of commercial vehicle operators.

What the regulators so often do not seem to understand is that ultimately the consumers have to pay for the costs of these regulations. The cost of regulations is not really a reflection of the government's cost of being the regulator, it is the economic cost of having the regulations.

That is why I have been particularly encouraged to see President Trump taking the steps he has taken to roll back many of the late efforts by the Obama administration. Since taking office, President Trump has signed 13 Congressional Review Act resolutions which, according to the administration, will save \$10 billion in regulatory costs over a 10-year period of time. With regard to the Congressional Review Act, the Congress's passing a rejection of the rule and the President's agreeing to it happened exactly one time in 25 years prior to this administration. It has happened 13 times this year. It will happen, I am confident, a few more times, and it will have a real impact.

When you look at the regulations that have been delayed or repealed by CRAs and Executive orders—Congressional Review Act resolutions or Executive orders—the American Action Forum estimates that \$18.8 billion would be saved annually. Now, the President is not going to get much credit for that, and the Congress is not either, but if in the last few weeks we figured out how to take an \$18.8 billion burden off of people by not moving forward with regulations that the country had not had prior to just a few weeks ago, in some cases, that is a good thing.

Many of the Missourians from whom I have heard are particularly relieved that the President is also moving back from a couple of rules—the power rule and the waters of the United States rule—that Federal courts, fortunately, up until now, had said to President Obama's administration they did not have the authority to do what they were trying to do in either of these rules. The rules would have had devastating impacts on job opportunities and on families in our State. The power rule would have doubled the utility bills in 10 or 12 years.

I have been reminding Missourians over the last several months that if you do not think that is going to impact you when you pay your electric bill the next time, just write it right out of your checkbook one more time—write it—because that is what you would be doing sometime in the next decade and see what impact that has on the kinds of things you and your family would have been doing with the money that you would have been spending on twice your utility bill.

A week ago, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt was in our State, at the Thomas Hill powerplant, to talk about how these rules would have affected the State and how one can still fulfill the mission of the EPA for clean air and clean water and a better environment without having rules that devastate families as well as deal with problems, many of which have now been on the priority list for 10 years and longer and have never been dealt with, while the EPA has been coming up with something else to do. They would have driven up the cost of groceries. They would have driven up the cost of the utility bill itself. Of course, when the utility bill goes up, the utility bill work goes up, too, and work might not be there at double the utility bill.

The combined cost savings is estimated to be as high as \$67.3 billion over the very foreseeable future of the Congressional Review Act, the President's Executive orders, the announced decisions that they have made about things like the clean power rule and the waters of the United States rule. Even in Washington, \$67.3 billion is a lot of money, not to mention the 52 million hours of paperwork that will be needed to comply with rules that were not necessary to be there and that Senator ROUNDS mentioned.

Our economy cannot grow and thrive with billions of dollars' worth of regulations dragging it down. Let me say again that I am for every regulation that we absolutely have to have—there is no argument about that—but we need to have a process by which we know whether we have to have them. That is why, in the next few weeks, I plan to reintroduce the bipartisan Regulatory Improvement Act, which the Congress looked at last year.

This bill would create a Regulatory Improvement Commission that would review outdated regulations with the

goal of bringing the list back to the Congress and saying that we think that these can all be eliminated.

I have also cosponsored an act called the REINS Act, which would give me and the rest of the Congress the obligation to vote on any regulation that has more than \$100 million of impact on the economy so that if we need it, we are going to go home and justify it, and the American people—where I live and the Presiding Officer lives—can get their hands on us if we cannot explain why we thought it was a good idea to do that.

I believe the government should work for the American people, not the other way around, and I believe the President and the Congress have taken advantage of this historic opportunity to drive that peg a little deeper in the ground.

I look forward to continuing to work on these issues. I think we need to take more responsibility for these issues. I know some of our colleagues have said: Well, why did we repeal these late regulations? Well, they were late regulations for a reason, and the country had done just fine without them up until now.

So I look forward to working with the Presiding Officer and others to continue working on this effort to have regulations that make sense when we need them and not to have regulations when we don't need them.

NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY BEARCATS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. President, I would also like to mention one more topic quickly. This is a very Missouri topic.

The Northwest Missouri State University Bearcats this year, in NCAA Division II, won both the football championship and the men's basketball championship. It has been a long time in Division II when any school was able to bring both of those championships back to their campus.

When I was a college president, we were in that conference, the MIAA, which is a competitive conference, and competitive enough that in that Division II level, the Bearcats brought home both of those championships.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONGRATULATING SNOWFLAKE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I have spoken a lot in recent years about how Arizona is quickly becoming one of our country's major tech hubs. From entrepreneurial startups to major technology companies, Arizona is supporting innovation like never before. In fact, it was just announced that Waymo, Google's self-driving car project, will be launching its first pub-

lic trials of self-driving vehicles in the greater Phoenix area.

But, today, the biggest news in tech isn't coming from publicly traded Silicon Valley companies. No, today, the talk of the tech world is the students from my alma mater, Snowflake Junior High School. That is because these students from my small hometown of Snowflake, AZ, just won the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow contest.

This national contest tasks students from across the country with creating a solution to improve their local communities by using STEAM skills—Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math.

The winning project from Mr. Eilertsen's students is something special. Snowflake students designed and constructed a low-cost animal detection system to prevent fatalities from vehicle collisions with wild animals. They were motivated by the fact that an estimated 200 people lose their lives each year in these collisions, which can be common around rural communities like Snowflake.

The winning design consists of a 10-inch, weather-resistant motion sensor that blinks to warn drivers when a large animal is near. These durable, affordable sensors can be placed atop existing fence posts like the thousands that line roads all over rural Arizona.

I had the opportunity to meet with these very bright students—2 of them from a class of, I believe, 23—and those 2 are in the Gallery today, along with their teacher Mr. Eilertsen. I had the opportunity to meet with them yesterday in my office and to hear all about this winning project. Let me tell my colleagues that they blew me away with their creativity, their knowledge, and, most of all, their desire to use the STEAM discipline to save lives.

Think about how remarkable this project is. Here is a device that can actually save hundreds of lives and prevent harm to wildlife and to livestock. With the grit and ingenuity of a great startup, these students at Snowflake Junior High have shown the country that big ideas come from small towns.

In recognition of their innovative project, the students won \$150,000 in technology for their school and an additional \$20,000 for having the most popular project on social media and with the public—not bad for some kids from Snowflake.

Before I yield the floor, I would like to thank Mr. Eilertsen for all that he has done to inspire his students to think big and for making a victory in this Samsung competition possible.

I would also like to thank all of the faculty and staff in Snowflake for their tireless work as educators.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the students of Snowflake Junior High for their victory. I am confident that your project will save lives, and by winning this competition, you have provided your school with educational resources that will help students for years to come.

To the winning students from Snowflake Junior High School: Congratulations. You make me proud to be a Lobo, and, as always, proud to come from Snowflake and proud to be an Arizonan.

NAFTA

Mr. President, we can't simply ignore the benefits of NAFTA for the U.S. economy. Experts have said that more than one-quarter of global GDP—some \$20.5 trillion—is produced in NAFTA's combined markets of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Canada and Mexico are the largest export markets for the United States. U.S. trade with Canada and Mexico has more than tripled since 1993, and that was before NAFTA came into effect.

In 1993, U.S. foreign direct investment in Mexico was slightly more than \$15 billion. In 2016, it was more than \$92 billion in foreign direct investment.

NAFTA increased U.S. agricultural exports to Canada and Mexico by 350 percent, supporting U.S. farmers and ranchers like those back in Arizona. NAFTA has resulted in an integrated supply chain between the United States and other countries.

For example, the Wall Street Journal reported that "tens of thousands of parts that make up a vehicle often come from multiple producers in different countries and travel back and forth across borders several times." Abandoning NAFTA would destroy these supply chains, making it harder for our country's private sector employers to grow and to do business.

Arizona has certainly benefited from NAFTA. In 2016, Arizona's trade with Mexico exceeded \$15 billion. Total trade between Arizona and NAFTA countries reached nearly \$20 billion last year.

The Arizona Daily Star noted back in November that "trade with Mexico supports about 100,000 jobs in Arizona and retailers depend on roughly \$8 million Mexican shoppers spend daily in Arizona."

The bottom line is that trade is good for American businesses, it is good for American workers, and it is good for American consumers.

Trade deals like NAFTA make inputs for U.S. manufacturing cheaper than they would be otherwise. Cheaper inputs mean lower production costs for U.S.-based businesses, which, in turn, allows these companies to expand production and to reduce prices. That means everyday consumer products are more affordable for middle-class families.

If the protectionist trade policies of the past have taught us anything, it is that when we increase trade barriers, nobody wins. Do I agree that we should work to make U.S. businesses more competitive? Absolutely. Do I agree that we can modernize NAFTA? You bet. Pro-growth trade policies have been at the top of my list of priorities since I came to Congress. But any efforts to impose new restrictions on our ability to trade with Mexico and Can-

ada will have serious consequences for Arizona, leading to jobs being lost and higher costs for consumers.

If we just think, in 2003 total U.S. trade with Mexico was just around \$50 billion. Today, it is between \$500 billion and \$600 billion.

What is not to like about NAFTA? It is good for Americans. It is good for the Mexican economy. It is good for Canada.

We have noted many times that with regard to border security, the net flow of Mexican migrant workers has been south, not north, over the past couple of years. One of the biggest reasons for that, obviously, is the Mexican economy is doing better, and part of the biggest reason for that is because of NAFTA and their ability to trade. That is good for the United States. It is good for Mexico.

Trade is not a zero sum game where one party wins and the other party loses. Free trade benefits everyone. I hope that we remember this as we look toward NAFTA's future. We need to improve it and to modernize it, certainly, but we shouldn't abandon it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, before I begin my remarks, I just want to say, while the Senator from Arizona is still here, what a privilege it is to hear somebody come to this floor and actually speak about facts as they actually are—economic facts, facts related to immigration. If we had more people in the Senate who spoke on the floor the way the Senator from Arizona just did, there is nothing we wouldn't be able to accomplish together. It is a privilege to serve with him. It is a privilege to hear the clarity with which he spoke about these important issues. So I want to thank him through the Chair for that speech.

ANTIQUITIES ACT

Mr. President, at the close of the 19th century, many of our country's—almost all of our country's—most historic sites were completely unprotected. Places like Chaco Canyon and Cliff Palace, home to some of the most ancient dwellings in North America, faced looting and desecration. So in 1906, Congress actually passed pieces of legislation and thought about the next generation of Americans. Congress acted to protect these places by passing the Antiquities Act. The act empowered Presidents to preserve sites of cultural and historic importance and protect our most spectacular landscapes by designating them as national monuments using that authority.

Teddy Roosevelt moved to protect places like Devil's Tower, Muir Woods Forest, and even the Grand Canyon. Looking back, it is hard to imagine our country without those iconic places. It is hard to imagine our country without the legacy of those people who were thinking not between sound bites on the television but across generations.

Since Teddy Roosevelt, administrations from both parties, Democratic

and Republicans—he was a Republican, as it happens, but both parties have used the Antiquities Act to preserve places critical to our heritage, including the designation of Colorado National Monument in 1911. I just visited there.

In Washington, we may differ over policies—sometimes sharply. There is no surprise that is true. But both parties have long risen above partisan squabbles of today to protect these special places for tomorrow. But with yesterday's Executive order, President Trump has upended that tradition by opening the door to attacks on our national monuments for generations to come.

I know there are people in this administration who have said they are "lifetime supporters and admirers of Teddy Roosevelt's policies." If they are, now is the time they need to be heard because today's action is an offense to Teddy Roosevelt's vision for America and threatens his bipartisan legacy of conservation. The administration's latest Executive order initiates a review of all national monument designations since 1996 that are larger than 100,000 acres, with an interim report on its findings just 45 days later. I wonder if they know how long it takes to build a consensus in the West and in other places that a place is sacred enough that it should have one of these designations, and in 45 days they are going to threaten to disturb the work of people all over the West who have supported these designations.

Speaking yesterday, President Trump justified this action by calling earlier monument designations an "egregious abuse of federal power." I wonder what he would call a Washington-led effort to undo protections for national monuments that enjoy deep support from communities all across the country, including in my State of Colorado?

For all their rhetoric about Washington overreach, this administration and its allies in Congress seem to have no problem substituting their rash judgment for the thoughtful, community-driven designations of national monuments across the United States of America. Had they studied this issue at all, they would have learned that existing monument designations come from exhaustive consultation and hundreds of meetings over thousands of hours.

Unlike this administration, western communities did our homework. We laid the groundwork and paved the way for these designations, which leads me to wonder what the administration's review hopes to achieve. I would challenge anybody in the Senate to come down here to this floor and explain exactly how this 45-day review will uncover information that somehow our western communities missed. They can't. They can't because that is not the point of this review, which is no more than a Trojan horse for advancing the agenda not of the West but for advancing the agenda of partisan think

tanks and politicians in Washington instead of the real-world interests of western communities.

Worse, if the administration ultimately repeals national monument designations—which I hope they will not—as a result of this order, it would cause real economic pain to Western States, especially in rural areas. A recent study found that rural counties in the West with protected public lands saw jobs grow at a rate more than three times faster compared to areas without protected lands. It just makes sense. Just ask outfitters and guides near Browns Canyon, a national monument, or local business owners around Chimney Rock, a national monument, what the effect has been on their businesses. In fact, those businesses were huge champions of both those national monuments. You can go buy a beer in Pagosa Springs from a brewery that is brewing it and putting a label on it that says “Chimney Rock National Monument.” You can buy the beer and take it rafting through Browns Canyon with outfitters who strongly support the monument.

National monuments not only preserve our heritage, they strengthen rural communities by supporting outdoor economies and attracting visitors from around the country and around the world. We should be more encouraging of that. Let's do more of that. Instead, this Executive order takes aim directly at our rural economies in the West.

Look at this. As we can see here, nationwide, Americans spend \$887 billion on the outdoor economy each year, supporting \$65 billion in Federal tax revenue and 7.6 million American jobs which can't be exported anywhere. There is not a country in the world that has a system of public lands like the United States of America and in particular the Western United States of America. There is not a country in the world that has what we have.

If this administration really is serious about creating jobs, strengthening our economy, and remaining faithful to the bipartisan legacy of Roosevelt, it should keep our national monuments intact and uphold the traditions honored by every President since 1906.

These are treasured places. Even though they have a huge value in dollars and cents, their value goes far beyond the economic value. It goes to the heart of who we are as a nation. It goes to our cultural heritage and to the legacy we want to pass on from our grandparents to our grandchildren.

Teddy Roosevelt called conservation “a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of ensuring the safety and continuance of the nation.” We must do our duty, our patriotic duty, and I will use every tool at my disposal to protect the Antiquities Act and our national monuments because in the end our character as a nation is revealed in what we choose to preserve now and for generations to come.

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.

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

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

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, yesterday President Trump issued an Executive order that undermined the protection of dozens of our national monuments that were established over the past two decades by three different Presidents. In continuing his administration's war on our public lands, President Trump and Secretary of the Interior Zinke have attacked one of our Nation's most prized conservation laws—the Antiquities Act, which gives the President the authority to protect our nationally important lands and waters on Federal land by designating them as national monuments.

In the 111 years since the Antiquities Act was signed into law by President Teddy Roosevelt, 16 Presidents—8 Republicans and 8 Democrats—have used the law's authority to designate over 150 national monuments. President Trump is trying to undo over 100 years of conservation in just a few days.

Many of our Nation's iconic national parks were first protected by using the authority of the Antiquities Act, including the Grand Canyon, Acadia, Glacier Bay, Joshua Tree, Zion, and in my home State of Washington, Mount Olympus National Monument, which later became Olympic National Park.

No doubt Presidents of both parties have used the Antiquities Act to preserve the most beautiful places in our country. However, President Trump appears to be very uninformed on the history or the importance of the Antiquities Act. In his remarks signing the Executive order yesterday, he described the designation of national monuments as an “egregious use of federal power” and vowed he would “give that power back to the States.” He truly does not understand the Antiquities Act, nor does he appreciate the bold leadership of all of those Presidents, both Democrats and Republicans, over a period of time—eight Republicans and eight Democrats—who have used this authority in an appropriate way to preserve for all Americans in the future and those in the past who have enjoyed these beautiful places—and to preserve our access to public lands.

I can't tell you how important access to public lands is for schoolchildren, our returning veterans, our families, hunters, fishermen, and hikers. Putting the Antiquities Act and the millions of acres of national monuments that have been protected back into the hands of a few who are more aligned with special interests to try to open these areas up to oil and gas exploration is the antithesis of what the Antiquities Act is all about.

We plan to continue to emphasize how wrong the President's Executive order is.

First and foremost, in the Executive order, the President directed the Secretary of the Interior to review the designation or expansion of national monuments under the Antiquities Act where the Secretary deems that the designation or expansion was made without adequate public comment or coordination with relevant stakeholders. That literally gives the Secretary of the Interior broad authority to look at all the land that has previously been designated since 1996 and potentially open it up to saying they are going to try to reverse that.

There have been many discussions about the last 20 years of the designation of some unbelievable, beautiful places in America that are so special—the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, which is 1.7 million acres; the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument in Arizona; the Giant Sequoia National Monument in California; the Canyon of Ancients National Monument in Colorado—I know my colleague Senator BENNET from Colorado was speaking about it earlier; Hanford Reach National Monument in Washington, which covers 195,000 acres; the Ironwood Forest National Monument in Arizona; the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona; the Carrizo Plain National Monument in California; the Sonoran Desert National Monument in Arizona; the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument in Montana; the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument in New Mexico, on which my colleague Senator HEINRICH worked so hard; the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, also in New Mexico; the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument in California; the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument in California; the Basin and Range National Monument in Nevada; the Mojave Trails National Monument in California; the Sand to Snow National Monument in California; Bears Ears, as I have mentioned, in Utah; and the Gold Butte National Monument in Nevada. That sounds like a lot of designations that we have made over the last 20 years. Presidents were very judicious about those designations. It took a lot of public comment, many community meetings, and a lot of scientific analysis about the preservation of these areas. The end result is that for these generations and future generations, national monuments have been designated on public lands that are in our national interests.

This has been so important to us as a nation. As I said, places like the Grand Canyon, Olympic National Park in my State—many places have created what has become an outdoor recreation economy. That outdoor recreation economy is now over \$800 billion of annual revenue and dwarfs what the oil and gas industry represents as an economy of the future. In fact, this industry sector is on par to compete with

other large sectors of our economy—the financial service sector and the healthcare sector. So why are we taking away the very tool that has launched so much outdoor activity and a burgeoning job economy, with 7 million outdoor industry workers? Why are we taking away national monument designations that have been the priority of past Presidents and trying to return them because someone doesn't understand what the Antiquities Act is all about?

In addition to those large monuments that I just mentioned, also under review will be a group of other monuments that are marine national monuments. Yes, according to the definition I mentioned earlier, Secretary Zinke could review all of these monuments. In fact, I noticed that there were several people at the President's signing who represented some of these monuments. I don't know if they are urging the President to remove their areas, but it raises great concern about how important these marine monuments have been.

There is the Papahānaumokuākea marine national monument in the Hawaiian islands that was established in 2006; the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, also in Hawaii; the Rose Atoll National Monument in American Samoa; the Pacific Remote Islands National Monument in Hawaii; the Marianas Trench National Monument in the Mariana Islands; and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in the Atlantic.

In addition to all of those maritime national monuments of grand scale, these also under consideration are an additional two dozen or so—I think it looks like 25—smaller national monuments that could also be reviewed by the Secretary of the Interior. Even though they were designated with this Presidential authority, in previous administrations after great review, they could, by this President and this Interior Secretary, be wiped away very quickly.

We definitely do not believe the President has this legal authority, and we will pursue a vigorous fight. Why should we be wasting taxpayers' money when taxpayers' money was already spent to make these designations, and the taxpayer is getting the huge economic benefit of having these outdoor areas?

What else could be on the President's list according to this Executive order? The California Coastal National Monument; Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument; President Lincoln and Soldier's Home National Monument in Washington, DC; Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument in New Mexico; Minidoka National Historic Site in Idaho; Pompeys Pillar National Monument in Montana; Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument; Governors Island National Monument in New York; the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York; Fort

Monroe National Monument in Virginia; Fort Ord National Monument in California; Chimney Rock National Monument in Colorado; the Cesar Chavez National Monument in California; San Juan Islands National Monument in the State of Washington; the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument; the First State National Historic Park in Delaware; the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers Monument; the Honouliuli National Monument in Hawaii; the Pullman National Monument in Illinois; Browns Canyon National Monument in Colorado; Waco Mammoth National Monument in Texas; Castle Mountains National Monument in California; the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument; Stonewall National Monument in New York; the Birmingham Civil Rights Monument in Alabama; the Freedom Riders National Monument in Alabama; and the Reconstruction Era National Monument in South Carolina.

The Executive order says the Secretary of the Interior can review any national monument designation since 1996 “Where the Secretary determines that the designation or expansion was made without adequate public outreach and coordination with relevant stakeholders.”

The Executive order says that for any national monument on the list I just mentioned, the Secretary of the Interior could decide there was not appropriate public outreach. Even though the process used by Presidents under the Antiquities Act makes sure you have that, this Secretary could decide there wasn't enough and recommend to undo any of these monuments and eliminate access to the public for the purposes of recreation and enjoyment.

So this administration has it dead wrong. He is no Teddy Roosevelt. In fact, I saw he had a press conference with a statue of Teddy Roosevelt behind him. Teddy Roosevelt would be appalled because his concept of preserving Federal land was so important. Teddy Roosevelt was an outdoorsman who spent many a time in these great places of our Nation and understood their great significance. That is why we have the Antiquities Act. He knew that these resources strengthened our country. They made us strong as a nation. They show the crown jewels of the United States of America in all their glory and beauty. He knew it was important to protect them for future generations to enjoy, not just for the special interests to take advantage of in the near term.

We have a lot of Federal land and offshore land that is used for resource exploration and development. As people know, natural gas is at an all-time high in the United States and driving an all-time low price. It is not as if you need access to Bears Ears National Monument to drive down the price of natural gas or other fossil fuel. What you are going to do by pursuing this wrongheaded approach on Bears Ears is

take away one of the historic and beautiful archaeological histories of Native Americans and early Americans in the United States—and an area that has excellent outdoor recreation opportunities—and throw it, along with the concept of the Antiquities Act, over the side just because someone wants to try to reverse what our previous Presidents, starting with Teddy Roosevelt, have done to protect these monuments in our national interest.

Representing a State where we have several counties that have lots of Federal land, whether forest lands or BLM lands, I know that it can be challenging for local communities to maintain the infrastructure, the education, the hospitals, the law enforcement. I am a big believer in making sure that what are called PILT payments and the Secure Rural School Program are well funded and financed to make sure that these communities can be there to help us support these public lands. But the notion that with one act we would throw in Teddy Roosevelt's face all of these national monuments and now say that we are going to try to use it in reverse to review the work in the near term, of 3 different Presidents who used this authority is simply wrong-headed.

What we need to do is embrace the outdoor economy. As I said, it is 7 million jobs with over \$800 billion of economic activity. In fact, since the last time they did their report, there has been a \$200 billion annual increase in the economic impact in the United States of America. What great news. An industry and sector, particularly in retail, is growing by leaps and bounds. It is an industry that is providing people with more tools and opportunity to enjoy our beautiful places. The only thing we can do to screw that up is start taking away the beautiful places where people go to recreate. I would say we should be examining how well these areas we have protected are being used and figure out how we can continue to communicate to the general public about these wonderful experiences.

Do not think for one minute that the American people in their souls are not connected to the spiritual nature of these beautiful lands. They are. And that is what Teddy Roosevelt knew. He knew this is where we go to rejuvenate. Let's not take it away for some oil and gas exploration.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Nevada.

NO BUDGET, NO PAY ACT

Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, as we approach yet another deadline to continue funding for the government, I rise to speak today regarding my frustration and disappointment that Congress is once again kicking the can down the road. I am frustrated that I keep having to have this same conversation with my colleagues. I am disappointed in the lack of responsibility of everyone here in Washington, DC, to

do their job. Washington, DC, is the only place I can think of where people believe it is OK not to do their job, miss their deadlines, make up a new deadline, and then repeat that same process year after year after year.

I am upset that continually I have to remind everyone in Congress that the most basic responsibility that we have is to pass a budget and all of the appropriations bills and we should do it on time. It seems like Members of Congress now depend on the countdown clock at the bottom of every news channel to remind them to do their job.

Here we are, 4 months into 2017, and we still have not completed the appropriations process that was supposed to have been done half a year ago. If that is not bad enough, we only have 15 legislative weeks left to finish funding for the next fiscal year. My colleagues, I believe we are setting ourselves up for failure.

Washington is a consequence-free zone. That is why I will continue to advocate for my No Budget, No Pay Act. I have personally never seen Congress pass all 12 appropriations bills on time, on their own, without an omnibus or a CRomnibus. Regardless of who is in the majority, regardless of who is in the minority, my No Budget, No Pay legislation says that if Members of Congress do not pass an annual concurrent bipartisan budget resolution and all 12 spending bills on time, each year, then, they should not get paid.

Let me repeat that last part. If Congress fails to pass all 12 spending bills on time each year, then, they should not get paid. The American public is just as frustrated as I am. Since I have introduced No Budget, No Pay, I have been getting some much positive support for this idea. A woman by the name of Patricia from Fernley, NV, wrote to say No Budget, No Pay is long overdue.

Dorothy from Henderson, NV, wrote me to say No Budget, No Pay is a wonderful solution. Just last week, speaking in Reno, NV, I was asked when Congress is going to finally pass the No Budget, No Pay Act. Until the No Budget, No Pay Act is passed into law, I don't see any other way to motivate Members of Congress to do their job and avoid these continuing resolutions in the future.

I cannot support a CR that just boots our problems to another day without enacting the principles that are outlined in my No Budget, No Pay Act. There are important issues that need to be addressed through the appropriations process. For my home State of Nevada, we are looking at proposals from this new administration to cut funding to vitally important programs, such as the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, better known as SNPLMA, or payments in lieu of taxes, better known as the PILT program.

While these programs may not mean much to some of my colleagues, for Nevada they are vitally important to en-

suring economic viability and competitiveness for our State. Moreover, Nevada has been a good steward of these dollars by utilizing them for job-creating projects within my State.

By taking up individual appropriations bills and engaging in debate on programs important to particular agencies, Members have the opportunity to fight for priorities that are important to their State. Right now, I am fighting to fund these programs. Sometimes this fight needs to ensure certain programs are not funded because they are a waste of taxpayer dollars, like Yucca Mountain. I cannot say it enough times for my colleagues: Congress should not provide any funding to this failed project that has already wasted so many taxpayer dollars.

Nevada will not be a federally subsidized national nuclear waste dump, plain and simple. If I can repeat that, Nevada will not be a federally subsidized national nuclear waste dump, plain and simple. Without exercising the power of the purse, which my No Budget, No Pay legislation ensures, we will all be right back here in a week, a month, or several months, making the same speeches, taking the same votes over and over.

So I would like to say to any of my colleagues who are tired of these continuing resolutions, regardless of what specific issues they are fighting for, to support the No Budget, No Pay Act. I believe the Congress can work again, but it will take some of that accountability—like the No Budget, No Pay Act—to get us there.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REGULATORY ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about legislation to give our economy a shot in the arm and to help raise wages for Americans all across our country.

When I am back home, whether it is at a small auto body shop or whether it is at a big steel plant or whether it is at a soybean farm, I hear the same thing, which is people coming up to me and saying: Hey, ROB, with all of these regulations coming from Washington, I would love to hire more people, but I am spending too much time and money trying to keep up with these regulations.

I think that is true with every Member here, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, when you are back home talking to people. They get frustrated. Sometimes it is local and State regulations as well, but a lot of them are coming from the Federal Government.

One example would be the Whitacre Greer Company, which makes bricks. It

is a small family-owned business in Alliance, OH, just outside of Youngstown. They told me recently that complying with just one regulation is now costing this small company almost a million bucks a year that they don't have. They have had to go out and borrow the money, and that has been difficult for them. The cost of just complying with this one new regulation is about 10 percent of their annual revenue. Otherwise, that roughly million bucks would have been invested, they say, in plant, equipment and people. In other words, they would be able to create more jobs and modernize their facility if not for that compliance cost.

They are not alone. It is happening all over Ohio and across the country. Costly regulations are causing companies to pull back on expanding jobs and creating more opportunity for the people we represent.

Look, regulation has its place. There is no question about it. We need regulations. I think everybody acknowledges that. It has a proper role. We need reasonable laws that protect our health and the environment and prevent dishonest business practices. But let's make sure that, as we regulate more and more and more, we have smart regulations—regulations that make sense and that don't affect these small businesses, as I talked about with this brick company in Alliance, OH.

The reality today is that a lot of Federal regulations are more extensive in scope, more expensive to these companies—and, therefore, these workers—more unpredictable than they have to be to meet whatever the policy objectives are.

So Congress writes a law, and we have certain policy objectives, but then the regulators take that and they change the spirit of the congressional law instead of meeting that objective in the most cost-effective way possible. So I get that from my constituents, and the question is this: What do we do about it?

The other thing I hear about is the fact that regulators aren't accessible. People don't feel like they have any influence over it.

By keeping new businesses from starting and small businesses from growing, regulations are just making it harder for people to be able to make a living.

So how did we get here? Why are regulations so expensive and so burdensome on workers and jobs? I think a big reason is the way the Federal Government goes about writing regulations. Too often the process is unaccountable to the people. Too often it is based on sloppy or even bad information.

The current law that gives us the basic framework for all this process is called the Administrative Procedure Act. This has been around for a long time. But guess what. It has not been reformed in any significant way in 70 years.

The APA, or the Administrative Procedure Act, is something I have studied

in law school, as did other people here in this Chamber. It is something that you would expect to sort of change with the times, but it simply hasn't. That doesn't make sense.

Imagine if we didn't update our healthcare laws for 70 years. We are talking right now about updating the healthcare laws that were passed 7 years ago. Imagine if we didn't update our immigration laws for 70 years. Imagine if we didn't update our criminal laws for 70 years. You know, the world changes. It just doesn't make any sense not to update our regulation policy because we live in a growing and dynamic economy. Things are changing, and we have changed a lot in the last 70 years.

We didn't have things like microwave ovens or color TVs, and our economy was 10 percent the size of what it is today. Yet we are still using the same regulatory process that was put in place for a totally different kind of economy.

By the way, in 70 years, we have also learned a lot about how to regulate in a way that it is more cost effective and more efficient, and we need to put that into practice. So a reform of our regulatory process, in my view, is long overdue.

So far this year, we have taken some steps here in the Congress to give small businesses very specific regulatory relief by rescinding some of the recent regulations that the Obama administration had promulgated. We have done this about 10 times now with what is called the congressional review process. It is estimated that this has saved the economy a total of \$65 billion in regulatory costs and about 45 million hours of paperwork.

I have supported most of these Congressional Review Act bills because I think they make sense. But this is just a handful of recent regulations. We have only addressed a few of the symptoms, not the underlying cause. We still have to deal with the underlying problem of the way regulations get made. If we don't do that, the regulatory burden will just continue to increase.

By the way, this should be true whether it is a Republican administration or a Democratic administration. The same rules ought to apply.

All of this is why yesterday Senator HEIDI HEITKAMP from North Dakota and I introduced bipartisan legislation called the Regulatory Accountability Act, or the RAA, which would put in place some really important and very reasonable safeguards on the regulatory process to get better outcomes.

Every President since Ronald Reagan—Republican and Democrat alike—has agreed with the idea that regulatory agencies should estimate the costs and the benefits of something that we all accept. So they put this into what are called Executive orders saying that they have to go through the cost-benefit analysis the same way that your family does and that families

in Ohio do when they make a decision as to whether to buy that car or whether they can afford to send their kids to college. They figure out what it will cost and what the benefit will be. That has to go into regulations. Although every President from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama has agreed on the need for that, it has never been put into law.

The first thing this legislation does is very simple. The Regulatory Accountability Act—the RAA—says that there should be a law, we should codify the practice so that businesses have the predictability of knowing that regulations are going to continue to use that commonsense cost-benefit practice.

The Regulatory Accountability Act would then take the next step of requiring regulatory agencies, once they have figured out the costs and benefits of these proposals, to choose the most cost-effective way to achieve their policy objectives. That is common sense, right? It is not done now. This is a big change and an important part of the legislation. Again, it is the same thing people do every day with their families. When they are deciding where they are going to go to school or what brand of milk they are going to choose, they go through that kind of analysis. Let's find the most cost-effective way to accomplish the goal, one that costs less and has the least impact on the ability to create jobs.

As I said before, a lot of regulations are expensive. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, from 2009 to 2014, in those 5 years, the Federal Government published more than 80 major rules a year, every year. A major rule costs the economy more than \$100 million a year, and there have been 80 a year.

For these major rules, the RAA would let stakeholders ask a court to review the cost-benefit analysis used by the regulators, so that we ensure that agencies are using the best information available, not relying on faulty information or making mistakes. That seems fair to me, that we should have some process to make sure they are doing the right thing. This is going to have a huge impact on regulations.

The RAA makes regulators more accountable by bringing the public into the process. When folks talk about regulations, a lot of the time, their concern is that they feel they are cut off from the process. Although they can come to me or their other elected officials and state their concerns about this or that law, they have no access to the regulators. They are not elected; they don't feel as if they are accountable. They can't complain to them, and there is no influence if they do.

So under the RAA, agencies would have to listen to public comments and proposals before making a decision. Again, this is an important change. Instead of waiting until after the decision has been made and potentially triggering years of litigation, the RAA would move up that process. An ounce

of prevention, my colleagues, is worth at least a pound of cure. It is a lot better for our companies and for job creation to put some time into the effort upfront to get it right than to have to fix it later. I think it is better for the regulatory process and better for a smart regulatory process in terms of taking our laws and putting them into practice.

So the RAA requires agencies to choose the most cost-effective regulations, creates more accountability by involving the public, ensures we are using better information, and takes existing practice and puts it into law. Ultimately, this is going to make smarter rules with better outcomes and will give us a better environment for creating more jobs with better wages. The RAA will free up more resources for small businesses to hire more people, raise wages, and purchase more equipment. That will boost economic growth and benefit all of us.

There are some critics who have suggested that this bill will kill the regulatory process and prevent new regulations from being issued, but clearly they have not read the bill. The reason this bill is bipartisan is because it gives the American people a voice in the regulatory process and it makes it more effective for both our economy and for our health and safety. That is the kind of commonsense regulatory process that hard-working taxpayers expect and deserve from their government.

We have a lot of support for this bill from workers all over the country and from a wide variety of industries, including organizations representing truckers, farmers, electricians, and manufacturers. It is a bipartisan bill because it is a common-ground bill. It is a middle-ground bill.

I first introduced the RAA 6 years ago, and it has passed the House of Representatives five times. By the way, on one of those stand-alone votes, 19 Democrats in the House supported it. Some Democrats who serve in the Senate today have supported it in the past; they were House Members then. By the way, that was when the regulatory burden was less of a problem than it is today. I have always had Democratic cosponsors of the RAA when I have introduced it here in the Senate.

I am happy to have Senator HEITKAMP, Senator MANCHIN, and Senator HATCH as the original cosponsors to this legislation because this idea is needed now more than ever. It is a great opportunity to break through the partisan gridlock and get something that creates more jobs, raises wages, and makes a difference in people's lives. I think that is what the American people are looking for. That is what my neighbors in Ohio tell me. They want us to get stuff done to help families. I urge my colleagues to join Senator HEITKAMP, Senator HATCH, Senator MANCHIN, and me in supporting this legislation that will create

a more stable and reliable regulatory process and give the people we represent more opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN STRAAYER

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, in Denver today, the Colorado General Assembly will gather to pay tribute to Colorado State University professor John Straayer, whose 50-year teaching career included 37 years of managing a legislative intern program during the spring semester. Every Tuesday and Thursday, rain or snow, Dr. Straayer, a van or two, and an over caffeinated, sleep-deprived, ambitious crew of college juniors and seniors would travel to Denver from Fort Collins under the tutelage of Dr. Straayer to learn the "art of legislation."

After publishing several seminal books on Colorado politics, accumulating roughly 140,000 miles back and forth to the State capitol, and supervising over 1,000 interns over the years, he is retiring from his service as Colorado's legislative professor emeritus.

Dr. Straayer has a true love of politics—the process, the policy, the people, and the place. He has a passion for every ounce of it, the kind of healthy obsession with a place that means so much to the lives of its citizens. He has seen it all—the good and the bad, the fights and the endearing moments. He watched the impacts of constitutional battles, term limits, and reforms, and 50 years later, he has never lost his passion.

To be a part of his intern program, students were required to take his class on the legislative process. As a young CSU Ram myself, I remember his class vividly, absorbing his drive and drawn into the intrigue of policy. We talked about the cowboy coalition and the Sagebrush Rebellion; about Speaker Bev Bledsoe and Roy Romer; about Anne Burford, who served in the legislature as one of the self-identified "House Crazies," who in the 1980s became known as Ronald Reagan's EPA Administrator but who this past month became known as Neil Gorsuch's mom. We talked about the high-water mark of rural power and the rise of the suburban legislator.

Dr. Straayer introduced new generations of students to oatmeal with vanilla ice cream and topped with maple syrup.

Dr. Straayer introduced people to public service, including congressional and legislative staffers and many members of my own staff. According to a recent article in the Denver Post, those staffers and interns included former Democratic Governor Bill Ritter, Democratic State Senator Matt Jones, and Republican State Representative Dan Nordberg. They were all proteges of Dr. Straayer's. The article goes on to state that Straayer had arranged these internships, monitored them, and graded the reports of their experiences.

Dozens of Straayer interns have risen to high electoral office or become key legislative lobbyists—and not just in Colorado; one of his former students is a city alderman in Chicago.

I remember visiting Dr. Straayer when I first joined the program and was getting ready to be assigned to a legislator. When I received the assignment, I was disappointed to learn that I hadn't been appointed to the legislator I was hoping to be assigned to. Instead, I was assigned to a legislator from the Western Slope of Colorado. I am from the Eastern Plains, and I wasn't used to the Western Slope issues. Soon I would discover that Dr. Straayer had placed me with an incredible legislator named Russell George, who went on to become Colorado's speaker of the house—an individual who Dr. Straayer knew would be an incredible tutor and an inspiration to me. Dr. Straayer was right. Speaker George taught me about issues I work on each and every day here in the U.S. Senate—about public lands, water, and the West. He was and is an inspiration to me, and it is because Dr. Straayer had the discernment to go above and beyond for his students.

After graduation, Dr. Straayer invited me to speak to his class and later would tease me in the State legislature that perhaps I talked too much from the well. He provided me interns from the very same program I was a part of 10 years before. Most of all, he reminded me of the good that comes from our teachers and mentors, those who look out for us because, from a special place in their heart, they know that through the gift of their teaching, they will have a lasting impact for generations to come.

Congratulations, Dr. Straayer. Thank you for your service to Colorado State University and to the State of Colorado, and thank you for impacting the lives of so many people. From this U.S. Senator, thanks for being that life-changing spark.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

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, on Monday night we confirmed former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue to be President Trump's Secretary of Agriculture, and I am here for my 164th "Time to Wake Up" speech to urge Secretary Perdue to listen to his agency, to scientific researchers in farm States across the country, to our major food and agricultural producers, and to farmers, fishermen, ranchers, and foresters about the serious and growing effects of climate change.

Carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels is changing the atmosphere and the oceans. We see it everywhere. We see it on drought-stricken farms and in

raging wildfires. We see it in fish that are disappearing from warming, acidifying waters. We see it in our dying pine forests. We see it in extreme weather events.

Secretary Perdue is taking the helm of an agency with a key role in mitigating those very effects. The USDA provides farmers, foresters, commodities markets, and State and local officials with analyses of trends and emerging issues affecting agriculture, the food supply, the environment, and rural communities. In its own Climate Change Adaptation Plan, the Department notes: "Climate change has the potential to confound USDA efforts to meet these core obligations and responsibilities to the Nation."

During his tenure as Governor, Secretary Perdue issued a State energy strategy, stating: "Strong scientific evidence exists that increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are affecting Earth's climate."

That is encouraging. Yet, when asked by Senator LEAHY about climate change during the Secretary's confirmation process, he backpedaled and said: "It is clear that the climate has been changing," but there is "significant debate within the scientific community" on whether human activities play a role in that.

Whoops, that is the classic denier dodge, and it is just not true.

Secretary Perdue said several times during his confirmation process that he will use the "best scientific and statistical data available" to make decisions. The National Climate Assessment uses the "best scientific and statistical data" to conclude this: "In the long term, combined stresses associated with climate change are expected to decrease agricultural productivity."

In the Midwest, for instance, the National Climate Assessment reports that temperatures are increasing, and the rate of warming tripled between 1980 and 2010. Under the assessment's worst-case scenarios, temperatures across the Midwest are projected to rise 8.5 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100. If you are a farmer, 8.5 degrees changes everything.

In the western mountains, massive forests stand dead on the mountainsides as warmer winters allow the killer bark beetle to swarm into higher latitudes and higher altitudes. Over 82 million acres of national forests are under stress from fires, these insects, or both. Ominously, the assessment says that the combined effect of increasing wildfire, insect outbreaks, and diseases is expected to cause an "almost complete loss of subalpine forests."

The cost to taxpayers of fighting fires in those dead and dying forests is growing dramatically. Firefighting has gone from just 13 percent of the Forest Service's budget in 2004 to over 50 percent in 2015. The Forest Service estimates that by 2025 fighting fires will take up to two-thirds of its budget.

Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell testified to the Senate: "This increase in the cost of wildland fire suppression is subsuming the agency's budget and jeopardizing its ability to implement its full mission."

One place Secretary Perdue can go to find out a little bit about this is from our State universities.

The University of Wyoming's Center for Environmental Hydrology and Geophysics, for example, reports: "Many of the most pressing issues facing the Western United States hinge on the fate and transport of water and its response to diverse disturbances, including climate change."

At Kansas State University, professor of agronomy Charles Rice is using climate modeling to help anticipate climate effects in the Great Plains and to help the region mitigate and adapt to those effects.

In Wisconsin, Victor Cabrera, an assistant professor in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Dairy Science Department, says that higher summer temperatures and increasing drought will interfere with both livestock fertility and milk production, and dairy cows could give as much as 10 percent less milk. Secretary Perdue's own Department of Agriculture predicts that by 2030 climate change will cost the United States' dairy sector between \$79 million and \$199 million per year in lost production.

South Dakota State University professor Mark Cochrane is working with the Forest Service to better understand how a changing climate is affecting our forests. Professor Cochrane reported: "Forest fire seasons worldwide increased by 18.7 percent due to more rain-free days and hotter temperatures."

Secretary Perdue could travel to Iowa and hear from Gene Takle, an Iowa State University professor of agronomy and geological and atmospheric sciences, who told a United Nations conference recently that climate change is already affecting Iowa farmers. "This isn't just about the distant future," he said. At Iowa State's Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Secretary Perdue could also hear about what the center calls "aggravated and unpredictable risk that will challenge the security of our agricultural and biological systems."

I am from the Ocean State. So let's turn to the oceans, where the National Climate Assessment predicts: "Fishing costs are predicted to increase as fisheries transition to new species and as processing plants and fishing jobs shift poleward." In the Pacific Northwest, ocean acidification caused a 70-percent loss of oyster larvae from 2006 to 2008 at an oyster hatchery in Oregon. Wild oyster stocks in Washington State have failed as weather patterns have brought more acidic water to the shore. This is an industry worth about \$73 million annually. So we ought not to laugh this off.

In Alaska, the University of Alaska has an Ocean Acidification Research

Center. That is how seriously they take it. The Ocean Acidification Research Center warns that ocean acidification "has the potential to disrupt (the Alaskan seafood) industry from top to bottom"—a top-to-bottom disruption of one of Alaska's major industries, and we cannot get a word on climate change out of the Republican side of the aisle in this building.

It is, of course, not just scientists. Some of the largest agriculture and food companies are speaking out as well. For these companies, climate change is not a partisan issue. It is not even a political issue. It is a business survival issue. It is their new reality. In 2015, major food and beverage companies visited Congress to tell us how climate change is affecting their industry.

"Climate really matters to our business," said Kim Nelson, of General Mills. "We fundamentally rely on Mother Nature." The choices we make to protect or forsake our climate, she said, will be "important to the long-term viability of our company and our industry."

Paul Bakus, of Nestle, agreed, saying that climate change "is impacting our business today." His company cans pumpkins under the Libby's brand. They have seen pumpkin yields crash in the United States. Mr. Bakus told us: "We have never seen growing and harvesting conditions like this in the Midwest."

Chief sustainability officer for the Mars Corporation, Barry Parkin, was blunter in his assessment: "We are on a path to a dangerous place."

Greg Page, the former CEO of Cargill, has publicly stated that climate change must be addressed to prevent future food shortages. Specifically, he said:

U.S. production of corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton could decline by 14 percent by mid-century, and by as much as 42 percent by late century. From an agricultural standpoint, we have to prepare ourselves for a different climate than we have today.

In advance of the Paris climate conference, the heads of Mars, General Mills, Nestle USA, Unilever, Kellogg Company, New Belgium Brewing, Ben & Jerry's, Cliff Bar, Stonyfield Farm, Danone Dairy, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Hershey, and Hain Celestial signed a public letter—this one here—that said:

Climate change is bad for farmers and agriculture. Drought, flooding, and hotter growing conditions threaten the world's food supply and contribute to food insecurity.

They continued:

Now is the time to meaningfully address the reality of climate change. . . . We are ready to meet the climate challenges that face our businesses.

These big, successful companies don't take climate change lightly, and neither do our farmers, loggers, ranchers, and fishermen.

In South Carolina, farms that have been in families for generations, like that of Representative MARK SANFORD's, are under threat from climate

change. Congressman SANFORD said: "At our family farm in Beaufort, I've watched over the last 50 years as sea levels have risen and affected salt edges of the farm."

Out West, ranchers are experiencing longer and more severe droughts. In a 2012 survey of Southern Colorado ranchers, roughly one-quarter of respondents said they would likely leave the industry if the drought persisted. Carlyle Currier, who owns a ranch in Molina, CO, said: "We just can't grow enough to feed the cattle ourselves."

In New Hampshire, Jamey French, President of Northland Forest Products, has seen hardwood tree species begin to migrate, with less valuable timber trees like oak and hickory beginning to take the place of sugar maple and yellow birch.

I sure hope Secretary Purdue will come to Rhode Island and meet our fishermen. Chris Brown is the owner of Brown Family Seafood and the president of the Rhode Island Commercial Fishermen's Association. He has fished in the waters of Rhode Island Sound for years: "We used to come right here and catch two, three, four thousand pounds [of whiting] a day, sometimes 10," he told the New York Times. But the whiting have moved north to cooler waters. "Climate change is going to make it hard on some of those species that are not particularly fond of warm or warming waters," Chris said.

And he is not alone. I have been told by other fishermen that it is getting weird out there in Rhode Island's waters, that this is not our grandfathers' ocean. These changes are serious for this industry.

So I hope Secretary Perdue will hear the message of our farmers, foresters, ranchers, and fishermen. They are sending this message loud and clear. Climate change is happening now, and they count on us to face the challenge.

The problem, of course, is the fossil fuel-funded denial machine that has so much influence over the Republican Party in Congress today. That fossil fuel-funded denial machine will do its best to change the subject, to muddy the waters, to create artificial doubt, and to use its anonymous dark political money to break up and thwart any signs of progress, but all the dark money in the world can't change the things that Iowa farmers, Wyoming ranchers, South Dakota forest managers, and Rhode Island fishermen see.

If this body—if our Republican friends here—will not listen to Mars Corporation, to General Mills, to Nestle USA, to Unilever, to Kellogg, to Coke and Pepsi and Hershey, it is really time to wake up.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

INCREASING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABILITY TO VETERANS ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, this afternoon, the President will be signing an Executive order to increase accountability within the Department of Veterans Affairs. For several years, I have been calling on the VA to hold bad actors within the VA accountable. In my view, in too many instances, that has not occurred. There are far too many examples of those who commit wrongdoing while working at the VA, and even crimes against veterans and other VA employees have occurred without any consequence.

On his first day in office, I wrote the President urging him to make accountability within the Department of Veterans Affairs one of his top priorities. We see too many examples, and unfortunately one of those examples—one of those egregious examples—is in my home State of Kansas, where we face a terrible example of a VA employee violating the trust of veterans. Yet the VA seems to have no real sense of urgency in holding this person accountable or committing to fix the process by which he got into the position that he could commit the acts he did.

In 2015, we learned from local newspaper reports—not from the VA—that a physician's assistant at the Leavenworth VA hospital had been sexually abusing veterans. Shortly after that news broke, Leavenworth County prosecutors charged this individual with multiple counts of sexual assault and abuse against numerous veterans. He is currently awaiting trial.

The stories continue to come into our office and to the prosecutor about other victims. Veterans who sought services at the VA—the place they would expect to be cared for, respected, and the place they certainly should find safe—found something exactly the opposite.

As the story unfolded, we learned that Mr. Wisner—the person now charged with crimes—targeted vulnerable veterans suffering from PTSD, post-traumatic stress syndrome; he prescribed opioids that inhibited their thinking, and he used his position to deepen their wounds of war rather than to heal them.

Although Mr. Wisner is now beyond the reach of the VA, he and others like him who fail our veterans are not beyond the reach of Congress. It is ridiculous that taxpayers continue to fund pensions of VA senior executives and personnel convicted of crimes that harmed our Nation's veterans when they should have been serving and caring for them.

In the last Congress, we led significant efforts to develop, introduce, and

pass legislation. Most of those efforts were with the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and we passed some legislation unanimously here in the Senate. That legislation increases the accountability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to make certain that senior VA executives and certain healthcare employees convicted of a felony do not receive the same benefits as those who diligently and honorably serve our Nation's veterans.

Not as an aside but as a separate sentence, let me take this moment to say thank you to those people within the Department of Veterans Affairs who conscientiously care for and fulfill their responsibilities to our Nation's veterans each and every day. How saddening it must be that they have to work side by side with people who commit crimes—and other failures for our veterans—and receive no consequence for that behavior.

We want to protect our veterans. We also want to make sure that those who work at the Department of Veterans Affairs know that their profession is honorable and that they are doing the right thing. It is difficult to reach that conclusion when surrounded by individuals who have not fulfilled that responsibility.

In light of the situation with Mr. Wisner—and other cases of wrongdoing so awful that they have been found guilty of a felony—we will not tolerate crimes against veterans that cause harm to their personal safety or that involve corrupt, backroom dealings with senior VA executives.

That legislation passed the U.S. Senate on the final day of our session last year. It passed unanimously. Unfortunately, that legislation did not then pass the House of Representatives, despite what we were told was significant support for it. It just didn't work in the schedule. So today I am back on the Senate floor. A hotline request is pending in which we ask—I ask—that legislation unanimously passed by the U.S. Senate on the final day of the previous session would pass today. That will then give the House of Representatives the time and the mechanics to see that this legislation becomes law.

In fact, the very first piece of legislation I introduced in this session, the 115th, was Increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability to Veterans Act of 2017. We today call for its swift passage. I am hopeful this legislation will provide an ounce of justice to those victims who have suffered at the hands of this VA employee, and I call on my colleagues to once again stand with me in passing this legislation.

In addition to the issues of accountability of wrongdoing employees of the Department, this legislation also has additional provisions. Those provisions include holding VA leaders accountable for Department mismanagement, hiring well-qualified people and addressing employee performance, preventing

employees from conflicts of interest, and improving manager training.

We have a duty. Of all people in this country, whom should we pay respect and honor to? Whom should we care for? For whom should we make certain we live up to the commitments that were made? One would think that those who served in our military, who protected our freedoms and liberties are the ones we would put on a high pedestal and make sure everything possible to protect them is done.

We have a duty to taxpayers, as well, to make sure funds are not going to employees who are convicted of crimes against those veterans that they are charged to protect and to serve.

There have been a number of VA scandals, corruption, and illegal activity in nearly every State. Whether it has been a secret wait-list in a hospital that delayed critical care, opioid over-medication that led to death or suicide, or physical abuse and neglect, crimes must come to an end. There must be accountability for us to be able to say we are doing everything possible to bring those crimes to an end.

This legislation is an important step in making the VA worthy of the service of those who have sacrificed for this Nation. Given the previous unanimous support, I can't imagine—I hope there is no reason this legislation should not again pass today. I call upon my colleagues in the U.S. Senate to stand with me and Senator BLUMENTHAL and others as we work to make certain the VA is a department worthy of the veterans it serves.

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

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

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

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, later this afternoon the Senate will vote on the President's nomination of Alexander Acosta to serve as the U.S. Secretary of Labor. Mr. Acosta has excellent credentials and is well qualified for the position. He understands that a good-paying job is critical to helping workers realize the American dream for themselves and for their families.

After immigrating to the United States from Cuba, Mr. Acosta's parents worked hard to create more opportunities for their son. Alexander Acosta became the first person in his family to go to college, and from there he has had quite an impressive career.

He has already been confirmed by the U.S. Senate three different times: He served as a Republican member of the National Labor Relations Board, he

served as Assistant Attorney General for the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, and he served as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida.

Mr. Acosta's most recent role was serving as dean of Florida International University's law school. The school's president told the Miami Herald recently, "Alex has a destiny in public service. . . . He's a person of integrity, conscientious, thoughtful, he doesn't overreach."

On March 22, Mr. Acosta had a hearing in the Senate Labor Committee that lasted two and a half hours. Following his hearing, he answered 380 follow-up questions for the record—604 questions if you count the sub-questions. Then, on March 30, our committee approved Mr. Acosta's nomination, readying the nomination for consideration by the full Senate.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a list of 140 groups, which includes business groups and labor unions, which support Mr. Acosta's nomination.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

140 GROUPS THAT SUPPORT MR. ACOSTA'S
NOMINATION

Aeronautical Repair Station Association; Air Conditioning Contractors of America; Alaska Chamber; Alliance of Wyoming Manufacturers; American Apparel & Footwear Association; American Bakers Association; American Beverage Association; American Coatings Association; American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute; American Concrete Pressure Pipe Association; American Fiber Manufacturers Association; American Fire Sprinkler Association; American Foundry Society; American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers; American Home Furnishings Alliance; American Hotel & Lodging Association; American Iron and Steel Institute; American Moving & Storage Association; American Staffing Association; American Supply Association; American Trucking Associations; AmericanHort; Americans for Tax Reform; Argentum.

Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Arizona Manufacturers Council; Arkansas State Chamber/Associated Industries of Arkansas; Asian American Hotel Owners Association; Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc.; Associated Equipment Distributors; Associated General Contractors of America; Associated Industries of Missouri; Auto Care Association; Brick Industry Association; Can Industry Association; Center for Worker Freedom; Coalition of Franchisee Associations; Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry (CACI); Council of Industry of Southeastern New York; Corry & Associates; Delta Industries, Inc.

Fabricators and Manufacturers Association, International; The Fertilizer Institute; Franchise Business Services; Georgia Association of Manufacturers; Global Cold Chain Alliance; Harsco; Heating, Air-conditioning & Refrigeration Distributors International (HARDI); Hispanic National Bar Association; Hispanic Leadership Fund; HR Policy Association; INDA, The Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry; Independent Electrical Contractors; Independent Lubricant Manufacturers Association; Insured Retirement Institute; International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers; International As-

sociation of Fire Fighters; International Foodservice Distributors Association.

International Franchise Association; International Housewares Association; International Sign Association; International Sleep Products Association; International Warehouse Logistics Association; Investment Casting Institute; ISSA—The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association; Laborers' International Union of North America; The Latino Coalition; Leading Builders of America; League of United Latin American Citizens; The Linen, Uniform and Facility Services Association (TRSA); Manufacturer & Business Association; Metal Powder Industries Federation; Metals Service Center Institute; Michigan Manufacturers Association; Miles Sand & Gravel; Missouri Association of Manufacturers; MMC Materials, Inc.; Montana Retail Association.

Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA); MSPA Americas; National Association of Home Builders; National Association of Manufacturers (NAM); National Association of Printing Ink Manufacturers (NAPIM); National Association of Professional Employer Organizations; National Automobile Dealers Association; National Christmas Tree Association; National Club Association; National Council of Chain Restaurants; National Federation of Independent Business.

National Franchisee Association; National Grocers Association; National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association; National Oilseed Processors Association; National Precast Concrete Association; National Ready Mixed Concrete Association; National Restaurant Association; National Retail Federation; National Roofing Contractors Association; National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association; National Wooden Pallet and Container Association; Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry; Nevada Manufacturers Association; New Mexico Business Coalition; North American Building Trades Union; North American Concrete Alliance; Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association; Plastics Industry Association; Port Aggregates, Inc.; Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute; Private Care Association.

Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association; Retail Industry Leaders Association; Rhode Island Manufacturing Association; San Jose Police Officers' Association; Seafarers International Union of North America; Sergeants Benevolent Association, Police Department, City of New York; Shipbuilders Council of America; Sioux Corporation; Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council; SNAC International; The Society of Chemical Manufacturers and Affiliates; Society for Human Resource Management; South Carolina Chamber of Commerce; Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association; Specialty Equipment Market Association; Spurlino Materials.

Technology & Manufacturing Association; Texas Association of Business; Texas Association of Manufacturers; Tile Roofing Institute; Tree Care Industry Association; Truck Renting and Leasing Association; United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners; United Motorcoach Association; U.S. Chamber of Commerce; United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; The Vinyl Institute; Water & Sewer Distributors of America; Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America; Workforce Fairness Institute.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, the supporters include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Retail Federation, the National Federation of Independent Business, the National Association of Manufacturers, the International Franchise Association, the Associated Builders and Contractors,

and the American Beverage Association.

Here are some examples of what these groups had to say about Mr. Acosta. The International Franchise Association said, "Franchise owners around the country are facing a great deal of regulatory uncertainty as a result of the wreckage created by the previous administration's out-of-control Department of Labor. Mr. Acosta's exemplary record handling labor issues as a member of the NLRB has shown the appropriate balance needed to protect the interests of employees and employers."

The National Federation of Independent Business said, "Alexander Acosta is an experienced public servant with a distinguished record. His knowledge of labor issues and his service as U.S. Attorney make him an especially strong candidate to take on the entrenched bureaucracy, which has imposed unbelievably severe and costly regulations on small business in the recent years."

The National Retail Federation said, "Mr. Acosta's diverse experiences in both public service and the private sector position him well to be an effective and pragmatic leader at the Department of Labor."

Why is this nomination so important? In his new book, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman uses the term "Great Acceleration" for all of the technological, social, environmental, and market changes simultaneously sweeping across the globe and argues that we are now "living through one of the greatest inflection points in history" as a result. Add Ball State University's finding that automation is responsible for the loss of 88 percent of our manufacturing jobs. Add globalization. Add social, cultural, climate changes, and terrorism, and you get a big mismatch between the change of pace and the ability of the average American worker to keep up and fit in the accelerating forces shaping the workplace.

Earlier this year, after a group of senators listened to a group of scientists talk about the advances in artificial intelligence, one Senator asked, "Where are we all going to work?"

Tom Friedman says that probably the most important governance challenge is a great need "to develop the learning systems, training systems, management systems, social safety nets, and government regulations that would enable citizens to get the most out of these accelerations and cushion their worst impacts."

One of the federal government's chief actors in this drama should be the U.S. Secretary of Labor. In fact, as many have suggested and the House of Representatives has done, the title of the job for which Alexander Acosta has been nominated should be changed to the Secretary of Workforce, not Secretary of Labor.

Labor union membership in the private sector today is down to less than

7 percent. The issue for workers today is not whether they belong to a union. It is whether they have the skills to adapt to the changing workplace and to find and keep a job. To be accurate, to create and keep a job. My generation found jobs. This generation is more likely to have to create their own jobs.

In his inaugural address, President Trump said he heard “forgotten men and women” who are struggling to keep up and fit into today’s changing world: “[F]or too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation . . .” That is what President Trump said in his inaugural address.

Ten days earlier, in his farewell address, President Obama said he, too, heard those same voices: “[T]oo many families, in inner cities and in rural counties, have been left behind . . . if we don’t create opportunity for all people, the disaffection and division that has stalled our progress will only sharpen in years to come. . . .”

That was President Obama.

What can we do about this? The most important thing is to work with employers and community colleges and technical institutes and find ways to increase the number of Americans earning post-secondary certificates and two-year degrees or more.

Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce says that by 2020—3 years from now—65 percent of the jobs in this country will require some college or more. And at the rate we are going, Georgetown predicts the United States will lack 5 million workers with an adequate post-secondary education by 2020.

Unfortunately, too many of the federal government’s actions over the last few years have made it harder for American workers to keep up, to adjust to the changing world, and to create, find, or keep a job.

President Obama’s Department of Labor issued 130 percent more final rules than the previous administration’s labor department. Overall, the Obama Administration issued an average of 85 major rules. These are rules that may have an impact of \$100 million or more a year on the economy. Eighty-five major rules a year. President Bush, on the other hand, averaged about 62 a year. That is a 37-percent increase under President Obama.

Take the overtime rule. In my state, its costs would add hundreds of dollars per student in college tuition and it would force small businesses across the country to reduce the jobs that provide the stability that families need. This rule has been delayed by the courts until at least June 30th of this year.

Take the so-called joint employer policy. This is a policy that affects franchising and makes it more likely that a parent company will own and operate its stores instead of allowing

franchisees to own and operate those stores. A Republican majority at the National Labor Relations Board can start undoing the damage caused by this harmful decision.

Then, there is the fiduciary rule, which is going to make it too expensive for the average worker to obtain investment advice about retirement benefits—again making it harder, not easier, to adjust to the changing world of work. The Department of Labor under the Trump administration has delayed this rule for 60 days, until June 9, 2017. Some parts of the rule are delayed until January 1, 2018.

One rule after another from the Obama administration has stacked a big wet blanket of costs and time-consuming mandates on job creators, causing them to create fewer jobs.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s EEO-1 form will require employers to provide to the government 20 times as much information as they do today about how they pay workers. Earlier this month, the Senator from Kansas, Senator PAT ROBERTS, and I asked the Office of Management and Budget to rescind this time-wasting mandate.

There is the ridiculously complex 108-question FAFSA, the federal aid application form that 20 million families fill out every year as students go to college. It turns away from college many of the very students who most need to adjust to this changing world.

The Affordable Care Act defined full-time work as only 30 hours, forcing employers to cut their workers’ hours or reduce hiring altogether in order to escape the law’s mandate and its unaffordable penalties.

Many of these rules, like the persuader rule, which chills the ability of employers to retain legal advice during union organizing activities, seemed designed for the purpose of strengthening the membership and the power of labor unions.

We are fortunate to have a nominee in Mr. Acosta who can use his good judgment to reevaluate labor policies that make it much harder to create jobs and to find jobs.

We know that Mr. Acosta has support from members of both political parties, and that raises a question for me: Why did the Senate yesterday have to vote to invoke cloture on Mr. Acosta’s nomination? The vote was bipartisan, with 61 senators voting to end debate so Mr. Acosta could have had an up or down vote. He could have been approved by majority vote yesterday. That has been the tradition in the U.S. Senate for 230 years. There never has been a Cabinet member denied his or her position by requiring them to get more than 51 votes. There have been some cloture votes for delay or to take some extra time, but no one has ever been denied the position by requiring more than 51 votes.

During most of the 20th century, when one party controlled the White House and the Senate seventy percent

of the time, the minority never filibustered to death a single presidential nominee. The practice in the Senate since the Senate’s beginning has been that the President nominates and the Senate decides by majority vote whether to approve the nomination. Why are we having these cloture votes? We are getting into more and more of a difficult situation with these votes. It is a bad habit and both sides, Republicans and Democrats, have caused the problem.

During the Obama administration, over the 8 years, there were 173 cloture votes on nominations, and I voted to invoke cloture 41 of those times. For 10 of those nominees, I voted to end debate so that their nomination could have an up or down vote even though I opposed their confirmation.

No one has ever disputed our right in the Senate, regardless of who was in charge, to use our constitutional duty of advice and consent to delay and examine, sometimes causing nominations to be withdrawn or even defeating nominees by a majority vote.

What I would like to suggest today is that if we continue the trend of requiring cloture votes on presidential nominees—cabinet members and others—that may work fine as long as we have a president and a Senate of the same political party, but if we have a president and a Senate of different political parties and everybody has become accustomed to voting no on cloture, to requiring a cloture vote and voting no, the Senate may never be able to confirm any cabinet members or any sub-cabinet members when the Senate and the president are of different political parties.

I would suggest to my friends on the other side of the aisle that the Senate is a body of precedent, and I think it would be wise for us to stop and think, as we proceed, about whether it is wise to require cloture votes for presidential nominees. Why don’t we simply go ahead and approve them or not approve them by majority vote?

We have an excellent nominee in Mr. Acosta. We are fortunate that someone of his intelligence and experience is willing to serve as our U.S. Secretary of Labor. I look forward to voting for and to the Senate approving his confirmation later today.

I yield the floor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I oppose the nomination of Alexander Acosta to be Secretary of the Department of Labor.

Our Nation’s Labor Secretary has a responsibility to protect the safety and legal rights of the American workforce. From prosecuting civil rights violations to monitoring workplace safety, the Department of Labor ensures fair treatment. The Labor Secretary must also evaluate our economy and advocate for fair and equal pay and benefits for American workers. The Department provides the data and expertise for policymakers, employers, and workers to make economic decisions.

Unfortunately, Mr. Acosta's testimony on these points at his confirmation hearing was disappointing. He would not commit to support updating overtime rules to make sure that employees get fair pay for the hours they work. He would not commit to prioritize closing the gender pay gap. He would not commit to keeping workplace safety inspectors on the job.

Moreover, when Mr. Acosta led the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice during the George W. Bush Administration, the GAO reported that there was a "significant drop in the enforcement of several major antidiscrimination and voting rights laws." The Secretary of Labor must be a vigilant defender of the rights of workers.

In a Cabinet where too many department heads are looking out for millionaires and billionaires, we need a Secretary of Labor who will look out for the American worker. I am not convinced that Mr. Acosta will do that job.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

COAL MINER PENSION AND RETIREE HEALTH BENEFITS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, it is no great secret that the American people do not have a great deal of confidence in their government. It is no secret that the American people think the Congress is way out of touch with their needs and aspirations. In fact, just confirming that point, a recent poll appeared in the Washington Post and ABC News, and it found that 58 percent of the American people believe that President Trump is out of touch with the concerns of most people in the United States today; 62 percent of the American people believe that the Republican Party is out of touch with the concerns of most people in the United States; and 67 percent of the American people believe that the Democratic Party is out of touch with the concerns of most people in the United States today. Those are numbers that should cause a great deal of concern to Members of the Senate and the House, to Democrats and Republicans, to everybody.

I think one of the reasons is that there is a world outside of Capitol Hill where people are in pain; where people are working longer hours for lower wages; where people are scared to death about facing retirement because they have, in many cases, no money in the bank; where people today are paying 40 percent, 50 percent of limited incomes for affordable housing; where single moms can't afford childcare for their kids; where young people can't afford to go to college; where other people are leaving college deeply in debt. And all of that is taking place within the context of almost all new wealth and income going to the top 1 percent.

We have the absurd situation today where the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, and 52 percent of all new income is going to the top 1 per-

cent. The middle class is shrinking. There are 43 million Americans living in poverty, and the very wealthy are getting wealthier.

In the midst of all that, my Republican colleagues and President Trump are desperately trying to provide hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for the top 1 percent and cut back on programs that working families desperately need, whether it is Pell grants to make it easier for kids to go to college, whether it is afterschool programs, whether it is the Meals on Wheels program, whether it is affordable housing, or whatnot—tax breaks for billionaires, cutbacks on programs that people desperately need.

The American people will not regain confidence in the U.S. Congress unless we keep promises that were made to them. Today I want to talk about promises that were made to coal miners. For decades, coal miners contributed to their pension funds with the promise that when they retired, they would receive a pension and retiree health benefits that would last for a lifetime. Those were the promises to the people who went underneath the ground, who worked incredibly difficult jobs, who died of black lung disease or a myriad of other diseases or injuries. Promises were made to those workers, and those promises were broken.

If Congress does not act by tomorrow, the retiree health benefits of more than 22,000 coal miners will be eliminated. We cannot allow that to happen. It is not only unfair to the retired coal miners and their families, it once again will tell the American people that they cannot trust their government. Promises were made, but they were not carried out.

My understanding is that an agreement to protect these retiree health benefits may be included in the continuing resolution to keep the government from shutting down. As I have walked the hallways here in the Senate, I have met with members, retirees of the United Mine Workers, who have been back here week after week after week, and I applaud them for their persistence.

Let us hope that, in fact, the continuing resolution does contain an agreement to protect those retiree health benefits. It is absolutely imperative that the agreement contain those benefits and that those promises be kept.

Even if we do put that provision in the CR, it still does not address another problem faced by retirees in the coal industry and retirees all over the country, and that is the fact that we are doing nothing to protect the pension benefits of coal miners and tens and thousands of other workers. This is an issue that is of major crisis proportions all across this country, and it is an issue that must be addressed. That is why I am a proud cosponsor of the Miners Protection Act. That is also why I will be introducing legislation on

May 9 to protect the pensions of not only 90,000 coal miners throughout this country, but the retirement benefits of 10 million workers in multiemployer pension plans—10 million workers.

Over 40 years ago, the Federal Government made a solemn commitment to the workers of this country. If a retiree is promised a certain pension benefit after a lifetime of hard work, a company could not renege on that promise. Making that commitment 40 years ago was exactly the right thing to do. When someone works for their entire life, when they give up pay raises, when they work overtime, when they work weekends in order to make sure that he or she has a secure retirement, it is absolutely unacceptable to pull the plug from that worker's benefit.

Guarantees were made, and those guarantees must be kept. This is not the negotiating of wage increases. This is not the negotiating of overtime. This is a promise made to workers and paid for by workers, which simply cannot be nullified if people are to have any faith in our political system.

But more than 2 years ago behind closed doors, a provision was slipped into a must-pass spending bill that now makes it legal to cut the pension benefits of about 10 million workers and retirees in multiemployer pension plans. As a result, retirees all over this country are waking up to the unacceptable reality that the promises made to them could be broken and that the pension benefits they are receiving today may soon be cut by 30, 40 or even 65 percent. What this means is that retirees who are currently receiving a pension benefit of \$18,000 a year are in danger of seeing their benefits cut by \$3,843, a 21-percent cut. Retirees who are currently receiving a pension benefit of \$36,000 a year could see their pension benefits cut by up to \$21,000, a 60-percent cut.

In other words, tens of thousands of retirees all over this country who today are in the middle class, who worked hard their entire lives, who gave up on wage increases, who worked overtime in order to protect those pensions may be seeing significant reductions in what they anticipated. We are talking about retirees who will no longer be able to pay their mortgages. We are talking about retirees who will not be able to pay their utility bills. We are talking about families who may have to go on food stamps to feed their families after working their entire lives. That is unconscionable. We cannot allow that to happen.

In my view, we have to send a very loud and very clear message to the Republican leadership in Congress and to the President of the United States, and that is when a promise is made to the working people of this country with respect to their pensions and retiree health benefits, that promise must be kept.

Today, about 150 multiemployer pension plans are in trouble financially, but let's be clear. The retirees are not

the reason these pension plans are struggling financially. The reason many of these pension plans are in trouble is because of the greed, recklessness, and illegal behavior on Wall Street that drove this country into the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Let us never forget, when the largest financial institutions were on the verge of collapse 7 years ago, it was the taxpayers of this country who bailed them out. I didn't vote for it, but a majority of the Members of Congress did.

Congress gave Wall Street some \$700 billion in financial assistance. The Federal Reserve provided \$16 trillion in virtually zero-interest loans to every major financial institution in this country and to foreign banks throughout the world because they were, as we will all recall, too big to fail. If Congress can bail out Wall Street, if Congress can bail out foreign banks, we have to protect the pension benefits of American workers.

The legislation that I will be reintroducing on May 9 would prevent the retirement benefits of about 10 million workers and retirees from being cut by repealing the anti-pension rider that was included in an appropriations bill 2 years ago. It establishes an emergency fund within the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation to make sure that multiemployer pension plans can continue to provide every pension benefit owed to every eligible American for decades to come.

It is fully paid for by closing two tax loopholes that allow the wealthiest Americans in this country to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Closing these loopholes will allow us to protect the earned pension benefits of every worker and retiree in multiemployer pension plans in this country.

At a time of massive wealth and income inequality, when half of all older workers have no retirement savings at all, when 20 percent of seniors are living on less than \$13,000 a year, we have to do everything we can to protect and expand the fine pension benefit plans in America.

I look forward to the support of my colleagues for this important legislation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

(The remarks of Mr. MERKLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 987 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. MERKLEY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REGULATORY REFORM AND THE BUDGET PROCESS

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, there is a lot of conversation about all that is moving this week in the Senate and the House and the executive branch. There is a lot of conversation about 100 days. It is somewhat of a look back, and it is reasonable for Americans to be able to look back and say the beginning of a new Presidency or the beginning of a new session of Congress has begun and what has already happened. There has been quite a bit that has actually happened, but let me highlight one specific area. I want to highlight an area that has moved and to, quite frankly, highlight an area that has not.

What has moved has been a lot of conversation about regulation. When I walked into Congress just a few years ago, I had a lot of people in my State who would catch me and ask for one specific thing. They said: I don't want anything other than to make it stop. Because every time they get news, every time they open up something from an association or try to be able to track something, all they got was a new regulation. Some of them were large and some small, but it seemed like every time they opened the mail, they had a new requirement from some entity they had never heard of, 1,000 miles away, telling them how to operate their business or to submit some new form. Whether they are a school or a hospital or a small business or a large business, whether they are doing manufacturing or are service-oriented or technology, the flood of regulations coming out of Washington, DC, caused people around my State to say: Make it stop; we are trying to catch up. And literally they are hiring more people for compliance than they are to actually do what their business is designed to do. At some point, they want to hire somebody to actually do their business.

A dramatic shift happened starting January 20 of this year when the administration stepped in and for a moment said: Pause on regulations. And literally the Nation could take a deep breath. They didn't turn anything back. They didn't turn anything off. America didn't become less safe. They asked a simple question: How can people actually get involved in the process? And before a regulation comes out, we make sure that it is, No. 1, consistent with the law, and No. 2, that the people who are affected by it actually get a chance to raise their hands and say: When you do a regulation, make sure you consider this.

It doesn't seem unreasonable. If we are going to be a nation of the people, by the people, and for the people, it is a good idea to have people involved in

the process of the regulations that affect them. The government should not be their enemy. The government should be their ally. It should be the way to make sure that we have fair rules, that everyone has a consistent set of guidelines and that those guidelines don't change all the time.

Before this year, there had been only one time in the past decade that the Congressional Review Act was used. The Congressional Review Act was actually due to a fellow Oklahoman named Don Nickles who, in the Senate years ago, passed a simple piece of legislation to say that if a regulation is promulgated by an administration—any administration—that is not consistent with the desires of Congress, that Congress can pull it back out in the first few days after it was passed, and most of the time, it is legislative days—it is actually months in calendar time. In the first few months it is in existence, Congress can pull that regulation out and look at it and say: Is this consistent with what Congress passed? If it is not, Congress would have a fast-track process to be able to look at it and say: This is inconsistent with what Congress desired when it passed the law; that it had to go through the House, the Senate, and then to the White House to be signed. That has happened only one time.

In the past few months, Congress has passed now 13 Congressional Review Acts—13 different reviews of different regulations that were put down by the previous administration in their final months, some of them in their final days of—the administration—an administration that lasted 8 full years. These were the things they crammed into the very end, what are called midnight regulations. Those regulations cost billions of dollars, and some had very little review. Thirteen different times this Congress has pulled those out. It is literally billions of dollars in regulations that were laid on the economy and millions of hours of work on people filling out compliance forms and submitting things to Washington, DC, that most likely no one will ever read.

Those thirteen bills that have now been signed into law have helped free up our economy, and it has started a process that is very simple: What do we do to make sure that we have good regulations as a nation, that they stay consistent and have the maximum number of people involved?

The administration has also laid out something that many called a radical idea; that is, for every one regulation that goes in, an agency would pull two out; to go back and review old regulations and say: Are there other regulations that need to come out? For those who have called this a radical idea, I have had to smile and say: You realize the United Kingdom has done that for years. Canada has done that for years. Australia has done that for years.

It is not a radical, crazy idea; it is a simple statement to say that when regulations go in, we need to have consideration for those who are already regulated and say: Are we burying them in new compliance requirements? Is there an area where we can help free them of things that are not needed anymore, that are old, that are not used or not even appropriate anymore? It is a reasonable thing to be able to look at. It is not in statute, it is an Executive order, but it is one of those things that I think are wise for agencies to be able to take a look at.

Every administration over the past several decades has said they are going to do what is called a retrospective review—go back and look at it. This administration has said: We are really going to look at it. If a new regulation goes in, we have to go back and review and see if two can come out at the same time, to force that retrospective review.

Many other areas of regulations are coming out, but the primary issue that has come out is very simple; that is, slowing down the process and making sure it is wise to be able to impose new regulations. We should have them in health and safety areas, but we shouldn't do regulations just because someone in Washington, DC, thinks it is a good idea to be able to run everyone else's business.

With any set of decisions made by the executive branch, we should resolve many of these things in law. The Congressional Review Act—those are all in law. Those have all been settled. The executive actions like the “one in, two out”—that is an executive action. A future executive can flip it back around and say: We are not going to go back and review it at all.

I proposed a whole series of issues that we need to deal with on regulatory actions. I chair the Regulatory Affairs Subcommittee, in fact. We have had very bipartisan conversations to say: Where can we find common ground, and what do we need to do to be able to resolve this issue of regulations just showing up?

So we have set out a simple set of ideas, one beginning in small business. If we are going to start with regulatory issues, let's start in the area where we have the greatest amount of agreement; that is, on small businesses. Small businesses should have an opportunity to have a voice at the table. Now, when regulations are put out, often those regulations are put out and only the largest businesses are consulted on them—those that might have lobbyists or government relations or have a team of attorneys to be able to go engage with the Federal Government and get their input considered.

We required years ago that small businesses get a voice. The problem is, many agencies actually don't do it. We need to be able to press the issue and put into statute an absolute requirement that small businesses be consulted. So when a regulation is created,

the people who are affected the most—like in my State of Oklahoma, where 97 percent of the businesses are small businesses—that those folks actually get a voice.

It may shock some people in this Chamber to know that small business owners in Oklahoma don't wake up every day and read the Federal Register to see if there is an area they have to give notice and comment to. It may be stunning to know that they don't have a team of lawyers at every small business. In fact, there are towns in Oklahoma where there are many small businesses but there is not a lawyer in that town. We should not require every business to hire attorneys and to read the Federal Register every day for them to be able to stay in business. We should actually reach out to them and say: We are not opposed to small businesses; we want to make sure we facilitate them.

Here is a simple idea of many ideas in the small business bill that I have—not only getting greater input and to make sure they are in consideration, but how about this simple idea: If there is a paperwork violation for a small business, they are not fined immediately. They have forgiveness for that first-time offense. Many of them didn't even know there was a certain amount of paperwork that had to be turned in. It showed up as a requirement in the Federal Register. They are running their small business. They weren't tracking it. Someone comes in and evaluates and says “There is a piece of paper you haven't turned in” and drops a \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 fine on them for not submitting something, and they had no idea what it was.

First-time paperwork forgiveness is a simple idea. To actually be engaged where the Federal Government can go to a small business and say “Hey, you missed one,” and if they are not health or safety related issues, we give them forgiveness in the process—why should that be so hard for us to do?

We have another piece of legislation we proposed called early participation in regulations. Before a regulation is written by an agency, this would require that they actually put out the word that they are thinking about writing a regulation on a certain topic and get as much input as they can, so before they even write the regulation and we are fighting over whether we should use “or” or “and” in a section, we actually talk about whether it is needed at all, or if they are going to write it, make sure it has these certain issues in it—again, getting more people involved in the process.

Just a week ago, there was a march through this town and through many towns saying: We need to have great science in our Nation. I could not agree more. We should have quality science in our research. We should have engagement from science when we put policy papers together.

One of the challenges we currently have and one of the things we are try-

ing to correct with another piece of legislation is just on using best science, just requiring agencies, when they make a decision about something in a regulation, to actually use peer-reviewed, good science that can be shared with other people. We bump into issues now commonly with agencies where they say they have made a decision on some of the regulations, and we ask for the science behind it, and they say that the science is proprietary and they can't share it with us or the American people. The American people aren't good about withholding a secret on something that actually affects their day-to-day life. Don't lay a new requirement on them and tell them: Trust us—we have thought about this, and this is the right way to go. Americans aren't great with that. They just want to be able to know the facts behind it so they can see that science themselves.

So getting best science is something we have talked about within the framework of the Administrative Procedures Act for a long time—something many administrations for the past several decades have said we should do. Well, let's go ahead and do it, and let's require that we actually have best science out there.

This body, with a voice vote, just a year ago, passed a bill called TSCA. That TSCA bill dealt with chemicals and how we are going to approve chemicals and how the EPA can do it. We put new language in that requiring good science, peer-reviewed science, and on a voice vote from everyone in this body, we agreed that is the best way to handle science on chemicals.

So what did I do? I took that exact language that we all agreed to on TSCA and said: Let's apply that to every agency so that whenever an agency of any type makes a decision that is science-based, it has good transparency and it is peer-reviewed. We have agreed that the EPA should do it dealing with chemicals; let's agree that everyone should do it. Let's agree on how we handle guidance, to not allow agencies to be able to create guidance documents. Let's have good transparency and simplicity.

We have a simple bill, as odd as this may sound, that just says that for whatever regulation is out there, the agencies also have to put a description out on it in plain language that a non-attorney can understand in just 100 words, just a 100-word description of what it is. Right now there are folks who actually do try to research things, and if you are not a trained attorney, you can't even understand what it means. So just plain-language descriptions of regulations are called for.

These should all be areas of common ground. These should all be straightforward issues that aren't partisan issues but are commonsense issues.

We have made progress on regulations over the past 100 days. The American people have now been able to take a breath as regulations are not coming

out at rapid speed. We still need them, though. In the days ahead, we need to do good regulations, so let's figure out a good way to do it.

Let me make one more note on the opposite side. We have made progress in regulations, with a ways to go. Where we have not made progress in the past 100 days is on how we do budgeting.

There is a group of us who have talked for several years now and have said that we have to change the way we do budgeting. Year after year, the American people have said: Are we going to have another continuing resolution? Are we going to have another omnibus bill? Are we going to be late again on budgeting?

Year after year, Congress has said: Yes, we are.

Folks around my State occasionally catch me and say: This is different.

I smile at them and say: No, it is not different.

The way we do budgeting was created right after Watergate in 1974 to create a more transparent process. What they actually created was a process so difficult that it has only worked four times since 1974—four times. So if it feels like every year you are saying "How come the budget process didn't work again?" it is because every year but four, since 1974, the budget process didn't work.

At some point, we have to say: The budget process is not in the Constitution. Let's change the way we are doing the process. They were well-meaning in 1974 when they made that process; it just didn't work. So let's fix it instead of saying that once again it didn't work.

We will never get a better product on our budget until we fix the process of our budget. We will never be able to solve the budget debt and deficit issues we have with this continuing resolution autopilot system and with an omnibus system that seems to just perpetuate the same issues over and over again.

We have made specific proposals: doing the budget every 2 years, getting time to get more predictability, to get more time to be able to walk through the research of it; eliminating budget gimmicks, and there are a mess of budget gimmicks that are out there; and getting a better long-term view. The budget has what is called a 10-year window now, where we have to budget over 10 years. So what happens? Congress creates a budget that blows up in the 11th year. Well, that has been done year after year after year, and we have a lot of eleventh-hour years now stacking up and a lot of major problems that are out there.

We need to find a way to prevent us from ever having to get in a conversation about a government shutdown. We have a bill called the government shutdown prevention bill that would keep us from ever having that, and it would put the pressure back on Congress and the White House to resolve the issues

but would prevent us from ever having a government shutdown fight. We shouldn't argue about whether the government is going to be opened or closed. We should argue about how we are going to handle the issue of budgeting and how we are going to actually be able to get us back to balance.

There are a lot of simple, common-sense things that are out there that we can do, but we as a body have agreed that we are going to actually tackle the way we do budgeting. That is going to involve some focus and some time commitment and a risk to say: How it was done in the 1970s is not the way we should do it now. It didn't work. Let's change the system so we can actually get us back on track and bring some predictability again to what we are doing.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

REMEMBERING JAY DICKEY

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise to address the urgent crisis taking place in Sudan, but, first, I wish to take just a moment to remember former Congressman Jay Dickey, who, as many in Washington and Arkansas now know, passed away last week.

Jay was a native of Pine Bluff and represented Southern Arkansas in the Fourth Congressional District for four terms between 1993 and 2001. Jay was known as a fierce advocate for Arkansas and worked hard to ensure that our State had a strong voice in Washington.

A successful business owner and attorney, Jay was a well-respected member of the Pine Bluff community. He served as Pine Bluff city attorney and had a brief tenure on the Arkansas Supreme Court. Jay was a friend to many and built a warm relationship with almost everyone he met—even those who disagreed with him politically. He also wore his faith on his sleeve as a proud born-again Christian.

I will always appreciate Jay's kindness to me when I first started serving in Congress and truly valued his friendship. He was a loving father, a dedicated public servant, and he will be missed by many.

My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends as they mourn his loss, but I know they are also incredibly proud, as I have been, of the legacy Jay leaves behind, which will continue to have an impact on us all in the years ahead.

SOUTH SUDAN

Mr. President, the Trump administration has stated it will pursue a foreign policy focused on American interests that puts our national security first. I appreciate the President's commitment to a stronger and more respected America and stand ready to work with him to achieve that goal.

A stronger, more respected America does not mean we disengage with the international community. In fact, it means just the opposite. While there are many important issues we must ad-

dress here at home, we cannot lose sight of the places around the globe that are in need of American engagement.

As we have seen with Syria and North Korea, it makes a difference when the United States acts, but not every international crisis gets front page headlines like Syria and North Korea do. One such crisis with little attention but in desperate need of U.S. leadership is South Sudan. Hunger emergencies are on the rise across Africa, but the situation in South Sudan is so grim that it has led the U.N. to use the word "famine" for the first time since 2011.

"Famine" is not a word the U.N. or the international community throws around lightly. In order for the U.N. to officially declare a famine, a population must reach certain death rate, malnutrition, and food shortage thresholds. In blunt terms, a formal famine declaration means that many people have already started dying of hunger.

The famine in South Sudan is almost entirely manmade. The much heralded August 2015 peace agreement has failed to bring peace to South Sudan, which has been mired in a civil war almost entirely throughout the young nation's lifetime.

Thousands of civilians have been killed and millions more were displaced as a result of the civil war in South Sudan. Millions of those who are left in the country are facing a severe hunger crisis. Fighting between rival factions has left an estimated 4.9 million people—more than 40 percent of the country—in urgent need of food. That total is expected to rise to over 5.5 million people—5.5 million people—by summer if the international community doesn't act quickly. These innocent civilians are victims of competing groups that use hunger as a weapon of war while accumulating wealth by exploiting South Sudan's resources. Millions are suffering in South Sudan, but that is not due to shortage of food. It is because they are being denied food by a small few getting rich off the country's oil, gold, and livestock.

Meanwhile, humanitarian aid workers trying to reach the hungry are being kidnapped and held for ransom. Some have even been killed. Food shipments are being blocked, crops are being torched, farmers and herders are being forced from the land, and civilians so fear for their lives, they have been driven away from the violence in population centers to remote locations where aid workers can't reach them to provide the relief they need.

There is plenty of evidence to show that when people don't have enough to eat, they get desperate. Desperation fuels conflict. Conflict in a young country, in an unstable region, poses the risk of spillover into neighboring countries, further exacerbating human suffering. This is why U.S. leadership is needed.

By that, I don't mean throwing money or military personnel into a conflict zone. In fact, that would likely exacerbate the situation as the structural causes will remain once the money dries out and the troops head home.

The approach I am advocating is two-pronged. First and foremost, there absolutely is a need for the United States to take a lead in coordinating relief with NGOs and our international partners like the World Food Program—aid which has proven effective channels, the dedication and compassion of doers, not takers.

Along with helping those who desperately need humanitarian aid, the international community must also take action to end the unchecked corruption that fuels the conflict in South Sudan. This is the structural cause of the crisis. We have to address this problem at its root. If we want to have any chance at long-term stability in South Sudan, we must seriously consider options that would end the corruption which enriches those in power at the expense of the citizens.

I believe President Trump would support these efforts. The President understands how dire the situation in South Sudan is. The administration recently announced the continuation of the national emergency declaration for South Sudan, which was set to expire earlier this month.

Earlier this week, Ambassador Haley rightfully called out the warring parties in South Sudan and urged the U.N. Security Council to move forward with further sanctions and an arms embargo. The Ambassador's words urging the Council to take action to break the cycle of violence in South Sudan are extremely encouraging. They show the administration understands that the United States must remain engaged in corners of the world that need our leadership. It is my hope that Congress and the President can work together to exert that leadership and put an end to the corruption that is causing so much suffering in the country.

There is a role for soft power in a hard-powered administration. Human suffering is never in our national interest, no matter where it is happening. U.S. leadership, through diplomacy and smart foreign aid programs, help prevent situations which lead to serious threats to our national security.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REPUBLICAN HEALTHCARE BILL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, House Republicans have revived their efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

As a reminder, the original effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act—char-

acterized by some as the TrumpCare bill—was so unpopular that it had to be withdrawn from the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. That is because, after the Congressional Budget Office took a look, it would have taken away health insurance from 24 million Americans.

Think about that for a moment. The Republican answer to ObamaCare—the Affordable Care Act—was to remove health insurance protection and coverage from 24 million Americans. It would have devastated the Medicaid Program. The Medicaid Program, of course, is one that is easily characterized as a health insurance program for those who are in low-income categories, but that statement doesn't tell the real story.

For example, in my State, half of the children who are born in Illinois are covered by Medicaid. Their mothers and the kids are covered by Medicaid. So when it comes to new babies, particularly in low-income families, Medicaid provides the prenatal care, delivery, and care after the child is born, but the most expensive part of the Medicaid Program is the help it gives to senior citizens—mothers and grandmothers who are in nursing homes who have only a little bit of savings, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid cover their medical expenses. The Republican plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act would have decimated the Medicaid Program across the United States. It would have increased costs for the average person for health insurance by \$3,000, and particularly for people in upper ages—I guess I fit in that category—these folks would have seen a change in the calculation of premiums.

The Affordable Care Act protects premiums so they cannot be more than three times the lowest premium for any individual. The Republican approach said: Let's make that five times. If it goes up to five times, it can mean almost doubling the premiums paid by many senior citizens—those approaching, I should say, being senior citizens, from 50 to age 65.

It also would have cut off funding for women's health centers, all while providing a massive tax cut for upper income, wealthy people and big businesses, including tax cuts for drug companies. What a deal—to eliminate health insurance for 24 million Americans, to devastate the Medicaid Program, to increase the cost of health insurance for the average individual, to cut off funding for women's health centers in order to give a tax cut to wealthy people and drug companies.

The new bill does all those things as well—and then something I didn't think was possible. The new version of the Affordable Care Act repeal Republicans are now considering in the House allows insurance companies to impose—get this—an age tax and charge seniors significantly higher premiums than younger people. It says that insurance plans do not have to cover hospital visits, prescription drugs, mater-

nity care, substance abuse treatment, or mental health services.

The Affordable Care Act defined these as essential services so, if you are buying health insurance, you know you are buying that kind of protection. Well, Republicans have said: That is too much insurance for people. We ought to let them buy stripped-down versions of health insurance that may be cheaper. The obvious question, What happens to those people when they need coverage for substance abuse treatment? What if that son or daughter in high school begins an addiction to opioids, leading to heroin, and now your health insurance plan saved you money by not covering it or didn't cover mental health counseling?

It guts protections for people with preexisting conditions. Is there a person alive who doesn't know someone or have someone in their family with a preexisting condition? That used to be grounds for denying insurance coverage or charging outrageous premiums. We did away with it with the Affordable Care Act.

It is back, my friends, with the new Republican approach to the repeal of affordable care. It allows insurance companies to once again charge unaffordable premiums if someone in your family has a history of asthma, cancer, high blood pressure, or diabetes.

Republicans made these changes to win the votes of the most extreme conservative Members of the U.S. House, the so-called Freedom Caucus. What they are fighting for is for freedom from individuals getting protection when it comes to healthcare. These changes may appeal to a handful of extreme people who conveniently see their health insurance policies—their personal policies—protected under their bill, but these sorts of approaches don't appeal to anyone in the medical community.

Who opposes the new Republican repeal of the Affordable Care Act? The American Medical Association—that would be the doctors—the American Heart Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Association of Retired Persons, as well as every major medical and patient group out there. Every one of them opposes the changes proposed by the Republicans in the House to our healthcare system.

Of course, we have a bottom line that we measure proposals against. We go to the Congressional Budget Office, and we say to them: What impact will this have?

No one has sent this bill to the Congressional Budget Office, and no report has been given. So we don't know the impact on premiums of this new version. What is going to happen to seniors, to middle-income families?

Ramming through a bad bill that will harm Americans just because the President wants to have something to say on the 100th day of his Presidency is a bad idea. It is time to stop this

madness. It is time for Democrats and Republicans to sit down and talk seriously about improving our current system.

The Presiding Officer is from the State of Louisiana and is a medical doctor. He has joined on the Republican side with Senator COLLINS of Maine to open this conversation. Thank you. We should have this bipartisan conversation—not about repeal but repair, what we can do to make this better and fairer and more affordable while preserving quality healthcare for Americans. Thank you for your leadership in this. We have talked about it, and I want to continue the conversation.

This notion coming over from the House is unacceptable. I hope that many people will tell the President and tell those who support it that this is no way to celebrate 100 days—by taking health insurance away from 24 million people.

FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Mr. President, during the Senate's consideration of Betsy DeVos to be Secretary of Education, I asked a basic question: As Secretary of Education, would she side with corporate and other for-profit interests or would she be on the side of the students and their families?

I was concerned that the record of Secretary DeVos indicated that she was on the side of corporate interests, looking for opportunities to profit off of students and often exploiting them in the process.

Months into the job, now that she was approved by a historic tiebreaking vote by the Vice President, we are beginning to see which side the Secretary is on. A recent Chicago Tribune article entitled "Targeted by Obama, DeVry and other for-profit colleges rebounding under Trump" put it this way:

Less than 100 days into Trump's presidency, the Department of Education under Secretary Betsy DeVos has delayed implementation of gainful employment rules . . . withdrawn key federal student loan servicing reforms . . . and signaled a less onerous regulatory environment for the essentially taxpayer-financed career education [or for-profit] sector.

A group of State attorneys general, including Lisa Madigan of Illinois, warned of a return to "open season" on students in a letter to Secretary DeVos if she rolled back all of these protections.

I ask unanimous consent that the full text of that letter from the State attorneys general be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL,

February 22, 2017.

Re How For-profit Schools Have Harmed Student Borrowers: the Need for the Gainful Employment Rule, Vigorous Federal Oversight of Accreditors, and the Borrower Defense to Repayment Rule

Hon. ELISABETH DEVOS,

Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.

Speaker PAUL RYAN,

Speaker of the House, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,

Senate Majority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,

House Minority Leader, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

Hon. CHARLES E. SCHUMER,

Senate Minority Leader, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR SECRETARY DEVOS, SPEAKER RYAN, SENATOR MCCONNELL, CONGRESSWOMAN PELOSI, SENATOR SCHUMER: We, the undersigned Attorneys General of Illinois, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and the District of Columbia, as well as the Executive Director of the Office of Consumer Protection of Hawaii, write to express our support for recent federal protections for students and taxpayers in higher education. We are deeply concerned that rollbacks of these protections would again signal "open season" on students for the worst actors among for-profit post-secondary schools. As the chief consumer law enforcement agencies in our states, our offices handle thousands of complaints concerning higher education every year. We also enforce laws to protect consumers from unfair and deceptive practices perpetrated by higher education providers.

I. BACKGROUND: THE NEED FOR RULES TO PROTECT STUDENTS AND TAXPAYERS FROM UNFAIR AND DECEPTIVE PRACTICES BY FOR-PROFIT HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Over the last ten years, student loan debt has soared from \$450 billion to nearly \$1.4 trillion. A major driver of this increase has been for-profit colleges. Of the top 25 schools where students hold the most student loan debt, over half were for-profit schools in 2014. This is up from only one for-profit institution in the top 25 in 2000.

In addition to driving the increase in student loan borrowing, for-profit institutions also have significantly more loan defaults than other types of institutions. Since 2013, for-profit institutions accounted for 35% of all federal student loan defaults, but enrolled just 27% of all borrowers. Many for-profit schools are almost entirely dependent on federal grants and loans. In December 2016, the U.S. Department of Education ("ED") found that nearly 200 for-profit schools derive more than 90% of their income from federal sources. The only reason that many of these institutions are in compliance with the federal 90/10 Rule is that certain categories of federal money, including GI Bill money, are excluded from the rule and thus count toward the 10% that is supposed to be non-federal money.

Over the past fifteen years, millions of students have been defrauded by unscrupulous for-profit post-secondary schools. With accreditors asleep at the wheel, State Attorneys General Offices have stepped in to stop some of the worst abuses. The list of State Attorney General investigations and enforcement actions against for-profit colleges is long, including actions against: American Career Institute; Ashford University/

Bridgepoint Education, Inc.; Corinthian Colleges, Inc.; Career Education Corporation; Education Management Corporation; Daymar College; DeVry University; ITT Tech; National College of Kentucky; and Westwood Colleges, among others. These schools, and others like them, engaged in a variety of deceptive and abusive practices. Some promised prospective students jobs, careers, and further opportunities in education that the schools could not provide. Many schools inflated job placement numbers and/or promised career services resources that did not exist. Many nationally-accredited schools promised that their credits would transfer, even though credits from nationally-accredited schools often do not transfer to more rigorous regionally-accredited schools. Many students were placed in loans that the schools knew from experience their graduates could not pay back. The schools were overseen by accreditors who failed to take action to protect students or the taxpayers who funded their federal student loans, despite ample evidence of these and other problems. In short, the entire for-profit education system was failing students and taxpayers. As investigations and prosecutions initiated by our offices shed light on these problems, ED began to take steps to remedy these harms, issuing new regulations and reformulating policies to help protect students and taxpayers.

Three of these recent steps—the Gainful Employment Rule, the policy of vigorous federal oversight of accreditors, and the Borrower Defense to Repayment Rule—are essential to protect both consumers and taxpayers from fraudulent actors in the for-profit education sector. The Gainful Employment Rule is a measure of graduates' debt-to-income and is designed to ensure that programs produce graduates that are able to pay back their student loans. Prospectively, the federal government recognizes accreditors who have standards sufficient to show that the schools they accredit provide a quality education and should have access to federal student loans and grants. Finally, where other protections fail and students are defrauded by bad actors, the Borrower Defense to Repayment Rule provides a formal process for students to assert a defense to repayment of their federal student loans.

II. CORINTHIAN COLLEGES: AN EXAMPLE OF THE HARM FACED BY STUDENTS AND TAXPAYERS

The egregious conduct of Corinthian Colleges illustrates how each of these three policies is necessary to avoid harm to both students and taxpayers. In March 2016, after an extensive review of published job placement rates at Corinthian campuses nationwide, the Department of Education found that the job placement rates were fraudulent for hundreds of cohorts from 2010-2014. Corinthian was telling the world that far more of its students obtained jobs than actually did, inducing students to enroll. Many of these students were left without jobs in their field of study. Without these jobs, many are saddled with debt they cannot repay, defaulting on loans funded with taxpayer dollars.

Had the gainful employment regulations been in place, Corinthian's programs that weren't producing jobs for students would have been shut down because the median debt-to-income ratio would have shown that students were not making enough money to pay down their loans. Had Corinthian's accreditors reviewed the school's self-reported job placement data on a regular basis, the fraud would have been discovered and stopped much earlier, saving students and taxpayers billions of dollars.

The absence of policies in place to protect prospective students from Corinthian's fraudulent practices also demonstrates the

need for an effective process for students to assert a defense to loan repayment. This defense was established in the 1990s when Congress passed legislation allowing students to assert claims against their schools as a defense to repayment of their federal student loans. There was little detail, however, on the process for asserting such claims. The regulations set to take effect on July 1, 2017 give borrower defense to repayment set processes so that students, schools, and taxpayers have an orderly process, and a degree of certainty, moving forward.

Without the Gainful Employment Rule, meaningful oversight of accreditors, and an orderly borrower defense process, we face the prospect of for-profit schools continuing to line their pockets with taxpayer dollars while students and taxpayers experience another crushing wave of defaulted student loan debt.

III. THE GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT RULE

ED's gainful employment regulations are designed to further a simple idea—that students who attend career training programs should be able to repay their federal student loans once they graduate. The Rule allows prospective students to compare debt-to-income ratios across schools. By doing this, the Rule creates an incentive for schools to make good on their promises to students, and protects students from programs that will leave them saddled with debt and without job prospects in the careers for which they trained.

The Rule generally applies to vocational programs at for-profit institutions and to non-degree programs at community colleges. If graduates' annual loan payments exceed 30% of discretionary income and 12% of total earnings in two out of three consecutive years, the program loses access to Title IV federal student loans and grants. A program can also lose access if graduates' annual loan payments exceed 20% of discretionary income and 8% of total earnings for four consecutive years.

Data released on January 9, 2017 indicate that over 800 programs fail the Department's Gainful Employment metrics. For-profit institutions are responsible for 98% of the failing programs. But these 800 programs are only a portion of the for-profit school programs that have failed their students. With the Gainful Employment Rule pending, for-profit institutions have already eliminated hundreds of programs where students did not make enough money to cover their debt obligations, sometimes closing entire institutions that would have failed to provide students with gainful employment under the regulations.

It is essential that the Gainful Employment Rule be kept in place. Removing the Rule would open students and taxpayers up to the worst excesses of the for-profit higher education sector. It would greatly increase the regulatory and enforcement burden on states and accreditors by removing a central protection from the federal leg of the triad that oversees higher education in the United States.

IV. VIGOROUS OVERSIGHT OF ACCREDITORS BY ED

The federal government and states need strong partners with specialized knowledge of higher education to provide prospective quality assurance of schools in order to protect students and taxpayers. Accreditors are the organizations tasked with this role. Our experience, however, has shown that without substantive oversight by the federal government, some accreditors are negligent in their role.

The primary example of this dereliction of duty to students and taxpayers is the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges

and Schools (ACICS). As noted in our April 8, 2016 comment to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) opposing ACICS's application for renewal of recognition, a recent study found that only 35% of students enrolled in ACICS accredited programs graduate, the lowest rate for any accreditor.

NACIQI, a bipartisan panel, voted to revoke ACICS's recognition in June 2016. The Senior Department Official at ED agreed with NACIQI and revoked ACICS's recognition as an accreditor in September, 2016. ACICS appealed the decision to the Secretary of Education, and in December 2016, the Secretary denied ACICS's appeal.

An accreditor's failure to verify program quality at its accredited institutions jeopardizes the effectiveness of state enforcement efforts and regulations, exposing each state's students to subpar educational programs that provide little value, but for which each student may borrow tens of thousands of dollars in student loans, that are nearly impossible to discharge in bankruptcy.

A prime example of the harm that stems from lax accreditation was brought to light by state action against Westwood College. The Illinois Attorney General's Office sued Westwood College for systematically misrepresenting the ability of its criminal justice graduates to pursue careers in law enforcement. Thousands of Westwood students in Illinois borrowed up to \$75,000 each for careers they were unable to pursue because many police departments in Illinois, including the Chicago Police Department and the Illinois State Police, did not accept credits from nationally-accredited schools. Graduates of Westwood's criminal justice program have a median salary below the median salary of a 25-year old with a high school diploma, in part because they were locked out of the career they had been promised. This combination of high debt and limited job prospects is a crushing blow not only to students, but to taxpayers who bear the burden of defaults on these loans. Despite the Illinois Attorney General's January 2012 suit against Westwood, ACICS accredited Westwood up to the day it closed its doors in March 2016.

Similarly, on September 8, 2016, a Hennepin County Court found that the Minnesota School of Business and Globe University systematically misrepresented their criminal-justice program as allowing students to pursue careers as Minnesota police officers or probation or parole officers. The Minnesota School of Business and Globe University were accredited by ACICS throughout the time period of the fraud determined by the Court, and their Chief Operating Officer during that time was in fact the Chair of ACICS's board of directors. Terminating ACICS's recognition is a responsible action that will protect students and taxpayers for years to come.

V. THE BORROWER DEFENSE TO REPAYMENT RULE

In order to fairly and efficiently redress the harms suffered by for-profit college students, the borrower defense to repayment rule promulgated by ED must be allowed to take effect on July 1, 2017. As we noted in our August 1, 2016 comment to the proposed rule, students need a fair and transparent process to apply for borrower defense to repayment, and that process is missing from the existing regulation. The regulation finalized by ED also contains significant protections for taxpayers, including the requirement that schools cannot use arbitration agreements to bar students from bringing borrower defense claims directly against the school in court.

It is important to note that these regulations do not create a new defense to repayment. Congress established the borrower defense to repayment in the 1990s. Furthermore, over the last two years, ED has created substantial documentation of what constitutes a valid borrower defense claim under the existing regulation. Not only will the defense continue to be available, but it is likely that claims will continue to be asserted, particularly if regulations surrounding for-profit institutions, such as gainful employment, are loosened, allowing the bad practices of the past to return. Because the defense will continue to exist, a formal, transparent process to assert the defense, as reflected in the new repayment rule, is essential.

A basic sense of justice requires that the borrower defense to repayment rules be allowed to take effect. Millions of students paid tens of thousands of dollars each in federal student loan money to for-profit schools and received worthless degrees in return. Federal student loan debt is non-dischargeable in bankruptcy. These students cannot be left without a clear recourse. The new borrower defense to repayment regulations provide that recourse and should be allowed to take effect.

Our extensive experience in the higher education field, and our participation in the process of developing these recent policies and regulations, gives us unique insight into the abusive and deceptive practices of for-profit schools over the last ten years. We cannot overemphasize the harm to students and taxpayers that a rollback of federal protections would cause. Our offices hear from former for-profit students on a daily basis; sadly, many are hopeless. They have little hope of paying off their student loans without the career prospects promised by their schools. They have little hope of continuing their educations without the ability to transfer their credits from the many nationally-accredited for-profits to more rigorous regionally-accredited schools. Allowing for-profit schools unfettered access to federal student loan money without reasonable oversight and accountability is a mistake that American students and taxpayers should not be made to pay for again.

Sincerely,

Lisa Madigan, Illinois Attorney General;
Matthew Denn, Delaware Attorney General;
Tom Miller, Iowa Attorney General; Brian E. Frosh, Maryland Attorney General; Maura Healy, Massachusetts Attorney General;
Hector Balderas, New Mexico Attorney General; George Jepsen, Connecticut Attorney General; Douglas S. Chin, Hawaii Attorney General; Andy Beshear, Kentucky Attorney General; Janet T. Mills, Maine Attorney General.

Lori Swanson, Minnesota Attorney General; Eric Schneiderman, New York Attorney General; Josh Stein, North Carolina Attorney General; Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Attorney General; TJ Donovan, Vermont Attorney General; Karl A. Racine, District of Columbia Attorney General; Ellen F. Rosenblum, Oregon Attorney General; Peter Kilmartin, Rhode Island Attorney General; Bob Ferguson, Washington State Attorney General; Stephen H. Levins, Executive Director, Hawaii Office of Consumer Protection.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we know what open season means when it comes to these students. Gilbert Caro of Chicago can tell us. He was profiled in the Chicago Tribune article that I mentioned. Gilbert received his master of business administration degree from DeVry University. It is possibly the second largest for-profit college in the United States.

He took on nearly \$100,000 in debt for his master of business administration degree. He believed that debt was worth it because it was going to unlock the door to a high-paying job and financial security.

Do you have any idea what Gilbert Caro is doing now with his DeVry master of business administration degree? He is a prison guard in Joliet, IL.

While Gilbert has a good job, he certainly didn't need \$100,000 in debt to be a prison guard. It is far from what he was promised by DeVry when he signed up. Gilbert, like so many other students who go to for-profit colleges, was lured in by an amazing marketing campaign, flashy advertisements and empty promises.

In 2016, DeVry University, a for-profit school, agreed to a \$100 million settlement with the Federal Trade Commission for misleading "prospective students with ads that touted high employment success rates and income levels upon graduation."

DeVry is not alone. For-profit college giants like Corinthian and ITT Tech collapsed after they were caught engaging in similar deceptive, disgusting practices. The predatory practices of these and other for-profit colleges have left tens of thousands of students across the country, just like Gilbert Caro, with worthless degrees and a mountain of debt.

In fact, during the early part of this century, when for-profit colleges acted with near impunity, just the students from the for-profit colleges and universities accounted for 47 percent of all student loan defaults. Ten percent of the students coming out of high school went to for-profit colleges, and 47 percent of the student loan defaults were those same students—10 and 47. Why? Because they were overcharged for worthless degrees. That is why.

The University of Phoenix students held almost \$35 billion in cumulative debt. When I look at their flashy advertising and the commercials about how life is going to be perfect if you sign up at the University of Phoenix, it is hard for me to imagine how many of those students are burdened with debt they will never be able to repay.

We also know what open season means for the for-profit college industry and its executives and investors. Between 1998 and 2008, enrollment at for-profit colleges exploded by 225 percent—a lot of advertising, a lot of marketing, a lot of recruiting. With it came exploding profits for these schools.

By 2009, the seven largest publicly traded for-profit college companies were worth a combined \$51 billion—2009, \$51 billion.

In 2010, the University of Phoenix alone enrolled nearly half a million students, more than the combined enrollment of all the Big Ten universities.

When former Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin released his seminal report on the industry in

2012, for-profit colleges had grown to take in an incredible \$32 billion a year in Federal taxpayer dollars, 25 percent of all Federal aid in education, despite enrolling only 10 percent of the students that went to college after high school.

For-profit colleges and universities are the most heavily subsidized private businesses in America that exist. No one rivals them. No other industry is even close, and 80, 85, 90, 95 percent of the revenue of these so-called private, for-profit universities ends up coming out of the Federal Treasury.

John Murphy, the cofounder of the University of Phoenix, talks about those days by saying that what started off as a serious venture to educate students soon became too focused on "chasing stock prices."

To pump up those stock prices, companies needed students and they needed Federal student aid dollars. They proved that they would do and promise nearly anything to get "the juice," as Mr. MURPHY, the cofounder of the University of Phoenix, called it.

Boy, is this industry itching for the Trump administration to return to those bad old days. The Chicago Tribune reports that since the November 8 election, the stock prices of DeVry University, a for-profit college, have increased 52 percent.

In a recent New York Times article by Patricia Cohen entitled "For-Profit Schools, an Obama Target, See New Day Under Trump," the paid spokesman for the for-profit college industry, former Congressman Steve Gunderson, said he "has repeatedly spoken with members of Trump's transition team . . . White House domestic policy advisers . . . and congressional Republicans."

He is truly an insider. Mr. Gunderson promised: "We're going to get some regulatory relief."

Sadly, it looks like he is right. Take for example the delay of the gainful employment regulation. The Obama administration spent years writing and rewriting regulations to ensure that career training programs meet the statutory requirement to prepare students for "gainful employment."

Is that a radical idea—that if the Federal Government is going to provide grants and loans for a student to go to a school, the school should provide education and training that would lead to "gainful employment"?

My colleague from Oklahoma was on the floor a little while ago talking about overregulation, too many rules, and the impacts on small business. I would say that I am prepared to stand up and defend what the Obama administration did in saying that if you were going to lure a young man like Gilbert Caro into a school and put him \$100,000 in debt for a master's of business administration, he ought to at least end up with a job that is consistent with his education.

Today, Mr. Caro is a prison guard with \$100,000 of debt and a business administration degree of no value to him.

The gainful employment rule cuts off title IV funding for programs where graduates' ratio of student debt to earnings is too high. Literally, the students are too deeply in debt.

Prior to leaving office, the Obama Department of Education released the first set of gainful employment data. It showed that the graduates of public undergraduate certificate programs, like community colleges, earn \$9,000 more than their for-profit counterparts on average.

Think about that. You go to the virtually free community college, get a certificate, and you are going to earn \$9,000 more than if you get deeply in debt at one of the for-profit schools seeking the same degree. Of the programs that saddle students with too much debt compared to the income its students receive after their program, 98 percent of the violators were for-profit colleges.

This is not just a chance occurrence. It is a pattern. The rule is meant to protect students from taking on debt to attend programs that don't lead to a good-paying job. The rule is also meant to prevent billions in taxpayers' dollars on worthless programs.

Many for-profit colleges receive more than 90 percent of the revenue straight from Federal taxpayers. My Republican colleagues are committed to the free market system. So am I. I am committed to capitalism. I believe in it. Though, I think there is need for us to have regulation when it gets out of hand. That is why we have an antitrust division, for example.

In this circumstance, to argue that these are just private companies that are doing what ordinary people do when they start a business is to ignore the obvious. These for-profit colleges could not exist if they weren't receiving 80, 85, 90, and 95 percent of their revenue directly from the Federal Treasury.

In recent testimony before a House subcommittee, the Department of Education inspector general agreed that the gainful employment regulation "is a good rule in terms of protecting [students] and protecting taxpayers."

I sent a letter—along with Senators PATTY MURRAY, ELIZABETH WARREN, and nine other colleagues—expressing our concerns to Secretary DeVos about her delaying this rule. In our letter, we made clear that these delays undermine the rule and are going to be a danger to students and taxpayers.

It is also a betrayal of students not to ensure that they are treated fairly after they have been taken advantage of by for-profit schools.

Today, POLITICO reported that the Trump administration has dramatically slowed, if not stopped, processing applications from tens of thousands of students seeking to have their Federal student loans discharged after they have been defrauded by for-profit colleges.

Think about that. A student is about to sign up for a for-profit school.

Maybe he doesn't know much about higher education. His parents say: Listen, if you can get a Pell grant and a Federal student loan, this must be a really good school.

He is defrauded into signing up for a school that is too expensive and offers a worthless degree, and then they turn around and that school goes bankrupt. Now the student has the debt, no degree, and we are left holding the bag. What has happened in previous cases is the Federal Government stepped in and discharged the students from the debt if they were defrauded into signing up for the college.

Secretary Betsy DeVos has decided to slow that down—to slow down the discharge of these students' debt. Students who were misled or defrauded by their schools are eligible for discharge of their Federal student loans under the Higher Education Act—the law as it now exists. Yet during her confirmation process, Secretary DeVos would not commit to providing this relief to students—relief already specified in law—and has now effectively stopped processing the claims.

On the day before President Trump took office, more than 3,200 Illinois students applied to the Department of Education for relief. While the Department fails to process these claims, these students are left in the lurch. It adds insult to injury that students taken advantage of by for-profit colleges, nominally supervised and regulated by the Federal Government, are now being ignored by the Federal Government's Department of Education. That is unacceptable. It is unfair, and the Trump administration should change it.

We've started to see the true colors of the administration and Secretary DeVos when it comes to these students who have been victimized. As feared, the Department has thus far put for-profit and other commercial interests ahead of students and taxpayers.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). The Senator from Mississippi.

T-45 GOSHAWK FLEET

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak about a troubling issue for our Navy, our national defense, and a problem that should be of concern to Members of this body. Our Navy pilot training installations, including Naval Air Station Meridian in my home State of Mississippi, produce some of the finest pilots on the planet. They trained on the T-45 Goshawk.

On Friday, March 31, a significant number of T-45 instructor pilots at NAS Meridian, NAS Kingsville in Texas, and NAS Pensacola in Florida decided not to fly because of safety concerns. As you can imagine, this was an almost unprecedented act and brought considerable attention to a problem plaguing the Navy's tactical fighter community: a dramatic and sustained increase in so-called physiological episodes, or PE events, across the FA-18 Hornet, the EA-18 Growler,

and the training jet T-45 Goshawk fleets.

Physiological episodes occur when air crew experience diminished in-flight performance related to loss or contamination of oxygen, depressurization in the cockpit, or other factors. There are some technical terms I am going to mention to my colleagues. Hypoxic hypoxia occurs when pilots are getting insufficient oxygen. A more serious phenomenon called histotoxic hypoxia occurs when they are breathing contaminated oxygen, and of course depressurization occurs when the cabin pressure drops.

I have been assured that solving this physiological episode problem is now naval aviation's No. 1 one safety priority. As chairman of the Armed Services Committee's Seapower Subcommittee, I intend to continue the committee's oversight on this issue and, if necessary, include provisions in the upcoming Defense authorization bill to help. I applaud the work of our full committee chairman, Senator McCain, on his efforts so far. In fact, Senator McCain knows NAS Meridian very well, having served there as an instructor pilot. The airfield named "McCain Field" is in honor of Senator McCain's grandfather, ADM John McCain.

The Navy has told Congress and the American people repeatedly that its effort to mitigate and solve the problems of these PE events, including histotoxic hypoxia, are "resource unconstrained." In other words, the Navy has told us that money is no object in solving this problem, time is no object, and personnel is no object. As chairman of the Seapower Subcommittee, I intend to put that claim to test.

I would like to update my colleagues on the situation—my factfinding trip to Meridian, the state of play, and the plan going forward.

Beginning around 2010, a significant increase in reported PE events occurred, which led to the establishment of a Physiological Episode Team to identify root causes, develop mitigation efforts and solutions. This team mainly addressed the less serious problem of hypoxic hypoxia, but in recent months, there has been an alarming uptick in histotoxic hypoxia, a relatively new phenomenon involving contaminated oxygen in the cockpit. This has presented new challenges. The Navy has not identified a root cause for either type of hypoxia but has taken steps to mitigate effects through new maintenance rules, equipment changes and redesigns, and by adding data collection tools. However, there is currently not adequate mitigation for the more serious type of hypoxia, which has led to this halt in training.

As a search for the root causes continues, data collection is worth stressing. These aircraft do not have automatic sensors. In effect, the pilot is the sensor. Maximizing data collection on every training flight is critical. The collection of more data can help in the

analytical effort, which will get us closer to finding the root cause. After the instructor pilots' boycott—which I stress they had every right to do—the Navy issued a safety standdown and stopped all training flights for a period of days. This tactical pause allowed the Navy to send senior leadership to visit the training installations and hear directly from the instructor pilots and students. I respect the considered decisions of both of these groups, the instructor pilots who continued to fly and the ones who engaged in the boycott.

After meeting with Pentagon experts on this matter, I then made a fact-finding trip to NAS Meridian on April 8. I met with VADM Mike Shoemaker, the commander of Naval Air Forces. Admiral Shoemaker is the air boss who commands operational naval aviation forces. I also met with RADM Dell Bull, who is the chief of Naval Air Training, and I met with NAS Meridian's excellent installation leadership. Perhaps most important, I convened two focus groups: one group of instructor pilots who chose to fly and another group who chose not to fly. Both groups agree that a serious communication problem existed. The meetings with pilots demonstrated that some in the Navy hierarchy did not fully appreciate that this histotoxic hypoxia, contaminated oxygen, was a new and different phenomenon. In addition, the efforts of the Navy leadership were not being communicated effectively to the instructors and the students. In other words, the message was not getting down to the flight line, and the people on the flight line did not feel the message was getting back up to the hierarchy. Many felt their concerns were being ignored. The lack of action on the relatively new emergence of histotoxic hypoxia in the Goshawk only exacerbated the feeling among some that the Navy's actions were not matching its rhetoric.

Following my visit on April 8, the Navy took the important step of establishing a Physiological Episode Team for the T-45 alone. This is an important action which should bring more focused attention to the Goshawk community. The Navy ended the safety standdown on April 14 and resumed flying the next week under restricted conditions, such as flying at lower maximum altitudes and pulling fewer Gs. Of course, this is not the optimal way of training.

Then, following a subsequent PE incident in Kingsville and feedback from instructor pilots on the mitigation plan, the Navy has chosen to restrict training flights even further. This is a problem. The Navy tells us the current practice would allow a student to complete only about 20 to 25 percent of the curriculum. That is the status today. The Navy is already short on pilots, and continuing the status quo could further constrict the pilot production pipeline.

Where do we go from here? The Navy has brought three T-45s that have experienced physiological episodes to

Naval Air Station Patuxent River, MD, for extensive engineering investigation and analysis. They are taking the airplanes apart at Pax River. I applaud this action. Initial results of the testing should be available next week with more information to follow as the data is processed. At the same time, engineers have teamed up with pilots from both the test community and the training command, including at least one Meridian instructor pilot. They are investigating possible mitigations, such as alterations to pilot masks. This will allow our instructors and student pilots to get back to what they want to do most; that is, to fly and train new pilots to fly.

In addition, on April 21, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Moran, directed Admiral Scott Swift, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, to lead a month-long review of the facts, circumstances, and processes surrounding the recent episodes and how the Navy has addressed them. The Swift review will evaluate the Navy's organizational structures and processes and make recommendations for additional action.

These efforts are desperately needed. Still, we have no real diagnosis. Still, we have no real solution in the works. Senators should know this: As of 3 weeks ago, problems with histotoxic hypoxia at our naval training bases have earned the full attention of the top leadership in the Navy. These problems also have the full attention and oversight of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Seapower Subcommittee.

I look forward to continued interaction with the Navy leadership on this very important issue.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

ANTIQUITIES ACT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise to commemorate an important day for Utah and the western way of life. Just yesterday, the President signed an Executive order calling for review of monument designations across the United States, with a specific focus on two national monuments that have caused significant damage in my home State of Utah: Bears Ears and the Grand Staircase-Escalante.

Yesterday's Executive action is the culmination of countless hours of hard work and close coordination with the White House. When I first spoke with President Trump in the Oval Office during his first week on the job, I asked for his help in addressing the Bears Ears debacle. From day one, our President has been committed to helping us fix this disaster and ensuring that our smallest counties get a fair shake.

Throughout my Senate service, I have fought to give voice to the needs of our rural communities in the debate over public lands. Too often, past Presidents have ignored the concerns of Utah's families in declaring massive

monuments that threaten the western way of life. Too often, Presidents have abused the authority under the Antiquities Act to satisfy the demands of an extreme environmental agenda but no more.

Following yesterday's Executive order, I look forward to working with the Trump administration to address past abuses and restore the original meaning of the Antiquities Act. The Executive order directs Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke to review dozens of national monuments. This is a welcomed opportunity to set a new precedent for the responsible use of the Antiquities Act—a precedent that will take into account the needs of locals and foster greater trust between the States and the Federal Government as we work toward a shared goal of preserving our cultural antiquities.

For decades, I have sought to rein in Executive abuse under the Antiquities Act. That is why I traveled to Bears Ears just last week to hear firsthand from the local residents and Tribal members who have been hurt most by this monument designation. That is why, in the opening days of his Presidency, I met personally with President Trump in the Oval Office to discuss the public lands issue at length. I made clear to the President that Utahns have had enough of monument designations that come down unilaterally with zero support from locals, State officials, or Congress. Many of my own constituents have had their lives upended by this abuse of Executive power.

For too long, Utahns—many of whom depend on public lands for their very livelihood—have been at the mercy of out-of-touch bureaucrats who have little knowledge or personal connection to the land. President Obama only made their situation worse when he spurned the men and women of San Juan County by declaring the Bears Ears National Monument last December. In doing so, he defied the will of the State legislature, the Governor, and the entire Utah congressional delegation. President Obama's last-minute monument designation imposed even greater land use restrictions on a region that is already predominately controlled by the Federal Government.

As I have said before, in opposing the Bears Ears National Monument designation, I am in no way opposing the protection of lands that need to be protected. Indeed, there are many cultural sites in Utah that warrant preservation, and I am committed to working with the President and with Congress to protect those sacred places for future generations. But as I have also said previously, I believe that it is both unlawful and undemocratic for any President to seize millions upon millions of acres of land through the Antiquities Act—a law that was geared to give the President only narrow authority to designate special landmarks, such as a unique national arch or the site of old cliff dwellings.

We desperately need a new process for creating national monuments. Congress and impacted local communities, not the President alone, should have a say in decisions that restrict access to millions of acres of federally owned land. In making such decisions, the voice of the people is paramount.

Let me be clear: Abusing the Antiquities Act at the expense of local communities is not a sustainable public lands strategy. This strategy is counterintuitive because it puts Antiquities Act authority at great risk. The Antiquities Act was designed to provide specific protections for objects of antiquity, but out West, particularly in Utah, the law has become synonymous with land grabs and Federal overreach.

Restoring the legitimacy of Antiquities Act authority in the eyes of westerners requires a more measured approach to monument designations, an approach that takes into account the needs of locals and restores trust between States and the Federal Government.

To be clear, I have no objection when Presidents use the Antiquities Act according to its original purpose, which was to protect cultural antiquities by designating the minimum acreage necessary. Take, for example, the great State of Washington, which is home to several national monuments that were created in line with the law's original intent. The State's beautiful San Juan Islands cover only 970 acres, while the Hanford Reach encompasses 195,000 acres. At first glance, this amount of acreage may seem large, but compared to Utah's two most prominent national monuments, it is a tiny speck on the map. In fact, the total acreage of the San Juan Islands and Hanford Reach combined is only 6 percent of the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments.

In the State of Washington, Presidents have used the Antiquities Act within reason. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for my home State of Utah, where Presidents have repeatedly abused their authority under the law to declare eight national monuments that together span more than 3.3 million acres. In Utah, national monuments cover roughly 10 percent of all Federal land in a State where 67 percent of the land is already owned and dominated by the Federal Government. By contrast, only 28 percent of the land in the State of Washington is owned by the Federal Government. Of that Federal land, only 1.6 percent is locked away as a national monument. It is no wonder, then, that Utahns feel more threatened by the Antiquities Act than Washingtonians. This is a law that past Presidents have brandished as a weapon to cut up entire sections of our State.

This is far from the first time I have taken to the floor to speak out against Antiquities Act abuse. It certainly won't be the last. But I am encouraged by yesterday's Executive order with President Trump and Secretary Zinke

on our side. I believe we can plot a path forward to correct past abuses and forge a new precedent for future monument designations.

The President's Executive action signifies a critical milestone in the effort to include local voices in the management of our public lands. As the Trump administration reviews various national monuments, we must replace the top-down approach of past administrations with a grassroots strategy that engages local leaders, State officials, and Members of Congress in the decision-making process. Bringing all stakeholders to the table is essential to establish a new precedent that will undo the decades of abuse we have endured under, I think, false interpretations of the Antiquities Act.

I am eager to continue working with the President and the Secretary of the Interior to preserve our Nation's cultural treasures in a way that honors the original meaning of the Antiquities Act. I am likewise eager to involve locals in that process. With all parties working together, I firmly believe we can restore a relationship of trust between the States and the Federal Government in the management of public lands.

I am grateful for a President who is willing to work with us to reset the status quo. Better than any of his predecessors, President Trump understands the lasting damage wrought by past Presidents under the Antiquities Act. Indeed, in all my years of public service, I have never seen a President so committed to reining in the Federal Government and so eager to address the problems caused by these overreaching monument designations.

I wish to thank President Trump and Secretary Zinke for taking concrete steps to rein in abuse through yesterday's Executive order.

I also wish to thank the President's Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, who helped make yesterday's victory possible. Reince has done exceptionally well in one of the toughest jobs in all of Washington. The President is lucky to have Reince in the White House. I am lucky to call him a friend.

I also wish to thank my former chief of staff, Ron Porter, who is now a special assistant to the President and the Staff Secretary at the White House. Rob is an invaluable asset to the President's team and ours as well. Without him, yesterday's Executive order would never have come to fruition, at least in my opinion. Rob was among the finest men ever to serve as my chief of staff. I have enjoyed watching him succeed at the White House.

Yesterday we took a meaningful first step to fix past abuses under the Antiquities Act. Yet there is still much work to be done, and I look forward to working with the White House every step of the way.

With that, I am grateful for all those who have participated in helping us to right the wrongs that have been going on for far too long, as some of the

Presidents have played pure politics with public lands at the expense of the States involved, especially my State. It is easy to pick on a State that is 67 percent owned by the Federal Government and up to well over 70 percent owned by the Federal and State governments. It is easy to pick on these States—a small State indeed. But our State is resilient. We have some of the better people in Congress, and we also have the ability to be able to raise all kinds of hell here.

All I can say is that I just want my State treated fairly. I want to make sure the bureaucrats here in Washington don't walk all over the West because they think they can because of the wide expanses of territory and the many, many other aspects of the Western States that make them vulnerable to this type of inappropriate activity.

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

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

VA ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, one goal we share in this body, which is a very bipartisan goal, is keeping faith with our veterans, making sure no veteran is left behind.

I had the great honor to work as ranking member with Senator ISAKSON, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, on a bill called the Veterans First Act that unfortunately failed to cross the finish line during the last session. One of the major goals of that bill was to ensure accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs so employees of the VA who fail to do their job are held accountable. That goal of accountability is one of a number that must be pursued and will be sought during this session, including ending the backlog of appeals and providing better healthcare, ensuring skills training and job opportunities for our veterans.

Today the President signed an Executive order at the Department of Veterans Affairs to designate an individual responsible for accountability and whistleblower protection, a worthwhile first step. It is a commendable step toward accountability. But that individual and the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection must have real responsibility and power and must be insulated from any kind of political interference through establishment through statute. That office should be established by statutory authority. That is why I will be advocating and likely introducing legislation that involves supporting and training employees and listening to veterans about what they want from the VA through that Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection,

to provide real accountability to the Congress by requiring reporting to Congress about what it finds and real whistleblower protection, so that anybody who complains about the VA's misdirected or misguided action is assured protection against any kind of revenge or retaliation, which is the essence of whistleblower protection, and a Senate-confirmed director so that the accountability function is, again, accountable to us. That kind of statutory embodiment is necessary to make sure that the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection has power and reporting requirements so that it is accountable to us as elected representatives and advocates for our veterans.

My hope is that the Senate and House will adopt that provision, one that was contained in the Veterans First bill that Senator ISAKSON and I championed during the last Senate and which I hope we will pursue again in a very bipartisan way.

I also hope that the Senate will take up and pass S. 12, the Increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability to Veterans Act of 2017. My colleague, Senator MORAN, a cosponsor with me, spoke about it earlier today. It would provide reduction of benefits for senior executives and certain healthcare employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs if they have been convicted of a felony in connection with their work. VA employees who commit serious crimes in connection with their employment should not be receiving pensions. That is one of the key provisions to activate a deterrent to misconduct and also to assure that misconduct is adequately punished.

Accountability for leaders who manage the Department of Veterans Affairs Employee Affairs would be another goal of this legislation, S. 12, so that the men and women who hire and fire are themselves evaluated when they do those jobs.

These kinds of details are important—as important as any new office with an individual whose unspecified powers may include them or not. Right now they do not, under the Executive order, specifically include such enumerated powers. That is our job, to make sure that this office of accountability is real in its responsibility, is clearly assigned in its functions, is held accountable for its performance and has real teeth, not just rhetoric.

I am hopeful that we will move ahead with this very, very important office to make sure that our veterans receive what they deserve—real accountability, a genuine assurance that the people who serve them will do their jobs, not just adequately but excellently. That is the goal that I believe we will share.

I welcome this Executive order. I believe we can and must do more to make sure that the VA keeps faith with our veterans and leaves no veterans behind.

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 bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

All time has expired.

The question is, will the Senate advise and consent to the Acosta nomination?

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 60, nays 38, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 116 Ex.]

YEAS—60

Alexander	Gardner	Murkowski
Barrasso	Graham	Nelson
Blunt	Grassley	Paul
Boozman	Hatch	Perdue
Burr	Heitkamp	Portman
Capito	Heller	Risch
Cassidy	Hoeven	Roberts
Cochran	Inhofe	Rounds
Collins	Isakson	Rubio
Corker	Johnson	Sasse
Cornyn	Kennedy	Scott
Cortez Masto	King	Shelby
Cotton	Lankford	Strange
Crapo	Lee	Sullivan
Cruz	Manchin	Tester
Daines	McCain	Thune
Enzi	McCaskill	Tillis
Ernst	McConnell	Warner
Fischer	Menendez	Wicker
Flake	Moran	Young

NAYS—38

Baldwin	Feinstein	Murray
Bennet	Franken	Reed
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Sanders
Booker	Harris	Schatz
Brown	Hassan	Schumer
Cantwell	Heinrich	Shaheen
Cardin	Hirono	Stabenow
Carper	Kaine	Udall
Casey	Klobuchar	Van Hollen
Coons	Leahy	Warren
Donnelly	Markey	Whitehouse
Duckworth	Merkley	Wyden
Durbin	Murphy	

NOT VOTING—2

Peters Toomey

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—JOINT RESOLUTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, colleagues, it is my understanding that the four corners who are working on the omnibus appropriations are very, very close to agreement. We still need

a few days to process the larger bill. The House has posted a 1-week CR to keep the government open. We are prepared to clear the 1-week CR on this side of the aisle.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the text of a joint resolution, which is at the desk—that is, a 1-week continuing resolution—be printed in the RECORD; further, that if the Senate receives a joint resolution from the House, the text of which is identical to the text of the joint resolution printed in the RECORD, the joint resolution be considered to have been read three times and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered to have been made and laid upon the table; provided further, that if the language is not identical, then this order be vitiated.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, colleagues, I am objecting because we still have to resolve the issue of poison pill riders before Democrats can agree to the short-term CR.

Let's make no mistake about it, we are indeed making great progress. I thank the majority leader. He has been cooperative and extremely helpful throughout the process. I thank Chairman COCHRAN and Senator LEAHY the same. But our position has been clear, and it is nothing new: no poison pill riders. The sooner we can resolve this issue, the quicker we can have an agreement on appropriations for 2017.

So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I would only add—not to prolong the discussion, but I don't think the failure to pass the 1-week CR necessarily impacts in a positive way the concerns the Democratic leader has. But that is his call to make. This 1-week CR is cleared on our side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, there is a simple way to resolve it, and that is, the Republican leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House just agree to no poison pill riders.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, 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.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to make sure my colleagues on

the other side of the aisle know that if we don't pass the 1-week extension, the miners' healthcare expires, but it is in the 1-week extension. If we don't pass the 1-week extension, the miners' healthcare revision expires.

Mr. SCHUMER. We are aware.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to reconsider the vote, and I move to table the motion to reconsider.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

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.

25TH ANNIVERSARY VERMONT SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Vermont Small Business Development Center, VtSBDC, is joining SBDC's across the country in celebrating its 25th anniversary as a crucial resource for entrepreneurs. These centers provide services to facilitate the creation, sustainability, and growth of viable businesses. In Vermont, it is no secret that we take particular pride in our local businesses. Our entrepreneurs and their businesses are at the heart of our vibrant communities, and they are the roots of a thriving economy.

Over the past 25 years, VtSBDC has helped countless businesses capitalize on their potential. From glassblowers to forestry and sugarmakers to restaurants, VtSBDC has delivered thousands of hours of professional business counseling and training that is focused on strategic planning, business development, financial planning, and cash flow management. After the devastation of Tropical Storm Irene, VtSBDC reached out with State and Federal partners to offer small business owners the assistance and support necessary to undergo full recovery efforts. I am regularly reminded of VtSBDC's worth to entrepreneurs through client testimonials, regularly highlighting that, without the assistance of VtSBDC staff, their business would not have been able to reach the next levels. In addition to working with individuals to achieve their dreams, VtSBDC has also supported business incubators, or coworking spaces, where fledgling businesses and industries find their footing alongside other new businessowners.

Founded as a pilot program run by the Small Business Administration in 1977, national small business development centers have a long history proving public-private partnerships and,