

loud, clear voice by passing this legislation through the Senate as soon as possible.

Finally, as well, the contradictions, I might add, in the administration are enormous. Nikki Haley must be so embarrassed today. She forthrightly said that we are going to be tough on Russia and do additional sanctions one day, and then the President contradicted her the next. Do they talk to each other? Do they have a set plan? Or is it just up to the President's whim, day by day, moment by moment? When it comes to Russia, it is far too serious to rely on whim, changing attitudes, and maybe an 800-pound gorilla in the room. There is something the President is worried about.

#### REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, today is tax day. That is probably America's least favorite holiday. It is appropriate today to look back at what has happened since the Republicans passed their tax bill last year. Since the beginning of the tax debate, Republicans have insisted their bill is about cutting taxes for working Americans. Even though the crux of their bill was a massive corporate tax cut, they said that workers would benefit the most. Even though it would direct 83 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent, they said that the bill would be a "middle-class miracle."

How many middle-class people today think that tax bill is a miracle? Not many. The only way that could have been true was if corporations had decided to invest a substantial amount of their newfound profits in workers. That is what Republicans, after all, argued would happen.

We Democrats warned that if you gave the big corporations the lion's share of the tax cuts, corporations would do what they always do when they have higher profits and extra cash—distribute it amongst themselves, have a nice little party. Unfortunately, the evidence is mounting that our predictions, as much as we wish they hadn't come true, were prescient.

Since the passage of the tax bill—listen to this—corporations have spent over \$250 billion on share buybacks. That is putting corporations on track to spend between \$800 billion and \$1 trillion on share buybacks this year alone, outstripping the previous pace.

People may ask: What is a share buyback? Here is what it is. A corporation has a lot of money. Some things they can do are pay workers more, give family leave, treat their employees better. Another thing they could do is invest in new plants and equipment, new training to make that corporation more efficient and to sell more of its goods. Those are good things.

What is a bad thing? Buying back the stock. What is buying back the stock? The corporation says: We have a million shares outstanding. If we buy back

100,000 of them, the price of the remaining ones will go up.

Who benefits? Above all, those who have a lot of the stock shares—the CEOs of the corporations and the wealthiest heads of those companies. Who else benefits? Shareholders. Eighty percent of all shares in America, despite pensions and despite 401(k)s, are held by the 10 percent—the richest people in America. And one-third of all shares, totally, go to people overseas. That is who benefits from stock buybacks: corporate CEOs, wealthy shareholders, people overseas—more than the average American worker. That is what has happened.

Listen to this. According to a recent analysis by JUST Capital, only 6 percent of the capital allocated by companies from the tax bill's savings has gone to employees, while nearly 60 percent has gone to shareholders. That statistic gets to the very core of the debate. Who benefited from the tax bill? It was mainly wealthy CEOs, a lot of foreigners, and the wealthiest people in America—not the average working person.

As USA Today put it last week:

The number of companies letting workers know they are getting a bonus, raise or other form of financial compensation has slowed to a trickle. Most of the extra cash from tax savings is going into the pockets of stock shareholders through dividend increases and companies buying back their own stock in hopes of boosting its price.

The whole theory of the Republican tax bill can be summed up in two words: "trickle down." The whole theory was to lavish corporations and the already wealthy with tax cuts and maybe the benefits might trickle down to everyone else. We are already seeing the balloon burst on that idea as corporations dedicate an enormous percentage of the tax savings to stock buybacks and only a sliver to worker compensation. That is why the Republican bill is not popular. A poll out from NBC News/Wall Street Journal—Wall Street Journal, hardly a working man's newspaper—showed that only 27 percent of Americans think the tax cuts were a good idea. That is fitting news on tax day, one of the least popular days of the year.

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. WARREN. 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.

#### 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 consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Carlos G. Muniz, of Florida, to be General Counsel, Department of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12:30 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

#### CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTION

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, just weeks after making it harder to stop discrimination in mortgage lending, the Senate is now on the verge of voting to make it harder to stop discrimination in auto lending.

About 40 years ago, Congress passed the important civil rights law called the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. That law said companies couldn't discriminate when offering a loan. It was a simple idea: Loan terms should be based on creditworthiness, not on the color of someone's skin.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is one of the Federal agencies responsible for enforcing that 40-year-old law. The CFPB found out that when auto dealers were helping customers get financing for a car loan, minority customers were often given worse loans than their White counterparts. The underlying reason was something called a dealer reserve, where the lenders providing the financing for a car loan gave the dealer discretion to mark up the interest rate on the loan and the dealer could keep some of the additional profit from the markup. The problem was the growing evidence that dealers marked up loans higher for minorities than for Whites with similar credit profiles.

In 2013, the CFPB issued guidance to these lenders about how they could make sure they were complying with the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. They could institute more rigorous oversight of their auto financing process to get rid of these discriminatory practices or they could stop using the dealer reserves that facilitated these discriminatory practices and just pay dealers a flat fee per loan instead.

After issuing the guidance, the CFPB found that a few auto lenders were not following the guidance. It entered into settlements with Fifth Third and the financing arms of both Honda and Toyota. These settlements returned millions of dollars to people who had been charged more for car loans simply based on the color of their skin.

A lot of auto dealers and auto lenders don't like the CFPB's guidance, which brings us to today, when the Senate is about to vote on reversing this guidance and prohibiting the CFPB from ever issuing similar guidance again.

This is part of the broader Republican attack on the efforts to fight economic discrimination. House Republicans have passed multiple bills that would make it harder to enforce fair lending laws. Since assuming control of the CFPB, Mick Mulvaney has taken steps to undermine the agency's Office of Fair Lending.

The vote today is also a troubling followup to the recent bank deregulation bill that just passed the Senate. That bill reduced data reporting requirements for 85 percent of the banks in this country, making it harder for Federal agencies to monitor mortgage lending, uncover discrimination, and enforce the law. Now the Senate is considering rolling back guidance that explains how lenders can avoid discrimination when providing auto loans.

Let's be clear. Discrimination in auto lending is alive and well. The National Fair Housing Alliance recently sent two people—one White, one non-White—to eight car dealerships in Virginia. Even though the non-White person had better credit than the White person in each instance, the non-White person ended up with a more expensive loan half of the time. Think about that—better credit and paid more for the loan. In fact, in those cases, the non-White person would have paid \$2,500 more over the life of their loan than the White person with worse credit.

The last thing we should be doing is making it harder to crack down on that kind of discrimination. As a wide array of civil rights and consumer groups recently wrote, "Discrimination in auto lending continues to extract billions of dollars a year in extra loan payments from borrowers of color; Congress should be taking action to end this injustice, not interfering with efforts to enforce fair lending laws."

A vote in favor of the resolution today is a vote to support the Trump administration's systemic dismantling of fair lending laws in this country. It is a vote in favor of Mick Mulvaney's efforts to leash up the CFPB's Office of Fair Lending. It is a vote in favor of allowing some auto lenders and dealers to continue to charge African Americans and Latinos hundreds and thousands more just because of their race.

I urge all of my colleagues to oppose this resolution.

Thank you.

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.

Ms. STABENOW. 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 Senator from Michigan.

COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION BILL

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, today I rise to talk about an issue that is extremely important to my State of Michigan. In Michigan, we take great pride in the fact that we are never more than 6 miles from a body of water or more than 85 miles from one of our incredibly amazing Great Lakes.

In fact, one out of five jobs in Michigan in some way is tied to the water. So this is really about who we are. It is in our DNA in Michigan when we talk about the Great Lakes. In terms of the country, it is important for all of us to care about the Great Lakes because 95 percent of the surface fresh water in the United States is in the Great Lakes. It is 20 percent of the world's fresh water, but 95 percent of our fresh water in the United States is in the Great Lakes. Through our Great Lakes Task Force, we are always working together. All the Senators and House Members around the Great Lakes have a special responsibility to step up and protect them, but we all should care because of the incredible natural resources they provide.

Unfortunately, perhaps no other body of water in the United States has been as harmed by invasive species as the Great Lakes. It is ballast water that has brought the majority of these invasive species into the Great Lakes. They are first brought in from salt water into the Great Lakes, and then they are moved around within the Great Lakes after they get there.

I am very concerned about legislation in front of us that would weaken our ability to protect the Great Lakes. We need to do everything we can to maintain strong ballast water standards and maintain what we need to under the Clean Water Act to protect the waters. It is incredibly important for me to speak out, along with my colleagues, about what is in front of us.

I strongly support the Coast Guard bill. In fact, I strongly support the Coast Guard. I think we have the best and the brightest in the Michigan Coast Guard. I am very proud of them, but I am deeply opposed to attaching a bill to that critical legislation that would undermine our ability to fight invasive species under the Clean Water Act and that would take away the rights of our States to be able to protect our waters.

This new version of what has been dubbed VIDA, or the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, requires the Coast Guard to set ballast water standards in consultation with the EPA, but it has always been in reverse. The Coast Guard is not responsible for the protections. They do fantastic work, but it is not their job in terms of water quality. That is the EPA. Unfortunately, this legislation that has been attached to the Coast Guard bill removes the authority to regulate ballast water discharges under the Clean Water Act. That is a problem for a lot of reasons.

First of all, it means that States like the Great Lakes State of Michigan will

see our authority to set standards disappear, repealing what the State of Michigan—the Governor of the State and the legislature—has done over the years to protect the water that literally surrounds our peninsula. It means that legal challenges to ensure strong standards will be curtailed as well.

Why is this important?

Legal action under the Clean Water Act has arguably been the primary driver for requiring new ballast water standards. Preventing invasive species from hitching a ride in ballast water is really a big deal. In fact, the cost of fighting invasive species nationwide is about \$120 billion every year. In Michigan, we are spending anywhere up to \$800 million a year dealing with invasive species that are already here. One of our big nightmares is that Asian carp that have been coming up the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers will hit the Great Lakes. If we don't have the capacity to do what we need to do there, it is going to be a disaster for the Great Lakes.

Let me also say that on the Great Lakes, we have what we call our lakers, which are huge cargo vessels. If you have been to the Great Lakes, you can look out at it. It looks like you are looking at the ocean with big barges. We call the Great Lakes, of course, the ocean without the salt or sharks. We have barges.

I have been a strong supporter of the lakers. They are vital to our economy, and they really do a wonderful job. But unfortunately, when we look at protecting the Great Lakes, giving a de facto exemption, which is in this bill, from these vessels ever having to be required to install ballast water control technologies is not in the interest of protecting our waters.

The good news is that, as the lakers travel within the Great Lakes, they aren't bringing in the salt water ballast, but, unfortunately, they move them around. We saw this with zebra mussels that were in the lower part of the Great Lakes. Unfortunately, they get moved around all the way up to Lake Superior because of the vessels that are moving. It does make a difference having those standards.

Beyond the ballast water though, one of the things that I just recently found out about this addition to the Coast Guard bill that is concerning in a very large way, on top of all this, is that it not only curtails State ballast water laws, but many States have regulations to limit other discharges of oils and chemicals and so on. Often times, these rules are in place to protect sensitive areas like oyster beds or corals, which, again, are out in the salt water. For us, this is about the fact that it would remove the ability for States to regulate other harmful chemicals.

I will give you one example that is becoming a nightmare for us in Michigan. I think it will eventually be in every State. That is a runoff of a regulated type of foam that has been used

forever in fire suppression. There is a group of chemicals that they dump called PFOS. That is the acronym. We have fire suppression equipment that has been used at training facilities and others on our Air Force bases, Army bases, National Guard bases, and so on, for a long time. It is not used anymore. On the west side of Michigan, we have private companies making footwear and other kinds of products where these water-resistant chemicals have been used in all kinds of ways for a long time.

Across the country, States like Michigan are struggling to address serious contamination of drinking water caused by a chemical that has been used in this firefighting foam. At our National Guard training center, Camp Grayling in Northern Michigan—which is the largest one in the country for the National Guard—we have a beautiful lake. We have a lot of lakes. This beautiful lake is in the middle of this very large facility. We now see this foam flowing on top of the water. For people with private property around the lake, this foam chemical now is floating on top of the water. The townships are looking at ways that they can go from individual wells to some kind of municipal water system, but it is touching every part of Michigan. My guess is that before it is done, because these types of foams were used all over the country, we are going to see it everywhere, and we are going to have real challenges.

I am very appreciative that the Department of Defense appropriations money was added for a study to look at the broader safety issues and public health issues that relate to this so we know that the right standards are set. There are standards now, but we need to be looking more deeply at the impacts on ground water and so on. We are going to have a lot of remediation to do for the public sector as well as private sector.

Here is the problem. This bill says that States can no longer issue any regulation on the use of these foams which may contain toxic substances. It is not only ballast water that we care deeply about. States that don't have the beautiful Great Lakes around them or our coastlines are impacted by these toxic substances that we are finding more of every day—these chemicals that were used everywhere. I am sure people thought they were safe when they were using them. Now we are finding out they were not, and they have a huge impact.

This is especially problematic when the States—not the Federal Government—are on the frontline in addressing this new awareness of citizens about the impact of the ground water contamination. This bill would take away the capacity for States to be able to act. I don't think any of the supporters of the bill intended for this to happen. In fact, many of the proponents of the bill have been leaders in the effort in the Senate to address these chemicals.

I urge us to take a step back, and before voting to proceed to concur with this, that we take a step back together and take a look at the broader implications of the way this language is put together. I strongly support the Coast Guard bill. I think everybody here is going to regret it if this moves forward with this additional language. Certainly, I am not going to support it. Because of the ballast water concerns alone, I would not. But you add on top of that taking away the State's capacity to be able to address these toxic chemicals that we are now finding everywhere—not only in Michigan, but across the country—and I think they should be sending off alarm bells to everyone.

I know that Senator CARPER and the EPW Committee have been working on a real solution to address this issue. I personally think we can do that on a bipartisan basis. I hope we will.

This is a vote, I think, that many will regret down the road as this PFOS chemical contamination becomes more widespread. The firefighting foam wasn't just used in Michigan or in a few States. It was around the country. I think taking away the State's ability to be able to address that in their State is a very serious issue. I would urge my colleagues to vote no on this motion. Let us go back and take another look at it and figure out some different language. Certainly, we all support the Coast Guard. If we want to take VIDA out and do the Coast Guard bill, that is great. If we want to look at the issues around VIDA—and I appreciate the concerns around that—let's do it in a way that makes sense for the people we represent and the States who need to be able to act now. In Michigan, this has become a huge issue around this group of toxic chemicals.

I urge a "no" vote. Whenever we vote—I believe it may be tomorrow—I hope that we take a step back and work together to get this right.

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

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

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, today is the last tax day under the old, awful, and broken tax system that the American people have had to put up with for decades.

Under the tax relief law that Republicans passed in this body in December—it was signed by President Trump and passed the House, as well—we now have a simpler and fairer system and, so importantly, one that is much less expensive for American families.

One big thing we did in the tax law was to double the standard deduction that people can take. This is what it

means. This one change alone, all by itself, means that 95 percent of taxpayers will be taking the standard deduction from now on. It means people will not have to waste a lot of time wading through paperwork and boxes of receipts. People will not have to spend hours chasing after little itemized deductions, as they have done year after year on tax day. They will not just be crossing their fingers, hoping they are doing everything right, hoping they don't overpay, and hoping they don't run afoul of the law by not paying the amount that is required by law. It is going to be much simpler and much fairer.

When I thought of all of the things we have been working on with tax relief, tax reform, tax reductions, to me, it can be summed up in just two words: simpler and lower. Taxes needed to be lower, and they needed to be simpler. So what we are seeing now is both simpler and lower taxes. That is a big change that people are going to notice. They are noticing it now in their paychecks, but they are really going to notice it next April 15 when they file their taxes.

Americans will not have to wait until next year to see a lot of the benefits of this tax relief law. They are seeing it today because the law wasn't just tax reform and simplification; it was an immediate, big tax cut as well. It means hard-working Americans are seeing money in their paychecks, and they are seeing it today.

Average wages have gone up nearly 3 percent. That is a big increase compared to the stagnant wage growth we saw during the entire previous administration.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, American workers brought home almost \$200 billion more in February than they did in December. Some of it came right away in the form of bonuses that companies handed out because of the tax law; some of it came when employers cut the amount of income tax that they were withholding from a worker's paycheck; and some of it was because of higher wages we have seen with raises announced across the country. It all adds up to about \$200 billion more for hard-working Americans.

That is money people can then spend on things that are important to them and their families. It is about American families' priorities, not necessarily how the government thinks it can spend its money better than the American people. It is money people can save for things such as tuition for their kids, a new car, or whatever they want to save for. People notice that kind of difference in their take-home pay. It makes a big difference in their lives.

Another thing that happens when we cut taxes is that businesses have more money to hire more workers. I have seen it happen in Wyoming. I have seen it as I travel the State. In city after city, town after town, community after

community, businesses are hiring more workers locally. In fact, the American economy has added over 600,000 new jobs just since Republicans passed and President Trump signed the tax law in December.

These are jobs at places like Kroger. That grocery store chain—and they have a number of convenience stores, as well, serving all around Wyoming—said last week that they are going to be hiring 11,000 new workers. Those aren't just people at headquarters; these are people in stores all across the country—cashiers, produce clerks, workers in prepared food sections of the store. It is good for the American economy and good for the communities where these people are being hired.

If someone has money in their pocket, they can decide to spend some of it, give some to charity, invest some, or save some—whatever they want to do. It is their money.

In some of the stores similar to Kroger in Cheyenne, Casper, Gillette, Rock Springs—but we are seeing it all around the country—stores are hiring more people. They are increasing benefits for people who want to continue their education or get a GED. All of these things are benefiting our country. The companies say it is directly because they are saving money under the tax law.

We have heard this story again and again. You have heard it in your State, and I have heard it in mine. They are hiring because they are saving more money under the tax law.

A lot of companies are paying more because they want to hold on to the workers they have. That is one reason the initial jobless claims number for the first week of April has dropped. The claims of people who are out of work and have filed for benefits from the government have dropped by 9,000 people. That is a sign that people are keeping their jobs and don't need to apply for unemployment benefits.

The number of jobless claims has been low now for the longest stretch ever. They have been keeping records since 1967, and nobody has ever seen it like this.

One economist looked at all the good news and said: "The job market is rip-roaring." The American people don't need an economist to tell them that. All they need to do is look around their own hometown. I see it at home in Wyoming. Businesses are hiring. Workers are getting bonuses. They are getting raises. They are seeing more money in their paychecks. People all across America are feeling better about their jobs. I see confidence and optimism at home. People are feeling better about their own personal financial situation. It is certainly the case at home in Wyoming.

There have been a couple of surveys that have come out recently. In one of them, the Pew Research Center found that the number of people who say that this economy is in good or excellent condition is now the highest it has

been in two decades—20 years. That is the confidence of the American people in the economy.

In a second survey, the polling firm Gallup found that investor optimism is at "the highest levels . . . in 17 years." When we talk about investors, we are talking about families in Wyoming who are saving for their retirement. They have seen the effects of Republican policies like the tax relief law. They have seen what we are doing to cut regulations so the economy can grow, so people can be free to live their lives and make decisions for themselves. They have seen what happens when Washington starts to put America first again. All of those things, added together, make people confident in our economy, and it gives them optimism for the future.

The only people who aren't feeling optimistic right now are the Democrats in Congress who, across the board, voted against this tax relief law. Republicans voted to lower taxes, and Democrats voted for higher taxes. Now Democrats seem to be desperately trying to spin their way out of the terrible choices that they have made.

Over the weekend, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, NANCY PELOSI, said that the Republican tax cuts "are unfair to America's working families." Who is she kidding? The only thing unfair would be if Democrats get their wish and repeal the tax cuts that we passed and raise taxes, which apparently is what they want to do.

I have spoken to a lot of working families at home in Wyoming. They are overjoyed at the extra money they have gotten in their paychecks since the Republicans cut taxes. Americans know that the economy has created 605,000 new jobs since we passed tax relief. They know we are breaking records for low numbers of people filing for unemployment. People see that the average wages are up—much higher than they were a year ago. They know the Republicans cut taxes, doubled the standard deduction, got rid of the ObamaCare individual mandate tax, and changed the death tax, which is a big issue for our farmers and ranchers in Wyoming and for small business owners.

Hard-working Americans who just filled out their taxes know the Republicans are on their side, and the last thing they want is to hear Democrats talking about raising taxes again.

Thank you.

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. 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 TAX PLAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, as millions of Americans in Illinois and

across the Nation finish filing their taxes, I come to the floor to discuss the most recent tax reform bill considered by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Last year, Republicans followed through with their promise and used a special procedural approach called reconciliation, which allowed them to bring a tax reform plan to the floor outside of regular order and without committee hearings and the ordinary amendment-invoked process. Democrats were not really participants in this but only observers, under the reconciliation process. That tax plan has now become the law of the land, and now we know what it is doing. It has created a massive tax giveaway to the largest multinational corporations, to the wealthiest corporate CEOs, and to well-connected campaign donors.

In passing this plan, Republicans said that if they could just cut taxes enough for large corporations, these corporations would invest in America, give breaks to their employees, and create more employment. The benefits of these tax breaks to the corporations supposedly would trickle down to workers in the form of higher wages, and the economy would explode, creating new jobs.

The tax plan was voted on favorably by every Republican in the U.S. Senate, and it added \$1.5 trillion to the national debt, to fund these massive corporate tax cuts. So what did the corporations do with their tax cut benefits? They turned around and took their taxpayer-funded tax cut and gave their wealthy CEOs and shareholders a raise. So far, in 2018, large corporations have announced over \$235 billion in stock buybacks—far outpacing the rate of companies announcing one-time bonuses for their workers. Not only that, but more than 100,000 employees in large corporations have actually been terminated. You couldn't get further from tax relief for working families if you tried.

It gets worse. The Congressional Budget Office reported last week that the Republican tax plan will actually cost another \$300 billion beyond the \$1.5 trillion estimate. Our children and grandchildren will pay off the cost of this tax cut for the wealthiest people in America and the largest corporations. So much for the promise that these tax cuts would pay for themselves. It will cost us roughly \$1.9 trillion over 10 years for these tax cuts for major corporations and wealthy people. This is a burden our children and grandchildren will bear.

So what are we hearing now when it comes to the budget? Just last week, after seeing that the plan they voted for was expected to add \$1.9 trillion to the deficit, Republican Tennessee Senator CORKER said: "If it ends up costing what has been laid out here, it could well be one of the worst votes I've made."

The so-called fiscal conservatives here in the Senate didn't seem as concerned about the deficit when they

were voting for a 10-figure increase that would go to cut taxes for wealthy people and large corporations. But make no mistake—as predictably as night follows day, we now have a renewed call in the House of Representatives for a budget amendment—a constitutional, balanced budget, “stop me before I sin again” amendment. Now that Republicans have exploded the deficit, the absolutely vital public assistance programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are now at risk. If there is a balanced budget amendment, they have said that we have to get to the basic programs like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid to make up the difference. I think it is unconscionable to give tax breaks to people who are well off and comfortable and then to cut the basics of human existence for many senior citizens in Social Security and Medicare.

The devastating first act of the Republican tax plan and fiscal conservatives, as they define it, has exploded our Nation’s deficit and provided enormous benefit to those who, frankly, don’t need it. We can’t let the second act be a balanced budget constitutional amendment that will end up pillaging the basic programs that help low- and middle-income Americans the most in the name of fiscal responsibility.

#### COAST GUARD AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, there was a poll in the city of Chicago a few years ago by the Chicago Tribune, and they asked the residents of that city: What is the greatest asset in the city of Chicago? Overwhelmingly, they all said the same thing: Lake Michigan. That is understandable. If you have been to that beautiful city and seen that lakefront and realized the impact it has on the quality of life, it is understandable that Chicagoans would value it the most.

Millions of people visit Lake Michigan each year. They swim, kayak, and boat. They just walk along the beach and have little picnics. It really is a major asset. The lake is the primary source of drinking water for more than 10 million people not just in Illinois but in Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, and many other States. Together, the Great Lakes support a multibillion-dollar fishing industry, dozens of local economies, and thousands of small businesses. However, the Coast Guard reauthorization bill, which could come before the Senate as early as tomorrow, will do irreversible damage to the Great Lakes, and I am urging my colleagues to oppose it.

It is not uncommon in this Chamber for Members from each State to stand up from time to time and tell a story to their colleagues about something in their State of great personal value to them and to plead with their colleagues to understand what this means and to stand by them in protecting a great natural resource or a great natural asset.

The bill itself—the Coast Guard reauthorization—I don’t have a problem

with. It does a lot of good things for an important part of our military service. It helps equip the Coast Guard with the tools they are going to need so they can keep us safe and be part of the critical homeland security mission. There is, however, one provision in the bill that should not be there.

This bill was reported by the Commerce Committee. One of the provisions in this bill should never have started in the Commerce Committee; it should be in the Environment Committee. It is known as the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, or VIDA. This provision in the Coast Guard reauthorization bill will undermine the Clean Water Act just to give a generous deal to one specific industry.

VIDA exempts the shipping industry from being regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act. It places it instead under the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard is a great organization, and there are great men and women serving there. The Coast Guard, however, has no expertise in setting standards for clean water; the Environmental Protection Agency has that responsibility. This bill takes that responsibility away from the EPA.

This bill also preempts the States and their rights to implement their own standards that would meet specific needs and limits the public’s ability to seek action in court.

Who opposes this bill? The attorney general of the State of Illinois, as well as the attorneys general from New York, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington, so far.

The bill’s supporters say all of this is necessary to establish a uniform national standard, but the bill doesn’t do that. Instead, it cuts a big Great Lakes-sized doughnut hole out of its own standard and exempts ships operating on the Great Lakes from meeting the same “best available control technology” standard that all other shippers are required to meet. It is a sweetheart deal for shippers on the Great Lakes.

VIDA also makes it almost impossible for anyone to ever require ships operating on the Great Lakes to install new pollution controls in the future. This means these ships would likely never be required to use any available technology to prevent the spread of invasive species like mussels, blood red shrimp, and Asian carp.

I can’t tell you how much money we have spent to stop the Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes. We think it is going to destroy the Great Lakes as a marine habitat if we are not careful, and we have stopped them so far. This irresponsible measure as part of the Coast Guard reauthorization goes in exactly the opposite direction. It opens the door for invasive species invading our Great Lakes through ballast water. That is unacceptable.

Chicagoans deserve to know that ships operating on Lake Michigan are

using the best technology available to prevent the discharge of harmful chemicals into their primary drinking water and invasive species, but the bill’s exemptions go far beyond the Great Lakes.

Another provision of VIDA would prevent EPA and States from enforcing standards to stop the shipping industry from releasing fluorinated chemicals into the lakes and oceans across the country. Many of my colleagues have become familiar with chemicals like PFAS and PFOA after they contaminated critical groundwater sources in their own States.

As the ranking member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I can’t tell you how many colleagues from all across the United States have now discovered that these perfluorinated chemicals are a danger to their drinking supply and a public health hazard. They come to me begging for Federal funds to clean up the messes at military bases and airports. Now we are considering a bill on the floor that weakens the standard for release of those chemicals into our water supply. What are we thinking? Is the shipping industry worth that much that we turn our backs on this public health hazard?

I have seen how the military has used these chemicals over the years for legitimate purposes like firefighting. Now we are going to spend millions of dollars cleaning them up, and this Coast Guard bill is going to make it worse. Allowing the commercial shipping industry to freely release these chemicals into bodies of water without proper oversight is downright disgusting.

All of these reasons are why more than 115 environmental organizations have announced their opposition to this Coast Guard bill. It has nothing to do with the Coast Guard—we value them; we treasure them; we want to help them—but to slip this provision in, this environmental rider which endangers the water supply for millions of Americans, is just wrong.

Despite all these objections, Senator MCCONNELL now wants to bring this bill to the floor in a way that will limit debate, doesn’t allow for any amendments to change it, and provides no pathway to improve the bill or to delete this terrible provision. This is not how to consider an issue that is so important with so many people concerned about it.

I urge my colleagues, when this measure of the Coast Guard reauthorization comes up for a vote on cloture on concurrence, to vote no.

Today it is the Great Lakes. Tomorrow it is your backyard, it is your water supply that some special interest group will want to contaminate in the name of more profits. We can do better. We owe it to our kids to do better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Arizona.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1551

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise today, as I have and will continue to do until we find a resolution to this issue. I rise to advocate for a solution to address the issue of securing our border and protecting those young immigrants impacted by an uncertain future in the DACA Program.

Last month, I offered legislation to extend DACA for 3 years and to provide 3 years of increased funding for border security—this so-called 3-for-3 plan. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues have repeatedly chosen to block this measure from coming to the floor, but the President's decision to send National Guard troops to the border displays a continued interest to secure the border. To take care of that aspect, this bill would provide significant resources to do just that, to help secure the border, at the same time protecting these young immigrants from possible deportation.

I am the first to admit this solution is far from perfect, but it provides a temporary fix for these critical problems and will provide all sides of the debate with just enough of what they want. It is a compromise. It would begin the process of funding the President's plan to improve border security and, as I mentioned, ensure DACA recipients will not lose protections and face possible deportation.

These young immigrants were brought here through no fault of their own. They have waited long enough for these protections. Likewise, border communities, like in my home State of Arizona, have waited long enough for increased security along our southern border.

As I have said before, we in Congress have too regularly confused action with results and have been entirely too comfortable ignoring problems that are just actually tough to solve. We may not be able to deliver a permanent solution to these problems at this time, but we now have an opportunity to offer at least some action on them. There are many people whose lives and well-being depend on our ability to deliver meaningful results.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 300, H.R. 1551. I further ask that the Flake substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

If no one yields time, the time will be charged equally.

The majority whip.

SYRIA

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to offer some remarks on

the decision of the President of the United States to order precision missile strikes on three facilities in Syria last Friday night.

This action demonstrates American leadership in the face of gross human rights violations and, as we all recall, President Obama's redline, which was not enforced, which indeed is a provocation in and of itself.

I am glad this President has seen fit now, not just once but on two occasions, to punish the Syrian regime for such gross human rights violations. These actions are consistent with our values and legal authorities provided to the President under the Constitution. They are similar to decisions made by Presidents Clinton and Obama in Kosovo and Libya.

While not unprecedented, clearly what occurred is very serious. So I want to take just a few moments to explain why I think the strikes were justified and were the appropriate course of action taken against the Assad regime.

What we now know is, the Syrian government, on April 7, attacked civilians in the city of Duma, killing at least 70 and injuring 500 more. To carry out the attack, the regime used chlorine and sarin gas against its own people. We know this because credible medical personnel—including the World Health Organization—reported physical symptoms that indicated these substances had been used. People were convulsing in the streets, their nervous systems were attacked, their pupils were constricted, all telltale signs of these chemicals.

When civilians suffer in this way, there is nothing normal or acceptable about it—even in a country grappling with a brutal civil war. That Bashar al-Assad inflicted these crimes on his own people makes them even darker and more insidious.

Chemical weapons have long been the kind of redline in the realm of armed, international conflict. After World War I, the 1925 Geneva Protocol banned chemical and biological weapons because they are different in kind from guns, sabers, and bombs.

One reason they are different is because of the suffering they inflict on their victims. Another reason is because of their indiscriminate nature. Gases, by their very nature, are impossible to control. They spread in the atmosphere. You can't quarantine gas inside of a defined battlefield, which means civilians can't and will not be spared. In other words, there is nothing surgical or targeted about these weapons. The use of them can't be tailored to avoid harming children and innocent bystanders. They are instruments of terror, short and simple, and their brutality and lethality are stunning.

A third reason these weapons are so atrocious is because of the slippery slope they provide. If gas attacks are tolerated in the international community, what comes next—biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons? That is

not an unreasonable question. The free world must therefore stand unified against the use of chemical weapons. The failure to do so sends a signal of idleness or even complicity to the dictators of the world.

The Geneva Protocol that eventually led to the Chemical Weapons Convention has been ratified by more than 190 nations. This means there is a near global consensus that the kinds of gas attacks perpetrated by Bashar al-Assad are completely out of bounds, even in war zones.

As I stand here today, I want to offer my support for both the mission that was carried out and the underlying objective, which was to degrade Syria's capability to research, develop, and deploy chemical weapons—ones that have clearly done tremendous amounts of harm.

The targets of our Syrian missile strikes were a research center and two storage facilities used in the production and testing of chemical and biological weapons. We hope that now that these facilities are destroyed, Assad will be perhaps persuaded not to use chemical weapons once and for all. There is reason to be skeptical, as we know, since he has before. We all remember last year when we struck Syrian airfields after similar provocations. Bashar al-Assad ignored our warning, gassed his own people, and has now paid a higher price. Will it be enough? Who can know, but I hope so. The consequences of his cruel and repressive tactics were swift and circumscribed airstrikes ordered by the President of the United States. They protected against the loss of innocent life and avoided sparking a larger regional conflict.

We are grateful to our allies, Great Britain and France, which played a pivotal role in the mission. We are also grateful to our uniformed military for their meticulous planning, flawless execution, and courageous leadership.

TAX REFORM

Mr. President, on another matter that is very much on Americans' minds, today is tax day. This is the day our 2017 tax returns are due, and I know many Texans are breathing a sigh of relief, knowing what lies just around the corner, and that is because today is the last time Americans will file taxes under the old, broken Tax Code that we overhauled last year in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Yesterday, our friend Representative KEVIN BRADY in the House wrote that now we can finally say "Goodbye and good riddance to that outdated monstrosity of a tax code that took [so] much of [Americans'] money, sent [so many American] jobs overseas, and kept our economy so slow, many workers didn't see a pay raise for a decade or more."

It has been estimated that after-tax income in Texas will increase by close to \$2,600 because of the changes that we enacted into law and which were signed by the President. All across the State,



our constituents are seeing signs that the law is positive and has wide-reaching effects. I, like the Presiding Officer, my colleague from Texas, have spoken to many of those families and businesses, both great and small. Some of the most recent ones I talked to were in College Station. One of the folks I spoke to was a woman by the name of Claudia Smith. Claudia owns and operates a small mom-and-pop flooring business. She told me that tax reform has impacted her company in many important ways.

The first is that, with more money in their pockets, her customers feel more optimistic. They are more willing to make purchases that for years before they had been putting off.

The second is that Claudia is using her tax savings to hire more employees and buy expensive equipment that previously the company could not afford.

The third way the changes are helping Claudia is that she is able to sleep a little more soundly at night. In years past, one thing that kept her up was the rising cost of health insurance. Because of the size of her business, Claudia has never been required to provide it, but since she considers her coworkers to be family, health insurance is something she felt obligated to offer. When she did her annual budgeting each year, health insurance was often on the chopping block—something she just couldn't afford. Up until the very last minute, Claudia was never quite sure whether she would be able to keep offering it. Now, thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, she feels more confident in her ability to provide not only health insurance for the foreseeable future but other new employee benefits as well.

Claudia's is a great story—not because it is unique but because it is typical of the sort of response I have heard across my State when it comes to the benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Although I am very glad that last fall we were able to pass the first major overhaul of the Tax Code in more than 30 years, now is not the time to let up. We can't stop fighting for taxpayers like Claudia. In fact, today I am reintroducing the Small Business Taxpayer Bill of Rights Act, legislation that reduces redtape for taxpayers and allows small businesses to spend more time growing and creating jobs and less time dealing with burdensome IRS procedures and improper targeting practices. I am proud to have my colleague, the senior Senator from Nevada, as my original cosponsor. In some ways, it is a complement to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

This year, research has shown, taxpayers will spend more than 8 billion hours completing IRS forms, costing almost \$200 billion in cumulative monetized costs. That is a 14-percent increase from 2017. This legislation will hopefully improve that situation. It will notably lower the compliance burden, strengthen taxpayer protections, and ensure that small businesses are

not unfairly targeted with unjustified levels of scrutiny by the IRS. For example, the bill makes it a fireable offense for an IRS employee to use auditing methodologies based in whole or in part on the political or ideological views of a taxpayer individual or entity. The bill also allows more small businesses to petition for attorney's fees when a court determines that the IRS's legal actions weren't substantially justified. I hope we can act on this legislation soon.

To all of my fellow Texans, happy tax day. Just remember: Today, it is out with the old and in with the new.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak in opposition to the nomination of Carlos Muniz to be the general counsel at the Department of Education. One of the most important responsibilities that the Department of Education has is to uphold title IX and fight back against gender discrimination in all its forms. This is an enormous responsibility, but it is also an urgent one.

Thousands of men and women have survived sexual assaults on college campuses, and they are demanding that the Education Department and their universities take these crimes seriously. But over the last year, we have heard over and over again that Secretary DeVos has let down these survivors. Instead of working to uphold and even strengthen title IX, she has used her position to weaken title IX. We should not be arming her with more staff who are determined to carry out that plan, but that is what Mr. Muniz will do if he is confirmed.

Mr. Muniz's nomination sends a cynical message to survivors of campus sexual assault all over our country—that the Education Department is not taking survivors seriously and that they are not interested in protecting a law that is supposed to keep our students safe.

If this nominee is confirmed, I have no doubt that he is going to accelerate Secretary DeVos's attack on title IX. This is an insult to the thousands of students who have suffered through sexual assaults on their college campuses. Mr. Muniz has spent his career on the wrong side of this issue, and he has made it clear through his actions that he does not respect the important role title IX actually plays in protecting our students and keeping our campuses safe.

The general counsel of the Education Department should work to uphold and strengthen our anti-discrimination laws, but I fear this nominee is going to do the exact opposite. I urge all of my colleagues to do what is best for our students and join me in opposing this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwith-

standing rule XXII, if applicable, at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, April 18, the Senate resume consideration of the Muniz nomination, with 1 hour of debate remaining, equally divided between Senator GILLIBRAND or her designee and Senator ALEXANDER or his designee, on the nomination; further, that following the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on the nomination as under the previous order; finally, that the Senate now proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

##### MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business.

##### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, for the information of our colleagues, I know the leader plans to make a motion to proceed to S.J. Res. 57, the auto lending CRA, at 2:15 p.m., and we will have a rollcall vote on that motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks.

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

##### TAX REFORM

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I rise today on tax day to recognize this as the very last time Americans will have to file their taxes under the complicated, burdensome, outdated system of the past. Today, we officially kick off a new tax code—one that is simpler, fairer, and allows hard-working Americans to keep more of their hard-earned money.

Since we passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act last December, success stories have poured into my office from Indiana businesses that are paying their workers more and from constituents who are earning more. Tax reform has provided needed relief across Indiana and across the entire country.

To date, we have found scores of companies in my home State of Indiana that have invested in their employees, invested in capital improvements, or lowered energy rates for consumers. They range in size from large companies, such as Walmart and AT&T, to smaller Indiana businesses, such as Family Express, which has 70 convenience stores across the State and is building 10 more and increasing its starting wage. "We feel obligated to pass on a significant portion of the tax savings to our staff," said Family Express president and CEO Gus Olympidis.