

First, the idea that a lobbyist would have to pay in order to have access to a Member of Congress or his administration raises the potential of bribery, extortion, and perhaps pay-to-play. It is pay-to-play and the image of it that has so sullied this town and government in general that President Trump swayed so many people by describing it as a swamp. Well, the swamp has been deepened, and it has been further polluted by exactly this kind of talk.

I will say to Mick Mulvaney: You are destroying the credibility and trust of the American people and our honest colleagues, who come to work every day and try to help and serve the American people. Some of them still work in the Federal Government at high levels, in fear of losing their jobs because they adhere to a standard of integrity that no longer prevails.

In fact, the mindset and mentality of pay-to-play has become the new normal in this administration. It is filled with people at the highest levels who regard unbridled and unapologetic graft as the new normal. That is what that quote says to the average American.

It is typical of the practices of the Administrator of the EPA, who accepts virtually free lodging from a lobbyist who has access to him, as well as takes luxury flights and stays in exorbitantly expensive hotels at taxpayers' expense. Conflicts of interest, ethical violations, and other kinds of betrayal of the public trust have become commonplace at the top levels of the EPA.

It is the mindset of a President of the United States who literally every day accepts benefits from foreign governments and payment in violation of the U.S. Constitution, specifically in violation of the emoluments clause that prohibits such benefits and payments without the consent of Congress. Donald Trump has never come to the U.S. Congress seeking approval for the payments and benefits that go to the Trump Organization, which he still owns. That failure is a violation of the emoluments clause of the U.S. Constitution, and it is the reason that 200 of us Members of Congress have brought legal action to vindicate our trust and the trust of the American people that the Constitution will be followed and that we will do our job. We have standing to bring that action

because the President of the United States is preventing us from reviewing those payments and benefits that go to him, which we have an obligation to review under the U.S. Constitution. That case will be heard in court in June.

I hope the courts will vindicate the rule of law. I hope we will see an end to this corrosive and corrupting impact of money in politics and money in government through a web of deceit and contempt for the rule of law that betrays the trust of the American people.

The Washington, DC, that is conveyed by these quotes and actions by officials at the very top of our government are not my Washington. They are not the Washington, DC, of many of our colleagues—honest and hard-working in this Chamber, in the House of Representatives, and in the executive and judicial branches—who continue to do their job. Among them are two of our colleagues: JOHNNY ISAKSON and JON TESTER.

Senator ISAKSON of Georgia and Senator TESTER of Montana have helped to lead the Veterans' Affairs Committee over the past few days as it raises concerns and questions about the serious allegations made by men and women in uniform or retired Active-Duty military. These concerns go directly to the ethics and integrity and character and ability of the President's nominee to be VA Secretary, Ronny Jackson, a rear admiral in the U.S. Navy. There is no realistic path at this point to confirmation of Admiral Jackson. He should have a hearing if he wishes. He should be considered if he chooses. But the administration owes the American people, as well as the Senate, answers to questions raised by the chairman and ranking member of the VA Committee. I have talked to both of them, as well as the staff, about this investigation, and I have participated in their thinking and support their efforts to uncover the truth. Facts are stubborn things. That is what Ronald Reagan said. It remains true even more so today in this inquiry.

The administration has failed to vet this nomination. It failed abjectly to uncover the truth before it submitted this nomination. It owes the truth and the facts now to the Senate before there is any hearing. Documents and evidence should be provided, and the administration should reverse course,

if necessary, and make sure that full access is provided to all of these documents and evidence.

As recently as yesterday, members of the VA Committee were barred from viewing the FBI background check. The Inspector General's report of 2012 on Rear Admiral Jackson was not provided to our committee, and other relevant evidence and documents may exist, but they have been denied.

I urge the administration to provide the facts, respond to the questions, and address the serious allegations that have been made, because they are consistent and credible and compelling. The more time goes on, the more serious and substantial these allegations become in their detail and depth and power. Time is not on their side, and so far, the administration has abjectly failed to respond.

I thank Senators Isakson and Tester for their leadership and for their insistence on integrity and character because our veterans deserve it. Most importantly, our veterans deserve the very best leader, not one who will be encumbered by the baggage of allegations, unrefuted and un rebutted so far. Our veterans deserve the very best in healthcare and employment opportunities and skill training. Our veterans deserve that we keep faith with them and choose the very best leader, with experience in management, as well as a commitment to the high standards of integrity that befit the Veterans' Administration. It has seen problems. It needs improvement and reforms. The path forward for the VA is with a person and a leader who has unimpeachable integrity.

I thank Senator ISAKSON and Senator TESTER for their leadership and insistence on that high bar in the Veterans' Administration for the sake of our veterans.

Thank you, Mr. President.
I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 9:30 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 9:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:31 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, April 26, 2018, at 9:30 a.m.