

we put out there that provided for many of the ideas that were included in tax reform, and some of those were Democratic ideas. What happened, unfortunately, was that the Democrats were not over the 2016 election, and they absolutely refused to collaborate on tax reform legislation. Now they are trying to pretend that the economic progress we have made over the past 2 years doesn't exist.

In a recent tweet, one Democrat Presidential hopeful here in the Senate went so far as to actively mislead Americans about tax reform by falsely suggesting that tax reform raised taxes for the middle class when, instead, it lowered taxes for an estimated 90 percent of middle-class Americans. The Washington Post called her tweet "nonsensical and misleading." Presumably, most Americans are well aware that the size of their tax refunds has nothing to do with the size of their tax bills.

That statement—made by a Democratic candidate for President—peddles a blatantly false narrative in the hopes of scoring political points, and for that statement, she was awarded four Pinocchios by the Washington Post, which is about as big a whopper as you can get. Luckily, no matter how much the Democrats try to pretend that our economy isn't improving, they can't hide the reality that Republican economic policies are making life better for American families.

I am proud of everything we have accomplished so far, and we are going to keep working to ensure that our economy can thrive for the long term and to make sure that every American will have access to a secure and prosperous future.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on the government funding agreement announced last night. I greatly appreciate the work of Senator SHELBY, Senator LEAHY, and the Appropriations Committee in their efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement. I appreciate the efforts of Senator MCCONNELL, Senator SCHUMER, and our House counterparts, as well, to reach an agreement.

I am glad we will avert another government shutdown and also make critical investments in several areas that are important to my home State of Minnesota; however, there is an important piece of unfinished business that wasn't included in the agreement, and that is to provide backpay for the employees of Federal contractors who were forced out of work for more than a month during the shutdown.

During the longest Federal shutdown in history, thousands of Americans who serve as contractors to the Federal Government lost over a month's pay through no fault of their own, and these are people who work as security guards and clean office buildings, and

they work shoulder to shoulder with Federal employees for all of us. Unfortunately, and this is important, while Federal employees have received backpay—a bill this Chamber passed unanimously—their contractor counterparts have been left out in the cold with no backpay.

I have introduced legislation, which has bipartisan support, which would right this wrong, and it should have been included in the final budget deal, but it appears that the White House blocked it.

I have talked with many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle here in the Senate Chamber, and I have not found a single person who says contractors don't deserve backpay. We all agree on this, and that is why every Democrat in this Chamber has cosponsored my bill, and that is why several of my Republican colleagues and many others in this room have not only cosponsored but have also expressed support for finding a solution to this challenge.

So why not provide backpay to contractors in the funding bill before us today? Because it appears the White House apparently has said not to do it. But I have talked to the White House just in the last week. I didn't hear any fundamental reasons why our plan couldn't go forward and why challenges couldn't be resolved.

While I don't claim to know the White House's motivation in opposing this bill, I do know there are several misconceptions about this legislation that I would like to address today.

First, some have claimed that the problem is just too complicated to solve or that it would involve an untested process, but that is not right.

My bill would allow Agencies to make what is called equitable adjustment to contract prices to compensate contractors who provide backpay to their furloughed employees. This equitable adjustment process is used regularly by contracting officers and contractors. It has already been used to address other shutdown-related claims, including hundreds of claims for shutdown-related compensation this year alone. This process has already been used to pay contractors, just not for backpay. So my bill would build on the existing processes already in place. These processes are established, and it is just not that complicated.

Second, some have claimed that the administrative costs of the bill would just be too large, and that is simply false.

It is true that Agencies would need to take administrative steps to implement the bill, just as they do with the passage of any legislation. But, again, my bill builds on an existing administrative process that is used regularly and efficiently without large administrative costs.

Let me be clear. If the White House or anyone has suggestions on ways to improve this legislation to make it easier to implement, we are all ears.

We would be happy to accommodate any reasonable suggestion; we just haven't seen any. We haven't received any specific suggestions.

Too often, contractors are invisible to the public, but they suffered greatly during this recent shutdown. Representative AYANNA PRESSLEY and I recently authored an op-ed about this, and it included a story about a woman named Tamela, whom we both met. We wrote in our op-ed:

Tamela was worried that she would fall behind on her mortgage and car payments, ruining the good credit she'd worked so long and so hard to build. And as she spoke, beads of sweat rolled down her face. Was she nervous about speaking in front of a crowd? No. As Tamela explained, she's diabetic and has high blood pressure. Without her regular paycheck, she hadn't been able to afford the co-pay for a doctor's appointment to have her blood pressure tested and her prescription renewed. So she was going without her medicine.

I recently received a letter from Annie, a Federal contractor in Duluth. Annie wrote to me:

I am losing wages that I count on each month to make significant payments towards my student loans and contributions to my savings, (including my retirement savings). I can honestly say I never thought I'd be applying for unemployment, especially as a 31-year-old, but today I did just that.

These employees deserve backpay. They had nothing to do with creating this crisis, and we should all be able to come together in a bipartisan way to make sure these Federal contract employees receive backpay. So I stand here today to say I am going to continue working to get this bill passed, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to find a path forward.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, today we hope to vote on a bipartisan, bicameral agreement that will fully fund the government and provide additional measures to strengthen our border security.

I want to applaud all of the members of the conference committee who worked on this agreement. I particularly want to recognize those Senate Members, led by Chairman SHELBY and Vice Chairman LEAHY, for negotiating a bipartisan compromise that will keep the government's doors open. Neither side got everything they wanted—that is why it is called a compromise—but in the end, fully funding the government and keeping it open is what is best for the American people.

What we saw during the 35-day government shutdown was that it took a terrible toll on our Federal workers, and it cost the U.S. economy \$11 billion—including \$3 billion that is gone forever, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Across the country, Federal workers have been very anxiously waiting to see if we were going to come to an agreement, if they were going to be

able to pay their mortgages, afford groceries, and get their prescriptions. Well, today, hopefully we can put their minds at ease. We can pass this legislation, and hopefully the President will sign it, because failure to do so would once again deprive Americans of important government services and throw our economy into a tailspin.

I urge all of our colleagues in Congress to take up this funding legislation, to pass it, and the President to sign it as soon as it reaches his desk.

Protecting our borders should not be an exercise in partisanship, and I am glad to see that this bill supports commonsense investments that focus on the technology, infrastructure, and personnel that are needed at the southern and northern borders to provide actual security that works.

The bill provides \$1.375 billion for targeted fencing in vulnerable areas along the southern border and more than \$800 million for Border Patrol agents, better surveillance and screening technologies, and increased security at our ports of entry. When resourced and deployed appropriately, these types of smart investments are far more likely to interrupt the flow of narcotics than a costly and ineffective border wall.

Importantly, the legislation also includes \$77 million for opioid equipment and staffing to interdict fentanyl and other synthetic opioids that are shipped through international mail and express consignment facilities. This is particularly important to States like mine, New Hampshire, where we have the second highest overdose death rate from opioids in the country. So many of those deaths are caused by the synthetic fentanyl. The opioid epidemic is a true national emergency, and Federal investments like these are needed to stop the illegal flow of these drugs into the country.

When Congress takes up and passes this deal, it will not only pass the appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security but also six other appropriations bills that have unfortunately been waylaid by our shutdown. This appropriations package supports critical Federal investments across all government Agencies, and I want to highlight just a few of those, starting with the programs funded in the bipartisan Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill for fiscal year 2019.

As ranking member of the CJS Subcommittee, I worked closely with my colleague Senator MORAN from Kansas, who chairs the subcommittee, and we crafted what I believe is a truly bipartisan bill that will promote the economy, protect the American people, and secure our Nation's leadership in science and innovation.

For example, the fiscal year 2019 CJS bill provides \$468 million in dedicated Justice Department grant programs to tackle the opioid epidemic. The legislation will provide funding to State and local governments and those organiza-

tions working on the frontlines—providing a balanced approach of law enforcement, treatment, and recovery resources to help our communities that are dealing with opioid and fentanyl deaths. This amount is \$21 million higher than the fiscal year 2018 level and \$336 million higher than the President's budget request. For communities desperately fighting opioid addiction, any further delay in funding is dangerous and could be deadly, so it is critical that we pass this bill today.

Importantly, the legislation also contains the highest funding level ever for the Office on Violence Against Women—\$497.5 million for critical programs that provide training for police officers and prosecutors, rape prevention programs, and funding for women's shelters.

While I am glad that the appropriations package provides funding for these Violence Against Women Act programs, more work needs to be done to better support survivors of domestic and sexual violence. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address the complex issue of domestic violence.

The appropriations package also supports investments in our national infrastructure and provides more than \$49 billion to the Federal Highway Administration to modernize our highways and repair our bridges.

This legislation would also provide a \$1.3 billion increase for housing programs like rental assistance and homeless support services. For us in New Hampshire, that means that 9,500 low-income households will continue to have a place they can call home.

I am pleased that the appropriations package includes a 1.9-percent pay increase for Federal civilian employees. This is a cost-of-living increase that is long overdue.

During the shutdown, I had a chance to meet with a number of our Federal workers, and one of the things that impressed me the most was the dedication those workers had to their jobs and to serving the people of this country. They were going to work without getting paid and without knowing when they were going to get paid. Yet they showed up every day because of their commitment to the people of this country.

In addition to passing this appropriations package, Congress should take further action to provide financial security to Federal employees and contractors. We just heard our colleague TINA SMITH talking about the importance of providing the pay to those people who so far are not slated to get backpay. I have cosponsored legislation to secure backpay for the Federal contractor employees, including janitorial, food, and security service workers who were furloughed or forced to accept reduced work hours as a result of the shutdown. I hope we in Congress will take up and pass the bills Senator SMITH outlined as soon as possible.

I know you know this, Mr. President, because we have talked about it, but

Americans are tired of partisanship. They expect their elected officials to work together to come to a bipartisan compromise and to do what is good for the country, and I couldn't agree more.

The Senate will soon consider an appropriations package to supply Federal investments for programs that support national defense, small businesses, conservation of public lands, food assistance for low-income families, and so much more. This package also includes compromised proposals to improve our border security.

I hope that we will pass this package this afternoon and that the President will sign this legislation into law as soon as it passes the House.

Federal workers are dedicated to serving the American people, and they have families to care for. They should never again be used as pawns. We should never again use shutting down the Federal Government as an excuse over disagreements over policy issues. It is time for our elected leaders to move away from the partisan politics and to live up to the expectations of our constituents. Let's fund the government, and let's do it today.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, William Barr is unquestionably qualified to serve as Attorney General, a position to which he was confirmed unanimously in 1991, in President George H.W. Bush's administration. Mr. Barr's record of public service and long career in the law are exemplary. I have carefully reviewed his record, listened to his testimony before the Judiciary Committee, and questioned him for an hour in my office. Given the significant issues before the Department of Justice and the fact that it is currently led by an unconfirmed, Acting Attorney General, I will vote to confirm Mr. Barr.

It is imperative that the Senate confirm an Attorney General who is committed to allowing the Special Counsel to complete his investigation unimpeded. Mr. Barr gave this commitment under oath to the Judiciary Committee and again to me in our private meeting. He testified clearly that he will not permit any interference in Special Counsel Mueller's investigation into Russian attempts to influence the 2016 election. In fact, Mr. Barr told the committee that he believes "the overarching public interest is to allow [Special Counsel Mueller] to finish." He also said he would resign if he were ordered by the President to fire the Special Counsel without good cause. Mr. Barr testified, "The country needs a credible resolution to these issues, and if confirmed, I will not permit partisan politics, personal interests, or any other improper consideration to interfere with this or any other investigation. I will follow the Special Counsel regulations scrupulously and in good faith, and on my watch, Bob [Mueller] will be allowed to finish his work."

Not only must the Special Counsel be allowed to finish his work, but also his conclusions must be as open and transparent to the public as possible. The

Special Counsel regulations, put in place during the Clinton administration, have guided administrations from both parties for two decades. Those regulations instruct the Special Counsel to submit a confidential report to the Attorney General, and Mr. Barr testified that he will be as transparent as possible about the report, consistent with the law. He told me he will always err on the side of disclosure and believes transparency is critical to the public's confidence in the investigation. When asked whether he would allow the President or his attorneys to edit any report, Mr. Barr told the committee, "That will not happen."

Mr. Barr and I also discussed the memo he wrote in 2018 about obstruction of justice and his views on executive power. I asked him whether suborning perjury would be obstruction. He said yes. I asked him what he would do if the President asked him to stop an otherwise lawful investigation. He said he would resign. We discussed the political checks that exist to limit Executive power, and he described the Special Counsel as a "super charged political check."

Some have suggested, however, that Mr. Barr's memo means he believes the President cannot obstruct justice at all. In a letter to Chairman Graham, Mr. Barr responded: "Quite the contrary, [the memo] expressed my belief that a President, just like anyone else, can obstruct justice if he or she engages in wrongful actions that impair the availability of evidence. Nor did the memorandum claim, as some have incorrectly suggested, that a President can never obstruct justice whenever he or she is exercising a constitutional function. If a President, acting with the requisite intent, engages in the kind of evidence impairment the statute prohibits—regardless whether it involves the exercise of his or her constitutional powers or not—then a President commits obstruction of justice under the statute. It is as simple as that."

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein has said publicly that Mr. Barr's memo had no impact on the investigation. Mr. Rosenstein also noted, "Lots of people offer opinions to the Department of Justice, but they don't influence our own decision making."

Mr. Barr's views on executive power, while legitimate, differ from my own and do concern me as a member of the legislative branch. His opinions highlight the tension that sometimes emerges among the branches of government and which is rooted in the separation of powers. On any given matter, I would likely argue for a more limited approach to Executive power. Regardless of his philosophy, Mr. Barr has noted correctly that the President is not above the law.

Mr. Barr brings considerable experience to bear on important legal policy matters at the DOJ. He testified that he supports efforts to protect the civil rights of LGBT individuals and that he

is against discrimination against anyone on account of their gender identity or sexual orientation. He further stated that he is willing to support "red flag laws" as a step toward preventing gun violence.

Mr. Barr offered his commitment to implementing the newly enacted FIRST STEP Act, a bill I supported and that he described as one that "recognizes the progress we have made over the past three decades in fighting violent crime." Mr. Barr is also committed to combating scams and fraudulent schemes that target seniors, which, as chairman of the Senate Aging Committee, I have investigated and urged the Department to prioritize.

Finally, Mr. Barr has served our country previously with distinction. One hundred and twenty former officials and employees from various administrations have praised Mr. Barr's "character of unwavering commitment to the rule of law without regard to favor or politics." His nomination is supported by many leaders from the law enforcement community, including the Fraternal Order of Police and the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association. In his testimony before the Judiciary Committee, Mr. Barr pledged to run the Department of Justice with professionalism and integrity. He noted that the President did not seek any promises from him and that he made none to the President.

Mr. Barr has pledged his allegiance to the rule of law, the Constitution, and the American people. He has served our country honorably in the past, and I believe he will do so once again.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise to support William Barr's nomination to be Attorney General of the United States. After meeting with Mr. Barr, I am convinced he is a qualified candidate and is committed to upholding our constitutional liberties.

Mr. Barr's record of achievement and civil service to our country stretches back over 30 years. Early in his career, he served as an intelligence analyst at the CIA and an assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel. He was later appointed Deputy Attorney General in the George H.W. Bush administration before becoming our 77th United States Attorney General. Mr. Barr's suitability for the role of attorney general has been tested before; in fact, he has excelled in that capacity.

Concerns have been raised regarding Mr. Barr's position with respect to the Second Amendment. Wyoming is a State of gunowners, and I am a strong defender of our Second Amendment rights, so naturally I probed these concerns. I had the opportunity to personally meet with Mr. Barr and directly ask him about his stance on the Second Amendment. He gave me direct answers and made it clear that he does not support limiting our Second Amendment rights.

Ultimately, the Constitution solely grants Congress power of law-making. I

am prepared to work with my Senate colleagues to protect against any efforts that would undermine our constitutional rights, and I will continue to conduct congressional oversight on the executive branch, a duty I take very seriously.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise to vote against William Barr's nomination to serve as Attorney General. Although Mr. Barr has served as Attorney General in the past, I do not believe he is the right candidate to lead the Department of Justice at this time.

Americans are facing unprecedented times. The President fired former FBI Director James Comey to circumvent and frustrate a Federal investigation. Former Deputy Director of the FBI Andrew McCabe confirmed today that he opened an investigation into the President himself regarding his potential ties to Russia after Comey's firing. Special Counsel Robert Mueller is investigating President Trump and his campaign for collusion and Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential elections. Some of the President's close confidants have been indicted, pled guilty and are cooperating with the Special Counsel. Yesterday, a judge ruled that President Trump's former campaign manager, Paul Manafort, lied to Federal investigators about his interactions with Russians during the campaign.

During this tumultuous time, Americans need an Attorney General who values transparency, who is independent, and who can stand up to a President who has shown repeatedly that he believes that the Attorney General of the United States is his personal attorney and not the attorney of the American people. After closely following Barr's nomination hearing and analyzing his record, I do not believe he will stand up to the President and effectively lead the Department.

Before Barr was formally nominated to be Attorney General, he wrote and distributed a 19-page memo where he characterized the Mueller investigation as "fatally misconceived" with "potentially disastrous implications not just for the Presidency, but for the Executive branch as a whole and for the Department in particular." Barr wrote this memo well aware that his knowledge of the facts surrounding the Mueller probe is severely limited to public reporting.

Nevertheless, Barr concluded that Trump's publicly reported interactions with former FBI Director James Comey could not constitute obstruction of justice and sent the memo to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, Assistant Attorney General Steve Engel, the Solicitor General, White House Special Counsel, Jared Kushner's attorney, and Donald Trump's personal attorneys. He made certain that everyone in Trump's orbit knew his name and knew about this memo.

This behavior should alarm not only Senators but every American. Former

FBI Director Comey testified under oath that President Trump said to him, "I need loyalty, I expect loyalty." President Trump publicly railed against former Attorney General Sessions for following the guidance of Department of Justice ethics officials and recusing himself from anything pertaining to the Russia investigation. During his confirmation hearing, Barr would not commit to following the advice of career ethics officials at DOJ if they recommend that he recuse himself from the Russia investigation to avoid any appearance of conflicts of interest. Instead, he said that he would rely on his own judgment. Mr. Barr is essentially asking Senators to trust him and his judgment. Why should Senators trust his judgment when there are systems and processes in place that were created for this exact circumstance? Mr. Barr cannot call himself an institutionalist concerned with maintaining the rule of law while seemingly being unwilling to submit to the rule of law when it applies to him.

It is not surprising that the President would select as his next Attorney General someone who not only refuses to recuse himself from the investigation but also believes that elements of Mueller's probe are "fatally misconceived."

Finally, during his confirmation hearing, Barr was repeatedly pressed by Republicans and Democrats on whether or not he would agree to release the final Mueller report in its entirety. Barr would not commit to do so. I believe that the report should be made available not only to Members of Congress but to all Americans so that they can see the evidence for themselves and reach their own conclusions. If we want Americans to trust their judicial system, we must insist on transparency and honesty.

Beyond those issues, I am concerned about Mr. Barr's commitment to civil rights. During his confirmation hearing, he seemed ignorant about the disparate treatment between Whites and Blacks in our criminal justice system. When he served as Attorney General under President George W. Bush, he advocated for policies that have in turn led to mass incarceration of nonviolent offenders. In 2015, he publicly opposed the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, bipartisan legislation that would have reduced Federal mandatory minimums, and required the Bureau of Prisons to provide more rehabilitative programming to prisoners.

Last year, Congress passed the First Step Act with broad bipartisan support. The First Step Act included similar provisions to the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act. The First Step Act will not be successful without direction from the Attorney General. I intend to use my position on the Appropriations Committee to hold Barr accountable and to make sure he is proactively implementing this law.

Americans deserve to have an Attorney General who is loyal to the office

and not to the President. I do not believe Mr. Barr is that Attorney General.

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

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

VOTE ON BARR NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Barr nomination?

Mr. YOUNG. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BARR).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 54, nays 45, as follows:

The result was announced—yeas 54, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 24 Ex.]

YEAS—54

Alexander	Gardner	Perdue
Barraso	Graham	Portman
Blackburn	Grassley	Risch
Blunt	Hawley	Roberts
Boozman	Hoeven	Romney
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Capito	Inhofe	Rubio
Cassidy	Isakson	Sasse
Collins	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Jones	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Kennedy	Shelby
Cramer	Lankford	Sinema
Crapo	Lee	Sullivan
Cruz	Manchin	Thune
Daines	McConnell	Tillis
Enzi	McSally	Toomey
Ernst	Moran	Wicker
Fischer	Murkowski	Young

NAYS—45

Baldwin	Harris	Reed
Bennet	Hassan	Rosen
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Markey	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Udall
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Murphy	Warner
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Paul	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Burr

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS OVERSIGHT

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, it is no secret that the 116th Congress got off to a rocky start as we tried to address the ongoing partial shutdown. Despite that, I remain optimistic that we can work together to get things done for the American people.

Those looking for an example of how to find common ground should look no further than the important work Congress has done, and continues to do, for our veterans. The hearing room of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is traditionally one of the most bipartisan places in Washington. It is also one of the busiest.

Last Congress, under Chairman ISAKSON's leadership, we held 30 hearings, considered 56 pieces of legislation, and sent to the full Senate 17 of President Trump's nominees to serve our veterans.

That spirit of cooperation continued here on the floor. During the last session of Congress, the Senate passed 23 major pieces of veteran-related legislation. As a result, the President signed into law bills that significantly enhance healthcare, education, retirement, and other benefits for our veterans.

I want to talk briefly about two of the more notable measures—the VA MISSION Act and the Forever GI bill—to underscore why it is so important for Congress to operate in a collaborative manner. Bipartisan oversight of the Departments and Agencies that implement the laws we pass in that Chamber is critical to ensuring that the executive branch follows the intent of Congress. These two laws highlight just how important that is.

Let's start with the VA MISSION Act. This law was passed to replace the Veterans Choice Act, which was created in response to the VA Health Administration scandal of 2014. This was a good first step. The Choice Program addressed many shortcomings within the VA system. However, my colleagues and I quickly learned it had its own share of troubles. Specifically, we heard repeated stories of difficulties navigating the complex and confusing bureaucratic process. Despite the new reforms, many veterans were still facing unacceptably long wait times at VA medical centers.