The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God, our shield, look with favor upon us today. Enable us to go from strength to strength, as we strive to live in day-tight compartments. Guide our Senators around the obstacles that hinder them from living for Your glory, as they seek to fulfill Your purpose for their lives in this generation. As they strive to please You, empower them to stand for right and leave the consequences to You. Lord, give them the grace to seek You with their whole hearts, knowing that those who passionately pursue You will find You. May they daily yield themselves to You through prayer and obedience. May they grasp Your firm hand, depending on You to lead them through the darkness to the light. We pray in Your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ISAKSON). The majority leader is recognized.

COAL MINER RETIREE’S HEALTH BENEFITS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the days since President Obama took office, too many coal miners have lost their jobs, including well over 10,000 in Kentucky, and more than 25 coal mining companies have filed for bankruptcy. This means that there are fewer workers available to pay into an expanding retirement pool, leaving health benefits in jeopardy for thousands of retired miners.

Last year, I was proud to be able to secure an extension of these benefits past their year-end expiration date. While I advocated for a long-term solution, we did secure a 4-month plan. I made a commitment at that time to work with my colleagues on a long-term health care solution for these retired miners.

Today, I plan to introduce legislation to protect and permanently extend those benefits for thousands of coal miner retirees and their dependents. Recognizing the damage that has been done over the past 8 years, my legislation also calls on Congress to work with the incoming Trump administration to repeal regulations that are harming the coal industry and to support economic development efforts in coal country.

I highlighted those goals in a letter I sent to President-Elect Trump earlier in the year regarding ways in which I hope we can work together to provide relief to coal country. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues and the incoming administration on these important issues.

REMEMBERING TIM MITCHELL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we were all saddened by the news that Tim Mitchell, a longtime member of the Democratic floor staff, passed away this past weekend after his heartbreaking battle with brain cancer. I know the Democratic leader will have more to say in just a moment, but I wanted to take a moment myself to reflect on Tim’s Senate service and express our condolences to his family.

Last September, the former Democratic leader and I had the opportunity to recognize Tim for a remarkable 25 years of Senate service. As we noted then, Tim has long been a critical member of the Senate team who worked tirelessly with his colleagues on both sides to ensure that the floor operated smoothly and efficiently.

Despite his passion for this institution, however, we know that Tim’s family always remained his top priority. His wife Alicia and his young son Ben know this as well. Our prayers are with them at this immensely difficult time.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING TIM MITCHELL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we received sad news yesterday. We lost a dear friend to many of us here in the Senate, a wonderful man, Tim Mitchell. He had a long battle with brain cancer. He was a member of the floor staff for many years. He did an amazingly outstanding job.

Every organization has what they call unsung heroes. On the battlefield, they are the soldiers, our infantry men and women. In the automobile plant, they are the assembly line workers. In the hospital, they may be the nurses, the clerical workers, or the folks who clean up the floors late at night. Those organizations can’t go on without
these people. They are the heart and soul of these organizations. They do their work quietly but proudly.

If you had to pick someone who personified the unsung hero of this body, it would be Tim. He did his job every day, whether you talked to him or not. You could see that pride and the knowledge he had in doing his job and doing his job well. He will be sorely missed by every Member here today, Democrat and Republican.

Let’s take a moment to remember Tim and to send our best wishes and prayers to his family and his loved ones.

(Moment of silence.)

Thank you, Mr. President.

NOMINEE FOR SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I wish to address a troubling report about the President-elect’s nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services that came out last night. We learned that Congressman PRICE bought shares in a medical device manufacturing company just days before introducing legislation in the House that would directly benefit that company.

His legislation wasn’t broad legislation. It didn’t affect health care in general. It specifically blocked a regulation on medical device companies that do hip and knee implants, including the very business he bought stock in. According to CNN, the company Representative Price bought stock in was one of two companies that would have been hardest hit by this new regulation—one of two—and he puts in legislation to repeal it just after buying stock in it.

Again, this is not someone who has Johnson & Johnson stock and then votes to cut Medicare. This is a narrow company that works on hip and knee implants—narrow legislation that deals with undoing some regulations on them. It is really troubling.

These revelations come on top of the report late last year by CQ and the Wall Street Journal that Congressman Price had traded stocks in dozens of health care companies valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars during his time in the House as chair on the Budget Committee, when he introduced, sponsored, or cosponsored several pieces of legislation that impacted these companies. It is really troubling.

Yesterday’s report makes it clear that this isn’t just a couple of questionable trades but, rather, a clear and troubling pattern of Congressman Price trading stock and using his office to benefit the companies in which he was investing.

Our President-elect claims he wants to drain the swamp, but Congressman Price has spent his career filling it up. I have asked the Office of Congressional Ethics to investigate whether or not Congressman Price violated the STOCK Act during his time in office before his nomination moves forward in any way.

It may well be that this trade was illegal. This isn’t a witch hunt. These are serious and disquieting allegations. The American people deserve to know if their potential Secretary of Health and Human Services violated a law against insider trading.

The facts here are a narrow company with hip and knee implants and legislation with hip and knee implants coming soon thereafter, after he bought stock—whao. These questions cry out for answers. The underline “before”—Nominee Price goes before the Senate Finance Committee.

When the public faith in government is as low as it is today, when politics and campaigns are saturated by money, as they are today, when folks feel their representatives are beholden to special interests before their constituents, reports like the one that just came out about Congressman Price perpeluate that distrust. They add fuel to the fire.

We need to get to the bottom of these allegations and get to the bottom of them quickly. The only way to restore faith in our government and in our democratic institutions is to insist upon transparency and ethical behavior by those in positions of the highest public trust. Until a congressional ethics investigation can be completed, this report and his previous trades cast serious doubt on whether Congressman Price is fit to hold the office of Secretary of Health and Human Services.

CBO REPORT ON REPEALING THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, I wish to turn to the CBO report that just came out today. The Congressional Budget Office today released a new report outlining the consequences of the Republican plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Remember, the CBO is a nonpartisan entity. The numbers don’t lie. Try as they might, our Republican colleagues can’t discredit them.

The numbers are even worse than experts could have imagined. Repealing the Affordable Care Act will mean tens of millions will lose their health insurance and individuals will see their premiums double. Let me repeat that. If the Republican bill passes—according to CBO, which is nonpartisan—tens of millions will lose their health insurance and individuals will see premiums double. Thirty-two million Americans would lose their health insurance, 18 million within the first year of repeal.

The report makes it crystal clear that the Republican effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act will increase health care costs for millions of Americans and kick millions more off their health insurance. No wonder President-Elect Trump realizes repeal without replace is the real disaster. No wonder he has abandoned the Congress not to do plain repeal. Some Republicans have tried to dismiss the CBO report as meaningless. I would remind my Republican friends of two points. First, this is the CBO Director that Republicans handpicked. This is not some Democratic operative. He is a person who knows numbers, who was chosen by our Republican colleagues. You can’t reject his findings.

Second, this is what the CBO is analyzing. They didn’t make up the scenario. They took the exact bill we had on the floor and said: What are going to be the consequences? Devastating—over 30 million losing coverage, premiums doubles. All the things that our colleagues are complaining about with ACA are even worse under their bill. Their complaints on ACA are incorrect. We have gained numbers, and costs have gone down. The rate of costs have gone down—much lower than they would be under this report.

I say to my colleagues, this is your repeal bill. The CBO didn’t make this up. It looked at the bill you sent to the President’s desk, the bill you said your repeal bill will be modeled on. It isn’t meaningless. It is your plan.

Now that repeal is real and not just a political exercise, the tide is turning. The American people are becoming and people—the prospects of dismantling health reform and leaving chaos in its wake. This is exactly why Republican Members of Congress are getting an earful back home from constituents who want them to turn back from their dangerous plan to make America sick again. I urge my Republican colleagues to listen to the growing outcry before it is too late.

CABINET NOMINEE HEARINGS

Mr. SCHUMER. One final issue: As the hearings continue this week on the President-elect’s Cabinet nominees, I wish to make a few points. As I have mentioned here on the floor several times, we Democrats want the process to be as fair and transparent as possible, abiding by all the ethics requirements demanded of nominees in the past. Yet the HELP Committee today will hold a hearing on Education Secretary nominee Betsy DeVos, who is worth $5 billion and owns an investment company with untold financial entanglements, despite the fact that she doesn’t have a signed ethics agreement. She is the pick for the President-elect’s Cabinet. As the HELP Committee, when he introduced, sponsored, or cosponsored several pieces of legislation that impacted these companies. It is really troubling.

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Then we have Wilbur Ross. He is the nominee for Commerce. He is a billion-aire. We have a Cabinet loaded with billionaires, despite how President-Elect Trump campaigned. Mr. Wilbur Ross is a billionaire with vast and complicated holdings. He just delivered his paperwork yesterday. He is scheduled for an appearance of an irregularity or an impartiality without any fact being true.

The statements made about the CBO estimate were made in what he said but wrong in the implication. He is accurate that CBO did say it would cost money if we didn’t have a replacement for ObamaCare, which is the replacement being worked on as we speak right now, and that is a fact. But when put together the way he put them together, it makes it look as though we are spending money that we are not, in fact, spending at all.

The CBO estimate also does not include the impact of legislative and administrative action to stabilize individual markets. In the absence of making that consideration, of course it is going to be more costly. Those are both extraneous facts that, when put together, make the appearance of a crime, which just isn’t there.

NOMINATION OF TOM PRICE
Mr. ISAJKSON. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about my friend, Dr. Tom Price. In a way, I am glad the minority leader brought up Representative Price and brought up specific allegations that have been made against him so I can hopefully put some light on the misperception that those allegations made and, in fact, shine some positive light on a great nominee to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I have known Tom Price for 30 years of my life. He and his wife Betty are dear friends. Their son Robert is the age of one of my sons. He is a fine young man. Tom is a leader in our community, a leader in the Roswell United Methodist Church, the first-ever elected Republican majority leader of the State of Georgia Senate, the chairman of the Senate Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives, former president of the study committee in the House of Representatives, and an all-around terrific individual who has a litany and liturgy of recommended approvals and improvements that have made the United States of America legislatively and legally much better.

Tom is a family man. I mentioned Betty and his son Robert. He is an accomplished professional. He is an orthopedic surgeon. He and his wife Betty met during their residencies at Grady Memorial Hospital. She is an anesthesiologist. Tom is an accomplished orthopedic surgeon.

Tom is one of those orthopedists who came together with a number of other orthopedists to form what is known as Resurgens Orthopaedics, the largest orthopedists to form what is known as Resurgens Orthopaedics, the largest orthopedic practice in the Southeastern United States—one of the finest anywhere in the country.

Tom has worked tirelessly in the Republican Party, tirelessly on the Democratic-Republican bipartisan agreements that have been made, and tirelessly on behalf of his community. This is a fine individual and is uniquely qualified to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services. This is an agency that will spend $1 trillion of the taxpayers’ money on an annual basis. You want a man who has been chair-man of the Budget Committee. You want a man who understands finances. You want a former legislator who knows how to get the job done. Tom Price is that man.

In fact, I am particularly well qualified to introduce Tom to this body and recommend him as Secretary of HHS because he replaced me when I left the House when I was elected to the Senate. He has been reelected six times. He served 6% terms in the House of Representatives, and he has an extensive legal background, an extensive legislative background, and an accomplished background of conservative leadership for the United States of America. Most importantly, he has done so on many issues dealing with medicine, and why not? He is an expert in medicine.

I know a little bit about real estate. I authored legislation on real estate. That is what you do when you are in a profession and know a little about something Congress is looking at. But the allegations made by Senator Schumer were being made by some of the media and papers around town—are just another example of taking disparate impact.

I want to talk to you a little about what Senator Schumer was talking about. He was talking about the purchase of Zimmer Biomet stock. 26 shares, worth $2.57. That is what he was talking about. The two disparate facts that he put together to make a wrong were this: The purchase was made without knowledge because his account is managed by Smith Barney and Morgan Stanley. They manage his account. They make the decisions about what to buy. Tom doesn’t make them. Tom found out about it and documented it on April 4, even though the purchase was made in March. He didn’t even know the purchase had been made on his behalf until it was disclosed, which he did as he is required to do by the STOCK Act. The single fact that the distinguished minority leader is a fact that is a required disclosure of the rules of the U.S. Senate to the Ethics Committee under the STOCK Act. So don’t make this look like some sinister thing, and let’s take it at face value. If you take it at face value, it was a purchase Tom didn’t make; it was made on his behalf. It was a purchase we documented that he didn’t know about until the 4th of April. The purchase was made in March. The purchase did not work to his benefit because the decision was not made by him.

He is like every other Member of the Senate and House who makes required disclosures. He has taken the oath of the STOCK Act. Tom obeyed the law. Tom did what was right. What was done is right and is being made to look wrong only because of appearance but not because of fact. That is the wrong way to take on the consideration of any nominee of a President of the United States to be a Secretary of any part of the Cabinet.
I reiterate: Who else would be better to oversee $1 trillion in spending than Tom Price, chairman of the Budget Committee, former member of Ways and Means, an accomplished legislator who put together the largest orthopedic practice in Atlanta, GA, and the State of Georgia? He is well qualified and eminently qualified. This body should overwhelmingly confirm his nomination to be U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services in the United States of America.

I am proud as his friend, I am proud as a former associate and legislator. I am proud as the person he succeeded in the U.S. House of Representatives, and I am proud as an American citizen to know that our President has picked someone who is eminently qualified, who has an impeccable record of success in his legislative jobs, who is a fine family man, a member of his church, a disciplined member of his political party and, most importantly, a man who loves his country and voluntarily to sacrifice his time and his knowledge to make America’s Department of Health and Human Services better.

Lastly, there is a little rumor going around that he is not for expanding Social Security. That is ironic to me. Let me tell you what he and I did in November and December. We traveled throughout Georgia on behalf of AARP, presenting ways to save Social Security. Day in and day out, Tom Price is on the record of the State of Georgia, fighting to preserve Social Security for those who have it and for those who will get it in the future. So don’t take this disparate impact of extraneous facts someone put together to try to make a wrong out of a right. Instead, look at the record of an impeccable legislator, a dedicated family man, a great American, and the next Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States of America, Dr. Tom Price.

I commend him to every Member of this Senate and hope you will confirm him when his vote comes before the Senate.

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OBAMACARE REPLACEMENT PLAN

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I was pleased to see on the front page of the Washington Post that President-Elect Trump was speaking about how we should maintain at least the number of people covered under ObamaCare in a new kind of replacement for that portion of ObamaCare. If you will, I agree totally with him. We should fulfill this promise and do it, as he said, at a lower cost.

We think we have a mechanism to do so with Senator COLLINS. We will speak to that today. First, let me point out, for those who are praising ObamaCare, who are the beneficiaries? What American people have been voting consistently against candidates who supported ObamaCare, culminating in the election of President-Elect Trump. So whatever folks might say about how wonderful it is, the American people are not voting for it consistently.

That said, there is a mandate from the American people not just to repeal but to replace. So it is not that the American people don’t want to have coverage, and they want folks with pre-existing conditions to have their issues addressed, but what they are concerned about is the way ObamaCare was forced upon them, with the power of Washington, DC, reaching into their own life, if you will, to their kitchen table, to threatening them penalties unless they comply with the Washington bureaucracy directly. That is what the American people do not like.

So, first, can we maintain coverage? President-Elect Trump said we are going to have insurance for everybody. Two, will we cover more? Yes. Three, can we lower costs? The answer there is yes.

Now, let’s first speak to covering more Americans under ObamaCare. President-Elect Trump, Majority Leader MCCONNELL, and Speaker RYAN have all committed to maintaining coverage for all.

People speak of the advances made under ObamaCare, I will give them those advances. There are still 30 million people uninsured. Our alternative has the potential to cover 95 percent of Americans without a mandate. The way we do this is that as we return power to the States, we give States the flexibility of saying that everyone who is eligible for coverage is enrolled unless they choose not to.

Just like when I turned 65 and I am on Medicare. I am on Medicare. I don’t feel it is a mandate. No one calls me up. Indeed, if I don’t want to be on Medicare, I have to call someone up and tell them I don’t want to be on it. State legislatures would have the option to say you are in unless you call and tell us you are out. I say that addresses hard to reach; the fellow whose life is so in disarray that he is living beneath a park bench and the typical 28-year-old male who never thinks about health insurance. All of a sudden he is in without even realizing he is in, until he needs it, and then he will be very pleased.

On the other hand, if you don’t want to be in, we make it easy to get out. By the way, I spoke of that fellow living beneath the park bench. As a physician who has worked in a hospital for the uninsured, that was not tongue-in-cheek, and that is not a throwaway line. That person living beneath the park bench will never have his life well enough together, or almost never, to go to a public library to log onto healthcare.gov. He does not have a W-2—and if he did, he lost it long ago—to submit it to sign up.

Under our program, we give States the power. He would have a health savings account so that if he goes to the urgent care center with a nail in his foot, it is covered. He has a pharmacy benefit, so that if he gets his life together while he is at that urgent care center to take a pharmacy benefit. Lastly, if something terrible happens, he is hit by a car or something, then he is brought to the hospital and that catastrophic coverage protects society against the cost of his hospitalization.

By the way, under our plan, we give States the power. I would like to think that this is something Democrats and Republicans can agree to. When Republicans say: You can keep your plan if you want it, we mean it. We mean it. The way we would do this is that Congress would give States alternative options. The State would have the choice.

The State could go with the alternative, which we will lay out. The State could opt for nothing, no Medicaid expansion and no help for their lower income folks, or the State could opt to stay in ObamaCare. If Illinois, California, Massachusetts, New York want to stay in ObamaCare, we think they should have the right to stay in ObamaCare.

ObamaCare, if it is working for your State, God bless you. On the other hand, it is not working for a State where there are double-digit and sometimes triple-digit premium increases in 1 year.

So the State could choose to stay in ObamaCare, for nothing, or for the alternative, which we lay out for them. But I say, I would say that those who govern closest to those who are governed would be best. We know that the State of Alaska is far different than the State of California, Illinois, Louisiana, or New York. So let those States decide the system that works best for them.

What is the timeline? This year, 2017, we would like to repeal ObamaCare but put in place the legislation which allows, in 2018, for a State legislature or a Governor to choose the option they wish and the mandate they wish to enroll the people of their State. In 2019, the State would implement the replacement option of their choice. By 2020, the repeal and the replace would have been finished.

If, at a later date, a State wishes to change their option—they decided to stay with ObamaCare but on second thought now they wish to have the alternative we lay out, which I actually think would be something that might happen, they could choose that as a later option.

We are not being partisan. I tell folks, this is not a Republican plan, not...
a Democratic plan, it is a patient plan, born out of my experience working in a public hospital for the uninsured; that if you give the patient the power, things line up. If we can make it an American patient plan, it does not matter what your State decides. I am comforted that we will end up in the right place.

Our goal is to fulfill President-Elect Trump’s promise, more coverage at lower cost. We think we have laid out a pathway which can truly be bipartisan to achieve that goal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

MS. COLLINS. Mr. President, first, let me start by commending the Senator from Louisiana for all of the thought and the work he has put into coming up with an alternative plan that would fix ObamaCare and result in more Americans having affordable health care. As a physician, Senator CASSIDY cares deeply about his patients and about patients in general. His goal, which I share, is to make sure every American has access to affordable health care. I commend him for his hard work and leadership.

Though we debate lately on the best approach to replacing and reforming the Affordable Care Act, also known as ObamaCare. Some of my colleagues have argued for immediate repeal without any replacement, an option that runs the risk of leaving millions of vulnerable Americans without affordable health insurance and would undo important consumer protections provided by current law.

Others have proposed repeal with a delayed effective date of 2 or 3 years to allow time for the Senate to devise legislation that would provide a better approach to health insurance. My concern with the repeal-and-delay plan is that the ObamaCare exchanges, already on very shaky financial ground, would go into a death spiral as consumers would face uncertainty and insurers would have no basis for pricing their policies.

Already we have seen insurers fleeing the marketplaces in many States, reducing choices for consumers. In some States, only one or two insurers remain on the exchanges, leaving individuals and families with few, if any, choice of insurance carriers. Every single one of the State cooperatives whose startup costs were financed by ObamaCare has experienced severe financial problems and only five remain operational today.

Many States, including Maine, are experiencing double-digit increases in premium rates, causing increased costs for consumers and for taxpayers. So repeal and delay would only exacerbate this problem.

I am pleased to see a growing consensus among Members of both the Senate and the House that we must fix ObamaCare, provide reforms at nearly the same time that we repeal the law, in order to protect families who rely on the program and to give insurers time to transition to a new marketplace that is based on more choices for consumers.

Many of us have been working for years on proposals to reform our health care system, to expand coverage, and to encourage new delivery systems that would help restrain the growth in health care costs. That is what the legislation that I am going to be pleased to join my colleague from Louisiana on, would do. It is focused on giving patients more choices while ensuring that consumers have access to affordable health insurance.

We have advanced bipartisan proposals in the past to deal with provisions of the law that have increased costs and discouraged employers from hiring full-time workers. Regrettably, every such reform has been met with a veto threat. That is why we continued to work.

In 2015, I joined Senator CASSIDY in introducing a more comprehensive and creative approach, the Patient Freedom Act, which is the basis for the legislation we are going to be introducing soon. It would allow States to have more choices. If they like the Affordable Care Act, they can keep the Affordable Care Act. If they want to go an alternative route that is more patient-centered, that would provide more choices and help to restrain costs, they can do that, too, and the Federal Government would take the funding that would otherwise be used for ACA subsidies and the expansion of Medicaid in their State and allow them to proceed along a more creative route.

We recognize how different the needs of our States are, but our citizens should have access to affordable health care and be able to choose the path that works best for them.

We will be talking more about the specifics of our bill when we introduce it, but I am excited about this approach. I am not saying it is perfect, but it is important that we put specific proposals on the table that our colleagues can coalesce around, debate, and refine so that we can move ahead and remove the fear and uncertainty of families who are relying on coverage through the exchanges without putting an undue burden on the employers who create jobs in this country.

Mr. President, let me again commend the Senator from Illinois. His hard work and leadership.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me start by commending my colleagues from Louisiana and Maine. I really believe their approach to the Affordable Care Act is much more reasonable than what we have heard in the past from some other colleagues.

Senator COLLINS just went through a list of options of repeal or run and run or replace 2 years from now. None of those are good options, and there is a reason why there is a backlash against this repeal effort across the country now, even among many Republicans. I am excited about this approach, the Patient Freedom Act does just that.

Again, I want to commend my colleague Senator CASSIDY for his leadership.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.
to the American people: We are no longer committed to making sure your family has the peace of mind of good health insurance. So I thank them for the efforts they have put into this, and I look forward to working with them.

PRESIDENT OBAMA’S LEGACY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday I went to the White House. It was a great celebration of the World Series champion Chicago Cubs being recognized in the White House by our President from Illinois, Barack Obama. Of course, he is a White Sox fan, and he didn’t apologize or change his stripes, but it was a great day of celebration. During the course of it, he said it was his last public event in the White House, and I came to realize that we are only days away from a new President and President Obama leaving.

I think back to a memorable moment in my life which most people wouldn’t have, but I will never forget. It was July 27, 2004. The place was Boston, MA. At the last minute, I was called on to introduce a friend of mine, a skinny lawyer and State senator from Illinois who was about to deliver the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. His name was Barack Obama. I had known him for several years. I knew he was an extraordinarily gifted politician, and I knew he was a very good person.

I know many audiences back home, including some in the most unlikely places. Once I saw him hold spellbound a group of blue-collar workers and farmers in Carroll, IL—a town which in the 1960s was completely devastated by racial tension and the presence of a local branch of the Ku Klux Klan—but even I was not prepared for the powerfully moving speech Barack Obama gave after I introduced him in Boston. It has been quoted in the Times. He told us:

There is a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America—and there’s the United States of America.

He went on to say:

The pundits like to slice and dice our country into red States and blue States; red States for Republicans, blue States for Democrats. But I’ve got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the blue States, and we don’t like Federal agents poking around in our libraries in the red States. We come close to Little League in the blue States, and, yes, we’ve got some gay friends in the red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq, and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq.

He only spoke for 17 minutes at that Boston convention—17 minutes—and in that time, he gave voice to what another tall, lanky lawyer from Illinois once called “the better angels of our nature.” He touched a long deep with the hearts of millions of Americans who wanted to believe in those better angels, who wanted to believe in what Barack Obama called “the audacity of hope,” the audacity to believe that America, which had achieved so many miracles, was capable of even greater goodness. People inside the convention hall and millions outside who heard that speech all had the same reaction: I like America’s future.

I remember going back to Illinois a few days after that convention and campaigning with Barack as he was running for the U.S. Senate. He went to the most unlikely downtown towns—Calumet Park, Chicago, huge crowds were coming in from adjoining States because they had seen him give that speech at the Democratic Convention. I knew there was something special about him.

His grandmother called him after he gave the speech. She gave him some advice. “You did well,” she said. “I just kind of worry about you. I hope you keep your head on straight.” Good advice for all of us.

A little over 4 years later, my friend—the then U.S. Senator from Illinois—was elected the 44th President. On inauguration day 2009, 2 million Americans stood shoulder to shoulder on the Mall, on the National Mall, cheered as the son of a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas placed his hand on the family Bible of Abraham Lincoln and swore to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States.

For the last 8 years, President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, their daughters Malia and Sasha, and First Grandmother Marian Robinson have made their home in the White House. What an irony—they were living in a house originally built by slaves.

The audacity of hope. The awe-inspiring strength of America to continually stretch to be that “more perfect Union.”

Part of the miracle of America is also the peaceful transition of power from one President to the next. As we prepare to transfer to a new President, I would do well to look back on the historic Presidency of Barack Obama. He was elected and reelected President twice, convincingly.

His grandmother would be proud that he has not only kept his head on straight, he has held his head high, kept his priorities straight even amidst often unprecedented, unyielding opposition and seemingly personal attacks. As First Lady Michelle Obama told us, the most famous Obama family has been “When they go low, we go high.” We have seen that grace in them time and time again.

President Obama is a profoundly good and decent man who has served America with dignity and integrity. He has been thoughtful, calm, and resolute—never rash or impulsive. He is a disciplined leader who has grappled honestly with complex challenges facing America and the world, and he has delivered solutions that improved lives.

In his farewell speech in Chicago, President Obama quoted the fictional hero Atticus Finch, reminding us: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Putting himself in another person’s shoes, seeing life through another person’s eyes, finding shared hopes is a lifelong habit and a special gift of this President.

He has tried his level best to heal and unite our divided Nation. His accomplishments are significant, and his record many will remember.

He was first elected at a time when America badly needed hope. President Obama inherited—inaugurated—the greatest financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression. The country had lost more than 2 million jobs in the previous 4 months before he was sworn in. By inauguration day, the country’s top four banks had lost half their value in less than a year. There was an urgent danger that not only the American economy would collapse, but the economy of the Western world was teetering in the balance.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, called the stimulus bill, saved the U.S. and global economy from a major crash and helped create the conditions for recovery. Unemployment today is at 4.9 percent. America has just seen the longest streak of private job creation in the Nation’s history. To borrow a phrase, thanks, Obama.

Our friends across the aisle said: Let America’s auto industry die. The Obama administration said: No way. They decided to place their bets on American manufacturing and workers instead. The Center for Automotive Research estimates that the special bankruptcy process for General Motors and Chrysler saved at least 1.5 million American jobs. Detroit has posted record profits for 7 years in a row. Barack Obama would not give up on American automakers or American auto companies, and it paid off.

Predatory lending and other systemic abuses were the cancer at the heart of the great financial meltdown of 2008 and 2009.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator’s time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for an additional 5 minutes.

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

Mr. DURBIN. Thank you, Mr. President.

Under this President, Congress passed the most comprehensive overhaul of financial regulations since the Great Depression, protecting consumers and taxpayers.

President Obama inherited a Federal budget hemorrhaging red ink. Under his watch, the budget deficit has fallen $1 trillion, despite record investments in education, green energy, broadband, high-speed rail, medical research, and other high-return priorities.
He brought us the Affordable Care Act. I am not going to dwell on it because I spoke on it before when the other Senators were on the floor.

There was a skit on “Saturday Night Live” last week that talked about, would it be happen if we had banned the word “ObamaCare”? Can we stick with the Affordable Care Act since it is helping so many people? Sometimes we think that is what this is all about: We have to get rid of it because it has its name on it. Well, we shouldn’t. We should focus on the good that it has done and make sure we do nothing less in the future. Health insurance costs are going down at the fastest rate in 50 years. Medicare gets an additional projected 10 years of solvency because of the Affordable Care Act. Numerous Republican Governors, including Vice President-Elect Mike Pence, have used Medicaid expansion of ObamaCare to reduce the uninsured in their States.

On the issue of climate, I will defer to my friend from Rhode Island, who has stepped off of the floor for a moment, but when it comes to this, President Obama has taken climate change seriously. He does not view it as an unproven Chinese-authored hoax; he believes it is a fact, and so do I. It is a threat to the existence of humanity, and we are running out of time to prevent a climate catastrophe.

Americans built on the historic breakthrough at the 2015 U.N. summit on climate change in Paris. When that summit ended, 195 countries joined the United States and agreed to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The President once told a group of young people: “I refuse to condemn your generation and future generations to a planet that is beyond fixing.”

We have a safer and more secure America. This President brought troops home—massive numbers of troops who were dispatched around the world in harm’s way. He understands we can’t fix all the world’s problems. We learned that the hard way. He banned the use of torture. We have seen the withdrawal of the majority of U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Al Qaeda has been decimated. Osama bin Laden is history, and ISIS is on the run.

Under President Obama, Americans led the successful global effort to contain and conquer an Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

And we helped preserve a democratic Ukraine against Russian aggression.

President Obama announced plans to reverse normal relations with Cuba—reversing 50 years of a failed policy that done at least as much harm to America’s relations with our neighbors in this hemisphere as it had done to pose the Castro regime.

The President and Secretary of State John Kerry made a momentous diplomatic success in negotiating an agreement to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons, protecting our ally Israel and many nations across the Middle East.

The Iran nuclear deal holds the promise of defusing a ticking time bomb. If Iran fails to live up to that promise, we will know quickly and we will take the steps to stop them.

I want to touch briefly on two other issues that I have worked on very closely and to which I am deeply committed. The first is the growing, bipartisan movement to end America’s era of overincarceration.

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The first is the growing, bipartisan movement to end America’s era of overincarceration.

America has 5 percent of the world’s population—and nearly 25 percent of the world’s prisoners. That ignominious label is largely a flexible antidrug laws that disproportionately punish people of color, especially poor people of color.
In 2010, President Obama signed a law that I introduced with Senator Sessions called the Fair Sentencing Act. It replaced a Federal law that demanded dramatically harsher sentences for convictions involving crack cocaine than powder cocaine. I have worked with Democrats and some brave Republican colleagues for a few years to further reform Federal sentencing—to allow Federal judges some discretion in nonviolent drug cases and eliminate “three strikes and you’re out law” and other overly harsh and inflexible laws that are overly harsh and hugely expensive to enforce.

In the absence of action from us, President Obama has used his powers to commute the sentences of more than 1,000 people—more than 50 times the number of people whose sentences were commuted by President George W. Bush and more than the past 11 Presidents combined.

We can’t have it both ways. If we don’t want President’s to use their lawful Executive authority to correct injustices, we need to correct those injustices ourselves. I hope we will do so in this new Congress.

Finally, we must—we must—fix America’s broken immigration system.

And let’s start by assuring DREAMers—young people who were brought to this country as children and who are undocumented through no fault of their own—that we will not deport them from the only nation they have ever called home.

I have come to this floor dozens of times to tell you their stories. They are scholars, American soldiers, researchers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, clergy members.

DACA—the President’s Executive order—allows them to stay in this country temporarily while Congress works to pass a comprehensive immigration reform plan that meets the needs of our economy, and honors our values and our unique and powerful heritage as a nation of immigrants.

More than 700,000 DREAMers put their trust in our Government and came forward to register under DACA.

What will happen to them if—as many fear—DACA is not extended?

Immigrants are not a threat to America. Immigrants are America. The sooner we acknowledge that fact and align our laws with it, the better we will be.

President, I could go on for quite some time about what President Obama, Vice President Biden, and their administration have meant for America, but time precludes that so I will close with these last thoughts.

In that historic speech he delivered in May three years ago, President Obama told us that, in his father’s native tongue, the name “Barack” means “blessing.”

President Obama leaves office now as the most popular politician in America, and assured of his place in history. I believe that America has been fortunate—even blessed—by his service and sacrifice as our President.

President Obama has also warned us that “History travels not only forwards; history can travel sideways.” I hope that we can all pledge, regardless of party, to keep history moving forward.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of the majority whip’s remarks, I be recognized.

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield to the majority whip.

OBAMACARE REPLACEMENT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Rhode Island for his courtesy.

Last week, the Senate took the first step in providing needed relief for the American people from a health care plan, the Affordable Care Act, that overpromised and underdelivered. Many are hurting now as a result of ObamaCare. They were told their premiums would go down, that they would be able to keep the policy they had if they liked it, and that if they liked their doctor, they could keep their doctor. They were told it would be true. So it is important that we keep our commitment to the American people.

I believe we have gotten a mandate as a result of the election on November 8 that we keep our promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to deliver health care that is affordable and is a matter of individual choice and freedom of choice.

The basic problem with ObamaCare is that it was command and control right out of Washington, DC, where people didn’t know what they were doing when it comes to rearranging one-sixth of our national economy and believed that they could, in the process of writing a 2,700-page bill—that I doubt many of them read—take over and improve our health care delivery system.

It was sold on the basis of providing people access to affordable care, and in many instances, according to my constituents, they have seen their premiums skyrocket and deductibles skyrocket and many instances, according to my constituents, they have seen their premiums skyrocket and deductibles skyrocket and in some cases, according to my constituents, they have seen their premiums skyrocket and deductibles skyrocket and in some cases, according to my constituents, they have seen their premiums skyrocket and deductibles skyrocket and in some cases, according to my constituents, they have seen their premiums skyrocket and deductibles skyrocket.

We also believe patients ought to have more tools, such as health savings accounts which they can use to pay for their regular health care along with Perhaps a catastrophic coverage which would help them in the event of an unexpected health care condition that would require hospitalization. If you are young and healthy and don’t need all the money you set aside in health savings accounts, you can keep that money and use it for your eventual retirement.

We also believe we ought to break down barriers that restrict choice and permit Americans to pick an insurance plan that is best for them and their families. One of the worst impacts of ObamaCare is that Washington, DC, said: Here is your health care coverage, and we are going to punish you with a penalty if you don’t buy it, forcing people to buy coverage that they didn’t want and didn’t need, a single male being forced, in essence, to buy maternity coverage. That is just 1 of the 10 essential health benefits that was mandated in ObamaCare that drove the cost of insurance through the roof, not to mention the fact that the pools of people who were insured tended to be older and less well, thus driving premiums again through the roof.

Another principle that is really important to our health care reform replacement is employment of busineses to provide employees with the kind of health care coverage that meets their needs through association health plans so they can pool their risks together to bring costs down and increase their choices. We believe there ought to be flexibility on the part of the States when it comes to Medicaid spending. We ought to, in my book, give the States the money and the block grant and say: Come up with a health care delivery Med-icaid’s low-income citizens that best suits their needs. We haven’t done that under ObamaCare. We have had a mandate and tied the hands of the States when it comes to coming up with alternatives to our own health delivery system.

Finally, when it comes for employers that provide 61 percent of the health care coverage for Americans, rather than tying their hands and driving up costs, what we ought to do is allow for increased flexibility for employer-sponsored plans that will help bring down the costs. We hear our colleagues on the other side of the aisle talking about ObamaCare like it was the gold

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CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, let me talk just a minute about the nominations process. In 2009, when President Obama was sworn into office, there were seven Cabinet members sworn in on his first day in office. That is a demonstration of the good faith and civility that ordinarily extends in the peaceful transition of power from one President to another. That doesn’t mean that everyone’s always agreed on this, but it is a milestone we marked about the fact that President Obama won as opposed to our preferred candidate, but we believed it was our responsibility to carry on this tradition of peaceful transition of power. The President, having won the election, is entitled to surround himself with his team, subject to the vetting and the confirmation process and the process known as advise and consent.

I believe we need to see some cooperation from our colleagues across the aisle, including the confirmation of the next Attorney General of the United States, Senator JEFF SESSIONS. Our Senate colleagues know JEFF SESSIONS. They have worked alongside him for years on the status quo to make health care more affordable, so that price people can afford, with choices that would be theirs, not a mandate out of Washington, DC.

Well, I don’t have to tell our Democratic colleagues about the unintended consequences of this partisan exercise. ObamaCare was passed without a single Republican vote so the problems that have developed from it are problems that were created by our Democratic colleagues. Having said that, we hope they will work with us to come up with an alternative which we believe would be more proven on the status quo to make health care more affordable, so that price people can afford, with choices that would be theirs, not a mandate out of Washington, DC.

During his hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee last week, all of us had a chance, along with our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, to ask him how he would handle a host of foreign policy and national security issues. During the question-and-answer period, he mentioned the importance of preserving our country’s position in world opinion and noted that our Nation has historically held the power of inspiration by our example, inspiring others around the world with our democracy. That extends well beyond our uniformed military and the three branches of government. That is something that should be cultivated well beyond our military preparedness. The point is, with General Mattis, we have a strategic thinker who sees the big picture, and I am confident he will lead our military in a way that advances our interests around the world, and what I am particularly looking for are leaders in the Trump administration who will restore America’s leadership role around the world wherever we go and wherever we look because I believe, in hearts of hearts, that one reason the world has become more dangerous and less stable is because many people around the world who are adversaries have viewed the Obama administration as retreat from America’s traditional leadership role in the world, and believe me, there are plenty of countries—plenty of bad actors—that are willing to take advantage of that void when America retreats and doesn’t demonstrate its historic leadership role.

I hope all of our colleagues will join us in supporting not only General Mattis’s confirmation but Secretary of State Tillerson’s and all of the others, including the Attorney General nominee, JEFF SESSIONS, and all of the other nominees of President-Elect Trump. They have every right to a thorough vetting. They have every right to ask hard questions to get information to help them vet these nominees. That is our job. In the end, they should not be denied that, which unfortunately some of them have threatened to do. That will not help anybody. It will not help this new administration, it will not make America a safer place, and it will make us more vulnerable to those around the world who want to disrupt the peaceful transition of power from one Presidency to the next.

Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Rhode Island for his courtesy, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, the senior Senator from West Virginia has a very short time clock and has asked me to yield 2 minutes to him before I begin my remarks.

I ask unanimous consent that that time be recognized at the conclusion of his remarks to speak in morning business for the duration of my remarks.

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

The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I thank my most generous friend from Rhode Island, Senator WHITEHOUSE, for allowing me to speak for a few minutes.

The remarks of Mr. MANCHIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 175 are printed in today’s Congressional Record under “Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.”

Mr. MANCHIN. Again, I thank the Senator.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. My pleasure.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, in my “Time to Wake Up” climate speech—this is No. 154—I sometimes feel as if I am out here banging hopelessly against a tightly locked, barred, and soundproofed door. I make them anyway because, at a minimum, I want people to know what happened here when people look back and ask what the hell went wrong with American democracy. But I do admit that it can sometimes be discouraging.

However, last week something important happened. A public servant won a victory against a massive special interest. A court in Massachusetts allowed the attorney general of that Commonwealth to obtain files and records from the ExxonMobil corporation about its climate denial enterprise.

That is great news, and it is an important event. There is virtually universal scientific consensus—and even alarm—about climate and oceanic changes caused by burning the fossil fuel industry’s products. In the face of that concern, the fossil fuel industry has gone to the mattresses to defend its business model. It is defending what the International Monetary Fund has described as a $700 billion—billion with a “b”—annual subsidy just in the United States.

To defend a prize of that magnitude, the industry has set up an array of front groups to obscure its hand and to
propagate fake science designed to raise doubts about the real thing. With that fake science, they dupe the public and provide talking points for their political operatives. The front groups are a tentacled Hydra named after everyone from Alphonse in Madison, Jefferson, and Franklin, to George C. Marshall. The resemblances between this fossil fuel climate denial operation and the tobacco fraud scheme are profound, and these resemblances are noted often, including by the lawyer who won the tobacco case. Yes, the Department of Justice won that case.

At the same time, the fossil fuel industry has taken advantage of the political weapon handed to them by five Republican appointees on the Supreme Court. This industry has used the unprecedented political power bestowed on mighty special interests by the Citizens United decision to extirpate judicial scrutiny for climate action. When I got here, there was plenty of Republican support for climate action, but after Citizens United that changed. They have seized that party like a hostile politician trained and turned Republican Party into the fossil fuel industry’s political arm. It turns out that you can do this on the cheap, compared to losing a subsidy of $700 billion a year.

This whole scheme reeks of mischief and self-interest, but in political forums the industry is such a powerful behemoth that it can block proper hearings, spout calculated misinformation, use truth, lobby to its heart’s content, refuse to answer questions, pile up the spin doctors and front groups, buy and rent politicians, and threaten to end careers of anyone who crosses them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do. They made an example of Representative Bob Inglis and bragged of the political peril—that would result to those who crossed them—and they do.

One would think conservative intellectuals would be the first to recognize the necessity of prohibiting fraud so as to ensure the integrity of otherwise free markets. Prohibitions on fraud go back to Roman times; no sane market could exist without them.

If ExxonMobil has committed fraud, its speeches on fraud would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection. But the company nevertheless invokes the First Amendment to suppress a subpoena designed to produce the information necessary to determine whether ExxonMobil has committed fraud. Its speech would not merit First Amendment protection.
CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. JOHNSON.) Morning business is closed.

GAO ACCESS AND OVERSIGHT ACT OF 2017

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is discharged from the bill, and the Senate will proceed to consideration of H.R. 72, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk reads as follows:

A bill (H.R. 72) to ensure the Government Accountability Office has adequate access to information.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 30 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

Mr. Sasse. Mr. President, in just a few minutes I will vote on a bill that probably will not get a lot of attention in Washington. No cable news shows are going to give it breaking alerts, headlines. Roundtables of pundits will not be gathering to scare about it, and partisans are not going to score the bill.

It is a straightforward bill with a straightforward purpose—to ensure that the Government Accountability Office can tap into the data at the Department of Agriculture and Human Services. But in this case, looks can be deceiving. The GAO Oversight and Access Act of 2017, which I introduced together with Senator Tester 1 year ago, represents a significant victory for taxpayers.

Its impact won’t be felt tomorrow in Washington, but over many years to come, taxpayers from Nebraska and across the country will see how passing this legislation played a role in forcing Congress to address some of the biggest problems that our government faces. Let’s step back for a moment and understand why. What is the problem?

The Federal Government has a very serious budget problem. This isn’t news to anyone who has been paying attention. It is not even something about which Democrats and Republicans disagree. We may not often agree on solutions, but we can and should agree to clearly identify the problems that the government, our government, has on its face. Some of the problems are very big—so big, in fact, that it is hard to even wrap our minds around how large the numbers are, like the fact that last year this government spent $587 billion more than all it collected in taxes.

National defense is the first and fundamental reason that the Federal Government exists. Last year we spent $595 billion on all of our national security or in the entire defense budget. When Ronald Reagan took office, the entire Federal budget was $590 billion. Now that is what we are borrowing annually.

Or look at it this way. Historically, the amount we borrowed last year was bigger than every Federal budget for the first 160 years of the Nation—combined. That is, if you added up every dollar that the government spent from 1789 through 1950, it would be less than the $587 billion that we overspent and therefore borrowed just last year. The former number got us through the Civil War, two world wars, and the Great Depression.

Some of our problems are actually relatively small, but they ultimately add up to something big. Just look at some of the stuff Senator Flake dug up in this year’s “Wastebasket” report or what Senator Lankford put in his report this year entitled “Federal Fumbles.” The Commerce Department gave $1.7 million to the National Comedy Museum to resurrect dead comedians using holograms. Also, $70,000 of our taxpayers’ money went to a Minnesota theater to put together an opera of Steven King’s “The Shining.”

And $17,000 was spent for people to wear fat suits to learn sensitivity to those with weight problems. These things are tiny individually, but when you put them together, they add up to a lot of our budget.

Expert after expert testifies before our committees that this is unsustainable. We all know this cannot go on forever. At some point, the government’s borrowing and overspending ways will catch up with us and we will have a Greek-style debt crisis.

Congress needs to begin acting now to address the government’s structural problems—chiefly in the entitlement programs, for those are the spending categories whose trajectories dwarf all others.

All of this gets to the central problem that the bill we are considering this afternoon was designed to solve—namely, that Congress is flying blind when it comes to overseeing huge portions of our budget, and therefore we don’t have the information we need to fix these problems.

The portion in particular I have in mind is the means-tested entitlement programs and the tax credits program. These include Medicaid; the earned-income tax credit, or EITC; the Supplemental Security Income—or disability—Program; food stamps; and Pell grants. All of these were designed to assist our low-income friends and neighbors. All of them together absorb a significant part of today’s Federal budget.

As of right now, $1 in every $6 we spend is on only 10 means-tested programs and tax credits like the ones just listed, according to the CBO, but because of an arcane law, Congress has been blocked from getting the best information that is available about how these programs are actually working or not working. What do I mean by that? By year, the Government Accountability Office—the GAO, the agency that is supposed to be the taxpayers’ watchdog because it is supposed to hunt down waste and expose
abuses—has been trying to gain access to a database at the Department of Health and Human Services called the National Directory of New Hires. The new hires database was created in 1996 to help enforce child support payments, and in order to do that, it collected some basic information—basically, who has a job, where they work, whom they work for, and how much they make.

The GAO’s interest in this data should be pretty obvious. If it could compare the information in the database to the information in the means-tested programs, it could easily spot fraud, waste, and mismanagement. For instance, if a program’s rules say that to qualify for benefits, a person needs to earn less than a certain amount of income annually, GAO would be able to use the database to see if the program is actually operating as designed and then issue reports to Congress. This is exactly the kind of work GAO does across all other Federal programs and that Congress routinely uses the GAO for—to take their recommendations to figure out how we should reform programs that are failing. Only in this instance, the GAO has been blocked from accessing the database.

Again, these are the biggest categories of Federal spending. The place the GAO has not been able to do its work is in the places where we are spending the most money. It is classic Washington—bureaucracy blocking oversight for taxpayers. It is not always malicious, but this is definitely wrong.

HHS has argued that when Congress created the new hires database, it didn’t expressly give the GAO permission to look at this data, and so its hands are tied. GAO countered that Congress had previously given blanket permission; the GAO has access to all Federal records many years prior.

Many in Congress believed that the law was clear and that GAO is entitled to this entitlement data under the law, but HHS continued to block the GAO from accessing the data. Today, Departments and other Federal agencies to access Federal records the next time a Federal agency tries to deny the GAO—and therefore us—access to that data; and No. 2, it requires the GAO to let all relevant congressional committees know when it issues reports in their jurisdiction.

We are now on the doorstep of hope fully passing this legislation today, which has rightly gotten a lot of support in Congress. When it passes the Senate tonight, it will head straight to the President’s desk for signature. Last year, it passed the House by a vote of 403 to 0 and it failed to pass the Senate was because of an anonymous hold.

In response, the House of Representatives took up this legislation as one of its first pieces and fit it over to the Senate 2 weeks ago, on January 4, moving just as quickly. It is a pleasure that the Presiding Officer today happens to be the chairman of the relevant committee that moved so quickly. Chairman Johnson and his new ranking member, Claire McCaskill, immediately took up this legislation and moved it through the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, for both the chairman—the Presiding Officer today—and the other members of the committee.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill tonight. It is appropriate that one of the first bills of this new Congress will be one to strengthen the authority of the GAO because by strengthening the powers of the GAO, what we are really doing is strengthening the Congress. There are a lot of talk around here on both sides of the aisle about the needs to reclaim Congress’s article I power. Across the 240 years of this Nation—or 226 years since the Constitution; 227 as I do the math here in my head—the Congress is at a fairly weak point in history, and we should be strengthening the article I branch of the Constitution.

One obvious important way to strengthen the powers of the Congress and therefore the accountability that we all have to the American people is by doing better oversight. Conducting hard-hitting but fair oversight of the executive branch agencies is how we protect the separation of powers, and it is how we guard the taxpayers’ funds, how we guard the wallet of the people. It is the Congress’s job to write the laws and to control the purse strings, and it is the President’s job to faithfully execute the laws. Good oversight gives the President the clear message that we need to do our job and to ensure that the executive agencies are doing theirs. There is no better friend of the Constitution in this regard than the Government Accountability Office. GAO is not simply another agency of a big government; the GAO is a part of the legislative branch, and it works hard to give Congress world-class insights into the operations of the other two branches. GAO is thorough, independent, and respected for its judgments by people of either party and no party at all.

I am deeply proud to see that Senator Tester has joined us on the floor, for he and I were the original sponsors of this bill. It is a pleasure that tonight we will be giving the GAO the tools it needs for oversight and therefore for our oversight.

It would only be natural, at the start of a new administration and a change in parties in the executive branch, for Democrats to become more interested in oversight and Republicans to become less so. May that not be the case. I am hopeful that oversight will remain a top priority for Members on both sides of the aisle. None of us came here to be partisan. We came here to exercise the functions of this office on behalf of the people in our States and across this Nation. It is therefore encouraging tonight, even as a new administration is about to begin in 3 days, that Congress will be asserting its constitutional right to oversight with a big bipartisan vote.

I want to thank my partner on the bill, Jon Tester of Montana, who will speak next. When we first heard about this issue together during briefings and committee hearings, we immediately realized that something was wrong, that the GAO had been handcuffed and not able to access this data, and we committed to each other to make sure something was done fast.

I would also like to name the original cosponsors of this bill, including Ron Johnson, Claire McCaskill, Tom Carper, Mike Enzi, Brian Schatz, Mike Lee, Tammy Baldwin, David Perdue, Joni Ernst, Jim Risch, Steve Daines, Tammy Duckworth, John McCain, Thom Tillis, Todd Young, Rob Portman, and James Lankford.

Finally, I wish to thank our House partners, including Representative Buddy Carter, Chairman Jason Chaffetz, and Ranking Member Elijah Cummings.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I reserve the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I wish to start off my remarks by thanking Senator Sasse for being able to work on this bill together. This is a good bill. He is exactly right—that this bill came out of the Presiding Officer’s committee last year, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. We met in the hallway and said: Let’s fix this problem, because it is a problem. We have a bill on the floor today that does that. It is a bipartisan bill. As the Senator from Nebraska has already pointed out, it is a truly bipartisan bill.

The GAO Access and Oversight Act makes the government more transparent and more accountable to our taxpayers.

Congress passed legislation in 1996 that created the National Directory of New Hires at the Department of Health and Human Services. Since that time, Congress has amended the law to permit other Federal agencies to access the directory. Today, Departments such as the Department of Education and the Department of the Treasury...
can access the directory for information on the collection of defaulted student loans or the collection of delinquent Federal loans, but the GAO—the Government Accountability Office—has not been allowed access to this directory.

Now, by clarifying that the GAO has the authority to access the National Directory of New Hires, we can ensure that the taxpayers’ watchdog is more easily able to do its job and root out Federal overpayments as well as waste, fraud and abuse.

Federal agencies reported nearly $1.25 trillion in improper payments in fiscal year 2014 alone—that is $1.25 billion with a “b.” By allowing the GAO access to this directory, Congress will provide the office with a critical tool that can help save taxpayers billions of dollars in unnecessary waste.

Once again, I thank the Senator from Nebraska for reaching across the aisle and working in a bipartisan fashion. This bill has strong support from Senators on both sides of the aisle, and—guess what—it passed unanimously in the House of Representatives.

I agree with folks across the country who have made themselves heard. They want a more transparent government, a more accountable government, and a more efficient government, and that is exactly what this bill does. That is why I encourage a “yes” vote on this good-government bill today.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

Mr. SASS. 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.

Mr. CORNY. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Alabama (Mr. SESSIONS).

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

The result was announced—yeas 99, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 28 Leg.]

YEAS—99

Alexander

Barrasso

Baucus

Bernstein

Blumenthal

Blunt

Booker

Boozman

Brown

Durbin

Benn

Feinstein

Franken

Gardner

Gilbert

Graham

Grassley

Harris

Hassan

Hatch

Heinrich

Hekitkamp

Hirono

Hoeven

H中铁

Isakson

Johnson

Kaine

Kennedy

King

Klobuchar

Lankford

Leahy

Lankford

Markley

McConnel

Menendez

Merkley

Moorin

Murkowski

Nelson

Portman

Risch

Roberts

Round

Rubio

Sanders

Sasse

Schatz

Schumer

Shaheen

Shelby

Stabenow

Sullivan

Tester

Thune

Tillis

Toomey

Udall

Van Hollen

Warren

Whitehouse

Wyden

Young

Duckworth

Brent

Fiasko

Franken

Gardner

Gilbert

Graham

Grassley

Harris

Hassan

Hatch

Heinrich

Hekitkamp

Hirono

Hoeven

H中铁

Isakson

Johnson

Kaine

Kennedy

King

Klobuchar

Lankford

Leahy

Lankford

Markley

McConnel

Menendez

Merkley

Moorin

Murkowski

Nelson

Portman

Risch

Roberts

Round

Rubio

Sanders

Sasse

Schatz

Schumer

Shaheen

Shelby

Stabenow

Sullivan

Tester

Thune

Tillis

Toomey

Udall

Van Hollen

Warren

Whitehouse

Wyden

Young

The bill (H.R. 72) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MINORITIES OF SCOTT PRUITT

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, having Scott Pruitt in charge of the EPA is bad for the air we breathe and the water we drink, and it is bad for American leadership on climate. It is not just that I have a different view from Mr. Pruitt on the Environmental Protection Agency. It is that he has made a career out of undermining the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. It is not just that he is a Republican or that he doesn’t share my views about clean energy.

Look, I understand that when a Republican administration comes in, their EPA nominee is going to have a different view of what the Agency ought to be doing. I am not suggesting that we are going to get Henry Waxman or Jeff Merkley to run the EPA. That is not what is going on here. Here is what it is, and I want people to listen carefully.

Scott Pruitt is a professional climate denier. That is his job. He has made his political bones trying to shred the EPA’s ability to enforce the laws that protect clean air and clean water. The core mission of the EPA is to safeguard public health by enforcing the laws on the books, and the cornerstones of the EPA’s authorities are the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. These laws were passed over 40 years ago with huge bipartisan majorities, and they have been extremely successful.

They especially inspired the dozens of young people watching C-SPAN right now to understand that the state of the environment in the late 1960s was catastrophic, like out of a science fiction movie. Even for those of us who were around, it is a good reminder of what the EPA has accomplished over the decades.

The Cuyahoga River in Ohio was so polluted that it caught on fire. Lake Erie was so polluted that almost nothing could live in it. Bacteria levels in the Hudson River were 170 times above levels that could be considered safe.

Raw sewage was directly discharged into rivers and streams where children swam. The FDA found that 87 percent of U.S. swordfish contained so much mercury that they were unfit for human consumption. Then the Clean Water Act was passed. We made incredible progress in the last 44 years. We still have a long way to go, as about one-third of our waterways are not yet fishable and swimmable, as the law requires.

Scott Pruitt’s opposition to the Clean Water Act and EPA makes me terrified that we could go back to the bad old days of water pollution. EPA’s enforcement of the Clean Air Act is an even bigger success story. This law has saved millions of lives and improved the health of millions of others. EPA’s enforcement of the law has reduced air pollution by 70 percent since 1970. Smog levels in L.A. have fallen two-thirds since their peak. Lead in the air is down 98 percent, carbon monoxide down 85 percent, sulfur dioxide down 80 percent. Acid rain is down over 50 percent and at a fraction of the anticipated cost. But this progress is in real jeopardy.

As an Oklahoma attorney general and as the head of the Republican Attorneys General Association, he dismantled the unit in his office charged with enforcing Federal environmental laws and stood up a unit to undermine Federal environmental law. He led the opposition to the Clean Power Plan. He sued the Federal Government over a dozen times to prevent the implementation of rules that would protect our health and our environment. What he does is fight the EPA. That is his thing.

As Oklahoma attorney general, he literally—I am not making this up—he literally copied and pasted a letter from a major oil company onto his official State attorney general letterhead and then sent it to the EPA as though it were his own.

I have never met Mr. Pruitt—and I assume he is personally a good guy—so I will say it like this: A person who works so closely with industries that
pollute our air and water is an unusually bad fit to run the EPA. Never before in the history of the EPA has a
President nominated someone so opposed to the EPA to run it, and on the most significant environmental challenge of our generation, he is aggressively trying to undermine the EPA. I have said that climate change debate is "far from settled" and that "scientists continue to disagree about the degree and extent of global warming and its connections to the actions of mankind." This, of course, is nuts. The climate debate is settled and has been for some time. More than 97 percent of climate scientists agree that the climate is changing and that humans are responsible. Ask a scientist, ask a farmer, ask a fisherman, ask a skier or snowboarder. If you don't believe 97 percent of scientists, will you at least believe your own eyes?

His position even puts him at odds with the Department of Defense, which has called climate change a threat multipluers. The good news is that we are actually making a lot of progress in clean energy, almost all of it in the private sector. The cost of solar power has dropped by 60 percent in the last 10 years and more new solar capacity was added in 2016 than any other energy source. Wind power was by far the largest source added to the grid in 2015. Clean energy generation grew by about 20 percent in the last year, and the long-term extensions of the renewable energy tax credits give us hope to think that kind of trajectory can be sustained. This comes at a time when public concern about climate change is at an all-time high, and with three-quarters of Americans, including half of Republicans, supporting Federal efforts to reduce carbon pollution.

This progress is fragile, and confirming Scott Pruitt can undermine our momentum. Again, here is Mr. Put
it in his own words about the Clean Power Plan: "The EPA does not possess the authority to regulate carbon dioxide to accomplish what it proposes in the unlawful Clean Power Plan." This is flat wrong.

Let me quickly explain a lawsuit called Massachusetts v. EPA. The Supreme Court ruled that the Clean Air Act requires the EPA to regulate air pollution and carbon pollution as a pollutant so it is not only that the EPA may regulate greenhouse gas emissions, under the Clean Air Act they are actually required to do so. Mr. Pruitt has bragged that he "led the charge to sue the EPA and to accomplish what it proposes in the unlawful Clean Power Plan." This is false.

On climate change, he has said:

Is it truly manmade or is it just simply another period of time when the Earth is cooling, increasing in heat? Is it just typical, natural type of occurrences as opposed to what the administration says? I cannot think of a person more ill-suited to lead the EPA, who denies decades of scientific research.

To my Republican colleagues, I have had many encouraging, rational conversations about climate with you but almost exclusively in private. I think this vote is the litmus test, the one your grandkids will ask you about. I know being in the Senate is about making choices—and lots of times it is great—but this issue, this vote is absolutely simple: Don't vote for a climate denier. You cannot dabble in conservation or energy efficiency or vote for a budget amendment recognizing the scientific consensus on climate change and then vote yes on this nominee. If you say you are not a climate denier, then you must approve this when you get to prove it. If we find another nominee, even one who hates the Clean Power Plan, who shares your view on federalism, who shares your view about the United Nations, about President Obama, that is fine; but this nominee is out of bounds.

Please, consult your voters, your university experts, talk to your kids. It is their planet. It is their future—or consider with your own conscience.

I know science and policies is complicated and the right thing to do is not that easy to determine in the fog of the battle. This is not one of those times. For future generations, for the planet, for the future of the Republican Party, you have to get this one right. If you are not a climate denier, do not put one in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, today I rise to talk about a critically important position in the Trump administration Cabinet: The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA charged with making sure that all Americans are safeguarded from major environmental threats to human health, where they live, where they learn, and where they work. Originally proposed by a Republican administration, this mission has been supported by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. Clean air to breathe and clean water to drink are basic human needs that we all must work to protect. Disagreements involving the EPA usually stem from how we best preserve our natural resources, and we certainly welcome those debates in the Senate.

Oftentimes, the role of the Environmental Protection Agency is to provide a check and balance to activities that pollute our air, dirty our waterways, and contaminate our land. This is why I am so troubled by the nomination of Scott Pruitt as EPA Administrator. Mr. Pruitt's track record on environmental issues as Oklahoma's attorney general is, in a word, dismal.

I am particularly concerned about the influence of the fossil fuel industry over Mr. Pruitt's decisions and actions. As Oklahoma's attorney general, he filed 148 lawsuits against the EPA to undermine their efforts. In 13 of those cases, companies that gave political donations to Mr. Pruitt also joined in that suit. As ranking member of the Science Subcommittee, I am worried that scientific data of the Environmental Protection Agency will be minimized, suppressed, and politicized. Mr. Pruitt has tried to instill doubt in the strong consensus of global climate change scientists, claiming that the debate on fundamental scientific principles is far from settled.

If his confirmation goes through, I am concerned that the work of EPA scientists may be edited, twisted, or buried to protect special interests and prevent necessary action. Many Michiganders are rightfully afraid that Mr. Pruitt will not enforce our bedrock environmental laws like the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. We have seen him fight against these very laws from his current position.

All across the Nation, communities are dealing with contamination and environmental catastrophes. Rural and urban communities alike depend on the strength of these laws as well as EPA's work to protect. For example, the people of Flint, MI, are still suffering through devastating effects of a catastrophic drinking water crisis. The Environmental Protection Agency is heavily involved to make sure the drinking water in Flint will be safe and the National Safe Drinking Water Act rules will be updated. I am very concerned that the EPA will ignore the lessons learned after the Flint water crisis under Administrator Pruitt, and Flint is not the only community facing a water quality crisis. For example, Monroe County—which gets its water from Lake Erie—has seen its drinking water affected because of toxins in western Lake Erie.

Algae blooms—a result of runoff pollution—have made their way into Detroit River water intakes. Harmful algal blooms are a problem that scientists say will only get worse as we see higher temperatures and more precipitation in the future.

In addition to providing safe drinking water, I am concerned that enforcement of clean air policies would be weakened. Keeping our air clean isn't just about climate change. It is about keeping pollutants out of the lungs of our children. People in places like Southwest Detroit and St. Clair County too often suffer the harmful impacts from poor air quality. Detroit's asthma rates are 30 percent higher than the national average, and the child asthma rate is 24 percent higher than the national average in the entire country. Children can't learn if they are too sick to be in school.
Mr. Pruitt has a record we can look at, and it is very extreme. He has attacked measures that reduced interstate smog pollution, including protections against arsenic and mercury. If Mr. Pruitt has sought to weaken these protections around the country that protect toxics like arsenic and mercury, I think we have to ask the question, if he is confirmed, will he be protecting American families or will he be protecting the bottom line of multinational corporations?

To those who oppose Mr. Pruitt’s approach of attacking the EPA, I would say strengthening our economy and our environment are not mutually exclusive. In fact, each effort depends on the success of the other. We must protect our natural resources so future generations will be able to sustainably use them.

Businesses can only attract top talent and jobs to the United States if we have clean places to live and to work and clean, healthy work environments. Sick days brought on by environmental toxins hurt small businesses, and environmental catastrophes can decimate a lifetime’s worth of equity built up by homeowners.

Smart, effective protections can be good, not just for our physical health but for our economic health as well. Previous EPA nominees from both parties have understood these basic principles. What separates Mr. Pruitt from past EPA nominees is his contempt for the mission of the Environmental Protection Agency and his disregard for the science that provides the very foundation for the Agency’s actions.

Just as I would not vote to confirm a fox to guard a henhouse, I will not vote to confirm Mr. Pruitt to safeguard our Nation’s environment.

I urge my colleagues to join me to oppose Mr. Pruitt’s nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon?

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I spent the last few days having town hall meetings at home. It was a big challenge. We had 200 people in McMinnville on Saturday night, a pregame event—that they are unhappy about the environmental rules and the prospects of the environmental rules being gutted by the new head of the EPA, you know that you have people alarmed.

Oregon is no stranger to the threats of pollution. In 2015, there was a discovery that heavy metals, including cadmium and arsenic, had been emitted for decades into the air of Portland neighborhoods at dangerous levels.

This pollution was caused by a regulatory loophole the size of Crater Lake. At the time, I called on the Environmental Protection Agency to take action. Within days, they were on the ground in Portland helping to assess the pollution and our health risks.

It seems to me that Americans need to trust that the Environmental Protection Agency will be able to defend their communities from air pollution or water contamination. That is why we have always opposed the nomination of Scott Pruitt to head it. We had 200 people in McMinnville on Saturday night, a small community. I think the temperature was about 22 degrees. What really troubled them is that it sure looks like, when you examine the record of Mr. Pruitt, that he is trampling on everything we call the Oregon Way. The Oregon Way is something that Democrats, Republicans, people across the political spectrum subscribe to because it involves protecting our treasured land, air, and water. It was something we want for our generation, and we will pass it on to our kids, and it has been hugely valuable to us in attracting more industries that pay well because the workers at those industries want clean air and clean water.

When you look at Scott Pruitt’s career, it really upends everything that I would call the Oregon Way—repeated attempts to weaken or eliminate health-based environmental standards, air quality standards for toxic air pollutants, limits on carbon emissions to take on the challenge of climate change. These rollbacks are particularly harmful to children and low-income households, communities of color, minorities, families, and communities.

Yesterday, Senator MERKLEY and I spoke at our wonderful Martin Luther King Day Breakfast put on by The Skanner. Bernie and Bobbie Foster have been doing this for years. All I could think of is, if you roll back clean air and water, you are going to hurt the people who are going to be hurt the most are low-income minorities, and communities of color. I don’t see a big outcry in America for policies that would do that kind of harm to some of the most vulnerable.

Mr. Pruitt also has a troubling history of denying that fundamental science really ought to be the basis of American policymaking when it comes to environmental protection. For example, he disputed the Agency’s science-based findings in 2009 that greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare. Now, my view is that this is an inarguable and unfortunate reality of climate change. But Mr. Pruitt’s challenge suggests either a misunderstanding about how environmental agencies ought to make science-based decisions or, even worse, a habit of setting science aside when the outcome is at odds with the special interests. Again, that comes back to the kind of comments that were made during my five town hall meetings over the last few days at home. People would say: Look, Democrats and Republicans at home in Oregon, great Republican Governors—particularly led by the late Tom McCall—they would constantly come back to the proposition that you should not let the special interests trample on your treasures, your land and your air, because not only was it bad for this generation—our generation—but it would be particularly damaging to our young people.

So it is really troubling that this has been the choice of the President-elect. My own view is that when it comes to environmental standards, one of the unsung successes of the last few years has been a rule cutting emissions of mercury, arsenic, lead and other dangerous materials. It prevented, in 2016, 11,000 premature deaths. The concern is that a lot of those deaths would be seen in minority communities and communities of color, the people I was concerned about when we had our Martin Luther King Day Breakfast.

Mr. Pruitt worked hard to gut that rule. He really pulled out all the stops to oppose a rule cutting emissions of mercury, arsenic, lead and dangerous heavy metals. He worked hard to gut it. If he is confirmed, he may just possibly be successful.

Now, the message that I have heard again and again is that we can do better than this. We do better than this. I think the American people, when they see what is at stake—it has been hard to follow all of the hearings. I know that I was very interested in the questioning in the Foreign Relations Committee by the Presiding Officer. I was trying to follow all the nominations, and I could not get to all the hearings. I could not follow all of the questioning that I thought was important.

But even when all of this is going on, when people tell you before a Trailblazers game—at home in Portland, a pregame event—that they are unhappy about the environmental rules and the prospects of the environmental rules being gutted by the new head of the EPA, you know that you have people alarmed.

Oregon is no stranger to the threats of pollution. In 2015, there was a discovery that heavy metals, including cadmium and arsenic, had been emitted for decades into the air of Portland neighborhoods at dangerous levels.

This pollution was caused by a regulatory loophole the size of Crater Lake. At the time, I called on the Environmental Protection Agency to take action. Within days, they were on the ground in Portland helping to assess the pollution and our health risks. Not long after, they identified the cause of the regulatory oversight and corrected course.

It seems to me that Americans need to trust that the Environmental Protection Agency will be able to defend their communities from air pollution or water contamination. That is why we have always opposed the nomination of Scott Pruitt to head it. We had 200 people in McMinnville on Saturday night, a small community. I think the temperature was about 22 degrees. What really troubled them is that it sure looks like, when you examine the record of Mr. Pruitt, that he is trampling on everything we call the Oregon Way. The Oregon Way is something that Democrats, Republicans, people across the political spectrum subscribe to because it involves protecting our treasured land, air, and water. It was something
to be in a partnership with them to get this fixed to enforce strong water quality standards, and it only can happen if you have strong leadership that starts at the top. The American people have a right to have confidence that the head of the Environmental Protection Agency is really tasked with improving the well-being of our communities and not the profits and the pocketbooks of the most powerful special interests in our country.

I am going to close by saying that I am not confident that a Pruitt EPA will stand on the side of those families against the special interests. That is why tonight I state that I will be opposing the nomination of Mr. Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Sander). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. RUHM. Mr. President, I fully join with my colleagues today. I appreciate the Senator from Oregon and his remarks. I join with him and the others who have spoken to express my grave concern about the nomination of Scott Pruitt as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

It is really unacceptable to me that someone who denies climate change—science could be put in charge of an agency that is really tasked with advancing our national strategy to address climate change and the ill resulting. Mr. Pruitt has said—the overwhelming evidence to the contrary—that the debate is far from settled. He denigrated science, in essence, to the evidence and the science and the conclusions of the near consensus of scientists.

Time and again, this attorney general from Oklahoma, Mr. Pruitt, has filed suits actually to block the I join with my colleagues today. I appreciate the Senator from Oregon and his remarks. I join with him and the others who have spoken to express my grave concern about the nomination of Scott Pruitt as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

It is really unacceptable to me that someone who denies climate change—science could be put in charge of an agency that is really tasked with advancing our national strategy to address climate change and the ill resulting. Mr. Pruitt has said—the overwhelming evidence to the contrary—that the debate is far from settled. He denigrated science, in essence, to the evidence and the science and the conclusions of the near consensus of scientists.

Time and again, this attorney general from Oklahoma, Mr. Pruitt, has filed suits actually to block the EPA's clean air and clean water regulations protocols, which have allowed the United States to lead the efforts to reduce carbon emissions and address the climate crisis worldwide.

There are few issues, in my opinion, that are as urgent as this, and across the globe that we must meaningfully do something collectively about. America must lead and not have a leader on this issue that is now so far out of step with global consensus. Everyone, from scientists and climate experts to business leaders and even our own military officials, understands that climate change is a real threat, not just to our environment but also to our economy, to the health of our people and our national security.

It is disturbing that, in a way—and it also defies common sense—if you hear the way some people talk about climate change, you would think that it can be stopped by putting on a pair of boots and Mr. Pruitt, you might think that not only is climate change not a problem but that it is not our problem. This could not be further from the truth. We are already, here in America, dealing with the very real impact of climate change. Ask anyone living in my home State along the shore or a family in Louisiana whose home has been destroyed by severe flooding or a farmer whose land has become barren from the droughts in California whether or not these consequences are real for their families. Yet, the President-elect and Mr. Pruitt not only refuse to acknowledge the science but continue fighting the dangerous and destructive path ahead. They are failing to face that if we fail to act.

Now, the facts of climate change are overwhelming. Sea levels are rising. Ocean temperatures are increasing. The ocean is becoming far more acidic. Solar levels are rising, both because of expansion of warming oceans and because of the melting of land-based snow and ice that is now entering our oceans. Many mountain glaciers are melting away and the Arctic sea ice is decreasing.

Climate change is an American issue and it is a global issue. Addressing climate change should be a cause where we find a common and lasting local and regional geographic divides. In many ways, it already is. We have seen 36 Nobel prize winners come together in 2015 in a historical declaration on the threats of climate change. Brad Schmid with the National Geographic last year—it said clearly that the majority of Americans are worried about global warming, and the major- ity of Americans believe global warming is a result of manmade pollution.

I understand that for many people climate change is not an immediate emergency and reality, but, again, we should understand that right now, many of our more vulnerable Americans are suffering as a result. I see this when I go home from here in Washington to Newark. Newark has almost an epidemic level of asthma, with kids missing school because of this health and lung risk. The facts are clear: The pollutants kids breathe are real. For families living in communities on the shore, the long-term damage after Superstorm Sandy, the facts are clear: Their homes are being destroyed by unpredictable weather events. In New Jersey, we have seen the damage up and down our coast, with rising sea levels, flooding, and extreme weather.

We know that those who can least afford it—low-income, hard-working families—are severely impacted around the country. Communities that are poor, often minority populations, disproportionately endure these and struggle related to changes in the weather due to climate change.

We know that when evacuation orders are given, those who can afford to leave their homes face a far different reality than those who have financial constraints.

Not only is it more difficult for working families to deal with climate-related issues, but the neighborhoods and communities in which they live are often the ones that are more affected by the rising temperatures and the pollution caused by climate change. One researcher who conducted a 2014 study...
on the effects of climate change reported that “generally, higher poverty neighborhoods are warmer, and wealthier neighborhoods are cooler.” We see that in cities in New Jersey.

Multiple studies continue to show that poorer communities are more likely to suffer the most harmful impacts than higher income communities. One study from the University of Minnesota found that Americans of color are exposed on average to 38 percent higher levels of outdoor nitrogen dioxide and ozone in their environments than white Americans. In one study, communities of color are exposed on average to 38 percent higher levels of outdoor nitrogen dioxide and ozone in their environments than white Americans.

Climate change is already posing real dangers. The most recent National Climate Assessment released in 2014 noted that communities in rural America, as well as urban communities, have already experienced consequences of climate change, including “crop and livestock losses from severe drought and flooding, damage to levees and roads from severe storms, shifts in planting and harvesting times, and large-scale losses from fires and other weather-related disasters.” The report concludes that “these impacts have profound effects, often significantly affecting the health and well-being of rural residents and communities.”

In States like Oklahoma, for example, where the State legislature mandated a study on the potential impacts of climate change, the group commissioned to do that study, the Oklahoma Climatological Survey, definitively concluded the following:

The Earth’s climate has warmed during the last 100 years. The Earth’s climate will continue to warm for the foreseeable future. Much of the global average temperature increase over the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities, particularly increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and will be impacted.

Undoubtedly, New Jersey, Oklahoma—where Mr. Pruitt is from—and the rest of our country and the world will continue to be impacted by this problem, especially if America does not lead and falls behind.

We have made great strides, though, in addressing climate change under President Obama, including critical tax credits for wind and solar energy that not only help deal with climate change but also help American businesses thrive and lead, with now more people being employed by solar than coal. We have the historic Paris agreement and EPA regulations to reduce coal. We have the historic Paris agreement and EPA regulations to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and we are making progress.

The United States has now emerged as a global leader in meaningfully addressing climate change. We cannot afford to slow down this progress, but I am afraid that under the leadership of President-Elect Donald Trump, that is exactly where we are headed. Despite scientific evidence, popular concern, and the real-life impacts of climate change being evidenced in communities all across the country, all different backgrounds, from urban to rural, our President-elect and his nominee for the EPA, Attorney General Scott Pruitt, plan to advance special interests ahead of the common interest, of the global interest, of America’s interests.

The United States has a long legacy of leading, being a global leader in times of crisis, and at a time when we see the realities of climate change, at a time when we and many scientists are concluding that there is a global crisis and military leaders are concluding that we have a global crisis, at a time when we are seeing the effect of that crisis being made real in regions across our Nation and our planet Earth, America must not waiver in its commitment.

I believe the Environmental Protection Agency deserves a leader who is prepared to lead—not deny, not retreat, but surrender the ground that we have gained. We deserve to have an EPA leader who is just that—someone who stands up to lead, who makes the difficult choices and finds ways to unify our country, to pull from the wisdom of the military, the wisdom of businesses, the wisdom of communities like the one in which I live, and chart a course for this country that helps to lead the globe, lead planet Earth out of this crisis and into the strength we can find through America, that is the task: that we can save our environment and create incredible prosperity in the future.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO JOHN SULLIVAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I want to take a few moments to acknowledge Illinois State Senator—and my friend—John Sullivan. John is one of the best and most decent men in politics—and there is no stronger advocate for the people of western Illinois.

After all, they are John’s lifelong friends and family. He has been living and farming there his entire life. And after 14 years in the Illinois Senate, John retired and returned to the family business.

John Sullivan grew up on his family farm in Macomb, Nauvoo, and Hamilton. He spent his summers taking care of livestock and baling hay. In 1981, John graduated from Quincy College—known today as Quincy University—with a degree in history. After college, he went to auction school and obtained his real estate license. He sold insurance before taking a job in Rushville with Production Credit Association.

He didn’t know anyone in Rushville—a population of just over 3,000 people—but he joined the local parish and quickly made friends. As fate would have it, Joan Merna moved to town and joined the same parish. Their friends decided to introduce them, and the rest is history. Today, John and Joan have been married for more than 33 years. And if you talk to their friends, they will tell you their marriage was one of the best things that happened to Rushville.

They are a great team and have a wonderful family.

In 1986, John joined the family real estate and auction business, which his children and siblings still run today. Nearly 20 years later, he sat down with Joan at the kitchen table and decided to run for office. It was something he always wanted to do—and 2002 was as good a time as any. Before John, no one thought a Democrat could be elected Senator in western Illinois. For years, good candidates tried and failed.

But John won office the old-fashioned way—by knocking on doors, walking in parades, and listening to people. He also had a secret weapon—six brothers and four sisters. Republicans said it was like running against the Walton family. And a couple of his brothers look a lot like John. But consensus was so great that, during that first campaign, people sometimes thought John was everywhere all at once. They didn’t realize that sometimes they were seeing one of the Sullivan brothers.

John learned fast and rose in just a few years from a political novice to a leader of the Democratic Party in the Illinois Senate. If you want to see John’s legacy, you can look at the extension of Route 339 in JoAnn’s name. It’s one of the main arteries that created hundreds of new jobs—and will continue to bring new jobs to the region long after we are gone. He has secured more than $820 million for Western Illinois University in Macomb—and over $18 million to keep the Quincy Veterans Home Guest House open.

But the greatest part of John’s legacy is the civility, reason, and dignity he has brought to his work—qualities needed in today’s politics. John understands that getting things done involves finding middle ground and getting along with people. Progress is a long march. It demands patience and perseverance. And sometimes, it requires the wisdom and humility to compromise, a lesson John learned from his parents, growing up as one of 11 children. When fights broke out, his parents didn’t get involved, they simply said: “Figure it out and just get along.” And they did. John took the advice to heart and built his reputation as someone who is always willing to listen to the other side to see if there is a way to move forward.
together. He knows that principled compromise isn’t capitulation, but how democracy is supposed to work. He will be sorely missed in the Illinois Senate.

Despite his many achievements, his proudest accomplishment is his family. John and Joan still live on their family farm in Rushville where they raised four children. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Emily. And let me tell you, Emily inherited some good public service genes—I am indebted to John and Joan for letting her work in my Washington office.

I will close with this. On the wall in John’s Senate office was a photograph of his dad, along with the advice he gave him, “Don’t forget the little guy.” Throughout his career, he has never forgotten the little guys—family farmers, small business owners, and hard-working people wondering how they will send their children to college or retire with dignity. John has stood with them and been their champion. Now, as he enters the next chapter in his life, I want to wish him and Joan many years of happiness and the best of luck with the family business and family farm.

**FISCAL YEAR 2017 ENFORCEMENT FILING**

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, S. Con. Res. 3, the fiscal year 2017 congressional budget resolution, included an instruction to the chairman of the Senate Committee on the Budget to file enforceable levels in the Senate in the event the budget was agreed to without the need to appoint a committee of conference on the measure. On Thursday, January 12, 2017, the Senate passed the budget by a vote of 51–48. On Friday, January 13, 2017, the House of Representatives passed the budget without changes on a vote of 227–198. As such, today I wish to submit the required filing found in the resolution.

Specifically, section 4001 of the fiscal year 2017 congressional budget resolution requires the chairman to file: No. 1, an allocation for fiscal year 2017 for the Committee on Appropriations; and No. 2, an allocation for fiscal years 2017, 2017 through 2021, and 2017 through 2026 for committees other than the Committee on Appropriations.

The figures included in this filing are consistent with the spending limits set forth in the Budget Control Act of 2011, as amended by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, and the levels included in S. Con. Res. 3.

For purposes of enforcing the Senate’s pay-as-you-go rule, which is found in section 201 of S. Con. Res. 21, the fiscal year 2008 congressional budget resolution, I am resetting the Senate’s scorecard to zero for all fiscal years.

All years in the accompanying tables are fiscal years.

I ask unanimous consent that the tables detailing enforcement in the Senate be printed in the RECORD.

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

**ALLOCATION OF SPENDING AUTHORITY TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017**

($ billions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriations</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2017–2021</th>
<th>2017–2026</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry: Budget Authority</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>1,326.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>1,325.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Services: Budget Authority</td>
<td>162.1</td>
<td>866.9</td>
<td>1,881.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>162.2</td>
<td>866.8</td>
<td>1,876.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs: Budget Authority</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>114.1</td>
<td>214.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>114.2</td>
<td>214.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce, Science, and Transportation: Budget Authority</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>208.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>208.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Natural Resources: Budget Authority</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>208.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>208.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Public Works: Budget Authority</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>220.1</td>
<td>424.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>220.2</td>
<td>424.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance: Budget Authority</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Relations: Budget Authority</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>112.9</td>
<td>215.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>112.9</td>
<td>215.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland Security and Government Affairs: Budget Authority</td>
<td>139.9</td>
<td>739.4</td>
<td>1,600.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>139.8</td>
<td>739.4</td>
<td>1,600.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice: Budget Authority</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>180.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>180.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions: Budget Authority</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>171.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>171.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and Administration: Budget Authority</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence: Budget Authority</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans’ Affairs: Budget Authority</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>527.1</td>
<td>1,037.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>108.0</td>
<td>527.1</td>
<td>1,037.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Affairs: Budget Authority</td>
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<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlays</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business: Budget Authority</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This allocation is consistent with the statutory limits imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, as amended. Regular appropriations assumed in this allocation total $551.0 billion in revised security category discretionary budget authority and $518.5 billion in revised nonsecurity category discretionary budget authority. This allocation assumes $1,181.8 billion in general purpose outlays stemming from those regular appropriations amounts. This allocation also includes the cap adjustments that occurred in calendar year 2016 for full-year spending for fiscal year 2017, pursuant to Section 251 of BBEDCA and Sections 302 and 314 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. Details of those adjustments can be found in the Congressional Record for May 12, 2016, May 26, 2016, June 27, 2016, September 2, 2016, and December 9, 2016.
TRIBUTE TO DR. ERICA TOWLE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, today I recognize Dr. Erica Towl, a Knauss Sea Grant fellow on the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, for all of the hard work she has done for me, my staff, and other members of the committee over the past year. Dr. Towl received her Ph.D. in coral reef ecology from the University of Miami. In her postgraduate work, she has used her scientific expertise to inform public policy. I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr. Towl for all of the fine work she has done. I wish her continued success in the years to come.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BLUE WATER AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. The chamber was founded in 1906 by a group of business owners and entrepreneurs in Port Huron who volunteered their time and financial resources to the growth of the greater Port Huron-Marysville community. Within its first year, the chamber had accomplished its goal of encouraging economic growth with the addition of new factories and the establishment of an industrial enterprise fund. Its work attracted new business from around Michigan, Illinois, and Kentucky. By the time the chamber was officially incorporated in 1917, it had grown to 956 members. This expansion allowed the chamber to begin to improve the well-being of the Port Huron community, a tradition that continues to this day.

Throughout its history, the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce has been more than just a way to connect businesses in the Port Huron area. It continually advocates for the community. Over the past few years, the chamber has led initiatives that have addressed housing shortages, advocated for improved conditions in our schools through finance reform and millage campaigns, and supported campaigns to improve our regional infrastructure. It has fought, time and time again, not just for better business, but for the prosperity of the entire Blue Water region.

Today the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce continues its great tradition of fostering economic prosperity and community improvement. The guiding force throughout the last century has been the chamber’s five core values: integrity, relationships, freedom, excellence, and happiness. By adhering to these values, they have grown and continued to succeed. In 2007, the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce was awarded the Chamber of the Year Award from the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals. It received this great honor again in 2010, for its continued and outstanding work in advocacy, education, and assistance programs to its community, a true testament to the membership and leadership. The growth we have seen in the Port Huron over the past few years has been remarkable, and the Blue Water Chamber has been a critical component of that success and progress.

I am pleased today to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing such an auspicious milestone for the Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce. On its 100th anniversary, the chamber and its members have much to celebrate, and I wish them continuing success and prosperity in the years ahead.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Ridgway, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations and treaties which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 3:02 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, without amendments:

S. 81. An act to provide for an exception to a limitation against appointment of persons as Secretary of Defense within seven years of relief from active duty as a regular commissioned officer of the Armed Forces.

The message further announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 78. An act to improve the consideration by the Securities and Exchange Commission of the costs and benefits of its regulations and orders.

H.R. 238. An act to reauthorize the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, to better protect futures customers, to provide end-users with market certainty, to make basic reforms to ensure transparency and accountability at the Commission, to help farmers, ranchers, and end-users manage risks, to help keep consumer costs low, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, without amendment:

S. Con. Res. 3. Concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2017 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2018 through 2026.

The message further announced that pursuant to 15 U.S.C. 1024(a), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, the Speaker appoints the following Members on the part of the House of Representatives to the Joint Economic Committee: Mr. Paulsen of Minnesota, Mr. Schweikert of Arizona, Mrs. Comstock of Virginia, Mr. LaHood of Illinois, Mr. Francis Rooney of Florida, Mr. Doyle of Wisconsin, Mr. Delaney of Maryland, Ms. Adams of North Carolina, and Mr. Beyer of Virginia.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bills were read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 78. An act to improve the consideration by the Securities and Exchange Commission of the costs and benefits of its regulations and orders; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

H.R. 238. An act to reauthorize the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, to better protect futures customers, to provide end-users with market certainty, to make basic reforms to ensure transparency and accountability at the Commission, to help farmers, ranchers, and end-users manage risks, to help keep consumer costs low, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE
January 17, 2017

By Mr. COCHRAN, from the Committee on Appropriations:
Special Report entitled “Further Revised Allocation to Subcommittees of Budget Totals for Fiscal Year 2017” (Rept. No. 115–1).

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself, Mr. FLAKE, Mr. McCAIN, Mr. LEE, and Mr. COTTON):
S. 147. A bill to prevent a taxpayer bailout of health insurance issuers; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 148. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a credit against tax for qualified elementary and secondary education tuition; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 149. A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide student loan deferment for victims of terrorist attacks; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 150. A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to provide an additional tool to prevent certain frauds against veterans, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 151. A bill to provide appropriate information to Federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies, pursuant to investigating terrorism, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself, Mr. McCAIN, and Mr. TOOMEY):
S. 152. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the removal or demotion of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs based on performance or fitness; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 159. A bill to terminate Operation Choke Point; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 160. A bill to reform the inspection process of housing assisted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself and Mr. NELSON):
S. 161. A bill to improve hurricane forecasting and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. RUBIO:
S. 162. A bill to restore Second Amendment rights in the District of Columbia; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. WARNER (for himself, Mr. LANKFORD, and Mr. BOOKER):
S. 163. A bill to provide section 31 of title 5, United States Code, to establish in statute the Presidential Innovation Fellows Program; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. JOHNSON (for himself, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. ENZI, Ms. BALDWIN, and Ms. KLOBuchar):
S. 164. A bill to require the Secretary of the Interior to reissue the final rules relating to the listing of the gray wolf in the Western Great Lakes and the State of Wyoming under the Endangered Species Act of 1973; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. ROUNDS:
S. 165. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to require an element in precession counseling for members of the Armed Forces on assistance and support services for caregivers of certain veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. HATCH (for himself and Mr. BOOKER):
S. 166. A bill to require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of Muhammad Ali; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. MORAÑ (for himself and Mr. ROBERTS):
S. 167. A bill to designate a National Memorial to Fallen Educators at the National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia, Kansas; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. WICKER (for himself, Mr. CASEY, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. NELSON, and Mr. THUNE):
S. 168. A bill to amend and enhance certain maritime programs of the Department of Transportation; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself and Mr. COTTON):
S. 169. A bill to counter anti-Semitism at the United Nations, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. NELSON, Mr. CORN, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. HATCH, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. COTTON, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. PETERS, Mr. HERSCHEL, Mr. STARKENBURG, Mr. MURKOWSKI, Mr. BENNET, and Mr. BLUMENT):
S. 170. A bill to provide for nonpreemption of measures by State and local governments to divest from entities that engage in commerce-related or investment-related boycott, divestment, or sanctions activities targeting Israel, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. SULLIVAN (for himself, Mr. THUNE, Mr. NELSON, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mr. SCHATZ, Ms. CANTWELL, and Mr. WICKER):
S. 171. A bill to reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, to reauthorize the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Ms. BALDWIN (for herself, Ms. WARNEN, Ms. SCHUMACHER, Mr. MARKEY, and Mr. MERKLEY):
S. 172. A bill to require the President to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and to make that Agreement ineligible for expedited consideration by Congress; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself and Mr. NELSON):
S. 173. A bill to require the United States Postal Service to designate a single, unique ZIP code for particular communities; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. HELLER (for himself and Mr. SCHAFER):
S. 174. A bill to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to consolidate the reporting obligations of the Federal Communications Commission in order to improve congressional oversight and reduce reporting burdens; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. MANCHIN (for himself, Mrs. CAPITO, Mr. CASEY, Mr. BROWN, Mr. KAINKE, Mr. WARNER, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. TESTER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. BERNSTEIN, Mr. HENCH, Ms. McCaskill, Ms. Heitkamp, Mr. NELSON, Mr. BURR, and Mr. SULLIVAN):
S. 175. A bill to amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer certain funds to the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan and the 1974 United Mine Workers of America, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MCCONNELL:
S. 176. A bill to amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer certain funds to the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. CARDIN (for himself, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. BROWN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. REED, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. FRANKEN, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. UDALL, Ms. KLOBuchar, Mr. KAINE, Mr. MERKLEY, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. WARNER, Ms. WARNEN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. MENENDEZ):
S.J. Res. 5. A joint resolution removing the deadline for the ratification of the equal rights amendment; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. DAINES (for himself, Mr. HAWKINS, Mr. BURDICK, Mr. INHOFF, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. BOOKMAN, Mr. WICKER, Mr. Risch, Mr.
TILLS, MR. SASSE, MR. LEE, AND MR. CRAPO:
S. Con. Res. 5. A concurrent resolution affirming the importance of religious freedom as a fundamental right that is essential to a free society and protected for all people of the United States under the Constitution of the United States, and recognizing the importance of the right of privacy of a retired member of the Virginia Statue for Religious Freedom; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS
S. 11
At the request of Mr. Heller, the name of the Senator from Utah (Mr. Hatch) was added as a cosponsor of S. 11, a bill to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to relocate to Jerusalem the United States Embassy in Israel, and for other purposes.

S. 17
At the request of Mr. Sasse, the names of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. Risch), the Senator from Utah (Mr. Lee), the Senator from Montana (Mr. Daines), the Senator from Indiana (Mr. Young), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. McCain), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Lankford), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. Tillis), the Senator from Ohio (Mr. Portman) and the Senator from Illinois (Ms. Duckworth) were added as cosponsors of S. 17, a bill to ensure the Government Accountability Office has adequate access to information.

S. 47
At the request of Mr. Rubio, the names of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. Flake) was added as a cosponsor of S. 47, a bill to prevent proposed regulations relating to restrictions on liquidation of an interest with respect to estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer taxes from taking effect.

S. 66
At the request of Mr. Heller, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mr. Blunt) was added as a cosponsor of S. 66, a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit certain retired members of the uniformed services who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or Combat-Related Special Compensation, and for other purposes.

S. 71
At the request of Mr. Nelson, the name of the Senator from Texas (Mr. Cornyn) was added as a cosponsor of S. 71, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to temporarily allow expensing of certain costs of replanting citrus plants lost by reason of casualty.

S. 87
At the request of Mr. Toomey, the names of the Senator from Utah (Mr. Hatch) and the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. Kennedy) were added as cosponsors of S. 87, a bill to ensure that State and local law enforcement may cooperate with Federal officials to protect our communities from violent criminals and suspected terrorists who are illegally present in the United States.

S. J. Res. 4
At the request of Mr. Lankford, the name of the Senator from Montana (Mr. Daines) was added as a cosponsor of S. J. Res. 4, a joint resolution disapproving the action of the District of Columbia Council in approving the Death with Dignity Act of 2016.

S. Res. 6
At the request of Mr. McCaskill, the names of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. McCain) and Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. Hassan) were added as cosponsors of S. Res. 6, a resolution objecting to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 and to all efforts that undermine direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians for a secure and peaceful settlement.

S. Res. 9
At the request of Mr. Hatch, the name of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. McCain) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 9, a resolution honoring in praise and remembrance the extraordinary life, steady leadership, and remarkable 70-year reign of King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS
BY MR. MANCHIN (for himself, Mrs. Capito, Mr. Casey, Mr. Brown, Mr. Kaine, Mr. Warner, Mr. Portman, Mr. Tester, Mrs. Murray, Mr. Sanders, Mr. Durbin, Mr. Franken, Mr. Booker, Mr. Donnelly, Mr. Heinrich, Mrs. McCaskill, Ms. Hekamp, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Burr, and Mr. Sullivan):
S. 176. A bill to amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer certain funds to the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. President, I am back again to introduce the Miners Protection Act.

It is bipartisan. We worked on it in a bipartisan manner, and we said: If it comes to the floor, we will pass it. So we are here again.

This is a promise that was made since 1946. These are men who have worked hard. They paid through the hard work. They have accomplished through their own sweat, and we are trying to make sure they have their permanent fix to their health care and to their pensions. This is something that has a pay-for. It is back up again. It should have been done last year. We funded an extension until April. April is going to come and go again, and then we are going to start playing politics with this. If we get this done now and get it done quickly, it is something that we can move on, and we can take care of the other problems we have.

Again, this is the Miners Protection Act, which our miners have worked for, earned, and deserved. Their widows and families are expecting this. They need this in order to live any type of a quality life.

I thank you, again. I thank all of my colleagues—my Republican friends for signing onto this piece of legislation and all of my Democratic friends, which unanimously signed onto it. It is something that should be done and done quickly.

By Mr. McConnel:
S. 176. A bill to amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer certain funds to the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.
Mr. McConnel. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

S. 176
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
This Act may be cited as the "Helping Ensure Long-Term Protection for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017" or the "HELP for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.
Congress finds the following:

(1) Over the 8 years preceding the date of the introduction of this Act, the coal industry and the communities supported by that industry have struggled, in large part due to overregulation.

(2) Excessive regulation has, in large part, made coal more expensive to mine and use and has put it at an unfair disadvantage in the marketplace.

(3) Because of these struggles:
(A) the coal mining industry has lost over 30,000 jobs since President Obama’s inauguration;
(B) over 600 coal mines have shuttered since President Obama’s inauguration;
(C) more than 25 coal mining companies have filed for bankruptcy since President Obama’s inauguration;
(D) Kentucky alone has lost over 10,000 coal mining jobs since President Obama’s inauguration; and
(E) the total number of operating coal mines has hit its lowest point in 16 years.

(4) Because of the health risks often associated with mining, robust health benefits are vital to coal miner retirees; however, coal company bankruptcies, job cuts, and closures have exhausted the ability of many coal companies to continue providing health benefits to retirees and their dependents.

(5) Congress has stepped in twice before, in 1992 and in 2006, to assist retired miners and to secure their health benefits. When thousands more were at risk of losing their benefits at the end of 2016, Congress intervened again to provide a 4-month extension in health benefits for orphaned retired miners and their dependents.

(6) While this extension helped prevent the loss of health benefits for thousands of miners, it did not provide a long-term solution.
(7) It is necessary to provide a permanent extension of health care benefits for the orphaned retirees who are at risk of losing their retirement health benefits at the end of April 2017.

SEC. 3. INCLUSION OF CERTAIN RETIREE IN THE MULTIEmployER HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN.

(a) In General.—Section 402(b)(2)(C) of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (30 U.S.C. 1232(h)(2)(C)), as amended by the Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017, is amended—

(1) by striking clauses (i), (ii), and (iv); and

(2) by inserting after clause (i) the following:

``(ii) Inclusions of certain retirees—Individuals referred to in clause (ii)(II) shall be treated as eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan if—

(A) by striking paragraph (4) and inserting—

``(4) Paragraph (3) of section 9705 of such Code is amended by striking—''.

``(B) by striking "9704(a)(3) and in" paragraph (A) and inserting a period, and

(C) by striking "9704(i)(2)(B)" in paragraph (A) and inserting "9704(i)(2)(B)".

(3) Subclause (I) of section 9705(b)(2)(C)(ii) of such Code is amended by striking—

``(I) those beneficiaries actually enrolled in the Plan as of the date of the enactment of the HELP for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017 who are eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan on the first day of the calendar year for which the transfer is made, other than those beneficiaries enrolled in the Plan as of the date of enactment of a partnership agreement with the current or former employer of such beneficiaries; and

(II) those beneficiaries whose health benefits, or the payment payable, following death or retirement or upon a finding of disability, directly by an employer in the bituminous coal industry under a coal wage agreement (as defined in section 9704(1)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986), would be denied or reduced as a result of a bankruptcy proceeding commenced in 2012 or 2013.

For purposes (i), a beneficiary enrolled in the Plan as of the date of the enactment of the HELP for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017 shall be deemed to have been eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan on January 1, 2017.

(3) Eligibility of Certain Retirees.—Individuals referred to in clause (ii)(II) shall be treated as eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan.

(iv) Requirements for Transfer.—The amount of the transfer otherwise determined under this subparagraph for a fiscal year shall be reduced by any amount transferred for the fiscal year to the Plan, to pay benefits required under the Plan, from a voluntary multiemployer beneficiary association established as a result of a bankruptcy proceeding described in clause (ii).

(b) Effective Date.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to fiscal years beginning after September 30, 2016.

(c) GAO Audit.—Not later than 3 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, and every 3 years thereafter, the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study of the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan described in section 402(b)(2)(C) of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (30 U.S.C. 1232(h)(2)(C)) and submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report analyzing whether Federal funds are being spent appropriately by the Plan.


(a) In General.—Subsection (a) of section 9704 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended—

(A) by striking subsection (d), and

(B) by redesignating subsections (e) through (j) as subsections (d) through (i), respectively.

(2) Subsection (d) of section 9704 of such Code, as so redesignated, is amended—

(A) by striking “3 separate accounts for each of the premiums described in subsections (a) and (d)” in paragraph (1) and inserting “2 separate accounts for each of the premiums described in subsections (b) and (c)”, and

(B) by striking “or the unassigned beneficiaries premium account” in paragraph (3)(B).

(b) Certain Amendments.—Section 9704 of the Internal Revenue Code is amended—

(1) by striking paragraph (3), and

(2) by inserting after clause (ii) the following:

``(ii) Inclusions of certain retirees—Individuals referred to in clause (ii)(II) shall be treated as eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan if—

(A) by striking paragraph (4) and inserting—

``(4) Paragraph (3) of section 9705 of such Code is amended by striking—''.

``(B) by striking "9704(a)(3) and in" paragraph (A) and inserting a period, and

(C) by striking "9704(i)(2)(B)" in paragraph (A) and inserting "9704(i)(2)(B)".

(3) Subclause (I) of section 9705(b)(2)(C)(ii) of such Code is amended by striking—

``(I) those beneficiaries actually enrolled in the Plan as of the date of the enactment of the HELP for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017 who are eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan on the first day of the calendar year for which the transfer is made, other than those beneficiaries enrolled in the Plan as of the date of enactment of a partnership agreement with the current or former employer of such beneficiaries; and

(II) those beneficiaries whose health benefits, or the payment payable, following death or retirement or upon a finding of disability, directly by an employer in the bituminous coal industry under a coal wage agreement (as defined in section 9704(1)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986), would be denied or reduced as a result of a bankruptcy proceeding commenced in 2012 or 2013.

For purposes (i), a beneficiary enrolled in the Plan as of the date of the enactment of the HELP for Coal Miners Health Care Act of 2017 shall be deemed to have been eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan on January 1, 2017.

(3) Eligibility of Certain Retirees.—Individuals referred to in clause (ii)(II) shall be treated as eligible to receive health benefits under the Plan.

(iv) Requirements for Transfer.—The amount of the transfer otherwise determined under this subparagraph for a fiscal year shall be reduced by any amount transferred for the fiscal year to the Plan, to pay benefits required under the Plan, from a voluntary multiemployer beneficiary association established as a result of a bankruptcy proceeding described in clause (ii).

(b) Effective Date.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to fiscal years beginning after September 30, 2016.

(c) GAO Audit.—Not later than 3 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, and every 3 years thereafter, the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study of the Multiemployer Health Benefit Plan described in section 402(b)(2)(C) of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (30 U.S.C. 1232(h)(2)(C)) and submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report analyzing whether Federal funds are being spent appropriately by the Plan.

SEC. 5. Sense of the Senate.

It is the sense of the Senate that Congress should work with the President to—

(1) repeal onerous regulations that have contributed to the downfall of the coal industry;

(2) support economic growth in Appalachia and other coal communities by promoting growth-oriented economic development efforts.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 5—AFFIRMING THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT ESSENTIAL TO A FREE SOCIETY AND PROTECTED FOR ALL PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES, AND RECOGNIZING THE 231ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENACTMENT OF THE VIRGINIA STATUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. DAINES (for himself, Mr. Hatch, Mr. Blunt, Mr. Lankford, Mr. Inhofe, Mr. Cornyn, Mr. Boozman, Mr. Wicker, Mr. Risch, Mr. Tillis, Mr. Sasse, Mr. Lee, and Mr. Cramer) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. CON. RES. 5

Whereas United States democracy is rooted in the fundamental truth that all people are created equal, endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;

Whereas the freedom of conscience was highly valued by—

(1) individuals seeking religious freedom who settled in the American colonies; and

(2) the founders of the United States; and

Whereas Jefferson, who wrote in his letter to the Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church at New London, Connecticut, dated February 4, 1809, that “[n]o provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the encroachments of the civil authority;”;

Whereas the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was—

(1) drafted by Thomas Jefferson, who considered the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom to be one of his greatest achievements; and

(2) enacted on January 16, 1786; and

WHEREAS THE 231ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE FREE SOCIETY AND PROTECTED AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT THAT MUST BE UPHELD BY THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS;

Whereas individuals who have studied United States democracy from an international perspective, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, have noted that religion plays a central role in preserving the United States Government because religion provides the moral base required for democracy to succeed;

Whereas, in Town of Greece v. Galloway, 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014), the United States Supreme Court affirmed that “people of many faiths may be united in a community of tolerance and devotion”;

Whereas the principle of religious freedom “has guided our Nation forward”, as expressed by the 44th President of the United States in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 2011, and freedom of religion “is a universal human right to be protected here at home and across the globe”, as expressed by that President of the United States on Religious Freedom Day in 2013;

Whereas “[r]eligious freedom is a fundamental human right that must be upheld by every nation and guaranteed by every government”, as expressed by the 42nd President of the United States in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1999;

Whereas the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and every other provision of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, provides that all people are created equal, endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;

WHEREAS THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

(1) the forerunner to the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States;

Whereas section 2(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401(a)) states that—

(1) “the right to freedom of religion underlies the very existence and existence of the United States”; and

(2) religious freedom was established by the founders of the United States “in law, as a fundamental right and as a pillar of our Nation”;

Whereas the role of religion in United States society and public life has a long and robust tradition;

Whereas individuals who have studied United States democracy from an international perspective, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, have noted that religion plays a central role in preserving the United States Government because religion provides the moral base required for democracy to succeed;

WHEREAS THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:—

(1) the right of individuals to express freely and act on their religious beliefs; and

(2) the right of individuals to exercise or act on a religious belief to which they do not adhere;

WHEREAS “our laws and institutions should not impede or hinder the free exercise and protection of fundamental religious liberties,” as expressed by the 42nd President of
Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that the Removal of Injunction of Secrecy—Treaty Document Nos. 115-1 and 115-2 be referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations and ordered to be printed; and that the President's messages be printed in the Record.

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

The messages of the President are as follows:

To the Senate of the United States:

With a view to receiving the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, I transmit herewith the Extra- dition Treaty between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Servia for the Mutual Extradition of Fugitives from Justice, signed October 25, 1901 (the "1901 Treaty"), which applies to the Republic of Kosovo as a successor state to the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Treaty follows generally the form and content of other extradition treaties recently concluded by the United States. It would replace an outmoded list of extraditable offenses with a modern "dual criminality" approach, which would enable extradition for such offenses as money laundering, cyber-related crimes, and other newer offenses not appearing on the 1901 Treaty list. The Treaty also provides that extradition shall not be refused based on the nationality of the person sought and contains a modernized "political offense" clause. Finally, the Treaty incorporates a series of procedural improvements to streamline and expedite the extradition process.

I recommend that the Senate give early and favorable consideration to the Treaty, and give its advice and consent to ratification.

BARACK OBAMA.

January 17, 2017.

To the Senate of the United States:

With a view to receiving the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, I transmit herewith the Extrac- dition Treaty between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo (the "Treaty"), signed at Prishtina on March 16, 2016. I also transmit, for the information of the Senate, the report of the Department of State with respect to the Treaty.

The Treaty would replace the Treaty between the United States of America and the Government of Yugoslavia. The Treaty generally the form and content of other extradition treaties recently concluded by the United States. It would replace an outmoded list of extraditable offenses with a modern "dual criminality" approach, which would enable extradition for such offenses as money laundering, cyber-related crimes, and other newer offenses not appearing on the 1901 Treaty list. The Treaty also provides that extradition shall not be refused based on the nationality of the person sought and contains a modernized "political offense" clause. Finally, the Treaty incorporates a series of procedural improvements to streamline and expedite the extradition process.

I recommend that the Senate give early and favorable consideration to the Treaty, and give its advice and consent to ratification.

BARACK OBAMA.

The WHITE HOUSE, January 17, 2017.

TALENT ACT OF 2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 39, which was received from the House.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows: A bill (H.R. 39) to amend title 5, United States Code, to codify the Presidential Innovation Fellows Program, and for other purposes.
There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 39) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2017

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 4 p.m., Friday, January 20; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, and the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day; finally, that following leader remarks, the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Senators should gather in the Chamber at 10 a.m. on Friday for the inauguration. Rollcall votes are possible on Friday afternoon on Cabinet nominations.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of the Democratic leader.

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

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

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

DEVOS NOMINATION HEARING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I have just been told that the hearing for Ms. DeVos, nominee for Secretary of Education, which began at 5 p.m., much to our chagrin, is now going to be—the chairman of the committee, Senator ALEXANDER, my dear friend, has stated that there will be only one round of questioning, 5 minutes each.

I tell my friend the majority leader, who just left, and my colleagues that this is not the way for comity: a hearing on a nominee with only one round of questioning, 5 minutes each, for a controversial nominee who has $5 billion of investments, who has not filed her papers yet. We feel very strongly that there ought to be another hearing, and this will affect how the rest of the nominees will go forward because we need time on them.

I have never heard of anything like this—a major nominee with major controversy, not having filed her papers, and then the hearing only beginning at 5 p.m. today because my friend Senator ALEXANDER wouldn’t switch the hearing to a different day, even though there is no rush. Now Senator ALEXANDER has just decreed as the hearing convened that there will be only one round of questioning, 5 minutes each.

I understand why my Republican colleagues are rushing through these nominees—and this one in particular. They are afraid of what the public will hear. They are afraid of what these nominees represent. President-Elect Trump has said he is going to drain the swamp. What does he have? A rigged Cabinet of billionaires and not the blue-collar people he has appealed to. How do we know they will represent the interests of the country, of the President-elect himself—at least what he said in his campaign? How do we know they are free of conflicts of interest? There is no way to know.

Tonight’s hearing is an indication of the swamp is not close to getting cleaned up; in fact, it is getting worse. I have not heard of any hearing like this.

I would respectfully urge my colleagues, the chairman of the HELP Committee, which covers education, to have another hearing because this hearing is not close to being adequate; it is a mockery of the process.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2017, AT 4 P.M.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands adjourned until 4 p.m. on Friday, January 20, 2017.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:05 p.m., adjourned until Friday, January 20, 2017, at 4 p.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

STATES JUSTICE INSTITUTE

GAYLE A. NACHTIGAL, OF OREGON, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE STATES JUSTICE INSTITUTE FOR A TERM EXPIRING SEPTEMBER 17, 2018. (REAPPOINTMENT)

COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION

CHRISTOPHER JAMES BRUMMEY, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE A COMMISSIONER OF THE COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION FOR A TERM EXPIRING JUNE 19, 2021. VICE MARK P. WETJEN, TERM EXPIRED.

BRIAN Q. QUINTEZ, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE A COMMISSIONER OF THE COMMODITY FUTURES TRADING COMMISSION FOR A TERM EXPIRING APRIL 13, 2022. VICE SCOTT O’MALLA, RESIGNED.

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMISSION

JASON K. KEARNS, OF COLORADO, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMISSION FOR THE TERM EXPIRING DECEMBER 14, 2023. VICE DRAN A. FINNERTY, TERM EXPIRED.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

TODD PHILIP RASKELL, OF FLORIDA, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF COUNSELORS, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.

UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION

CHARLES R. BREYER, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION FOR A TERM EXPIRING OCTOBER 31, 2020. VICE RICARDO R. HINOJOBA, TERM EXPIRED.