The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second.
The clerk will call the roll.
The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.
Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?
The result was announced—yeas 59, nays 40, as follows:

**Roll Call Vote No. 83 Leg.**

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**NOT VOTING—1**

Isakson Ron

The joint resolution (H.J. Res. 58) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

**PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION—MOTION TO PROCEED**

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to H.J. Res. 57.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 57, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Department of Education relating to accountability and State plans under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.
Congress said to the Department: You cannot tell States exactly how to rate the public schools in your State. But this regulation does that anyway. This is not a minor matter. The remarkable consensus that developed in the 2015 bill in the public schools to fix No Child Left Behind was to reverse the trend toward a national school board and restore to States, classroom teachers, and school boards decisions about what to do about their children. Teachers, Governors, and school board members who were fed up with Washington telling them so much about what to do about the children in their schools. So this regulation, which contravenes the law specifically, goes to the heart of the bill fixing No Child Left Behind. It is very unusual in Federal law to specifically prohibit a department from regulating on an issue, but that is exactly what Congress did in 2015. Here are seven specific examples of how the regulation seeks to overrule the law to violate prohibitions that Congress explicitly wrote in the law:

No. 1, the regulation prescribes the long-term goals and measurements of progress that States establish for students of one race.

The law says, for example, that the Secretary may not tell a State that goals set for students of one race must improve their progress 20 percent better than the progress of a group of students of a different race. Yet the regulation says that States must establish goals and measurements for lower performing subgroups who “require greater rates of improvement,” which would necessarily mean that students of one race would have to do better than students of another race.

No. 2, the regulation requires federally prescribed actions to be taken in schools that do not annually test at least 95 percent of students.

The law says that States must annually test not less than 95 percent of all students and each subgroup of students, but States determine how to hold schools accountable for ensuring that 95 percent of students participate on annual tests. The law says that the Secretary of Education may not prescribe “the way in which the State factors” the 95 percent testing requirement into their accountability system. Yet the regulation seeks to overrule these specific provisions by stating that States must take action in schools that miss the 95 percent requirement.

No. 3, the regulation prescribes that schools with consistently underperforming subgroups of students be identified with a lower summative determination.

The law says that States are required to identify schools for targeted support when a subgroup of students is “consistently underperforming” in a manner “as determined by the state.” Under the law, the Secretary can’t tell States how to identify the lowest performing schools or what a school’s rating should be. Yet the regulation we are seeking to overturn says that States are required to “demonstrate that a school with a consistently underperforming subgroup . . . receive a lower summative determination. . . .” than it would have otherwise received. This is meddling into the methodology of school ratings again, despite the fact that Congress said it could not.

No. 4, the regulation prescribes the timeline for identifying schools with consistently underperforming subgroups.

The law says that States are required to identify schools for targeted support when a subgroup of students is “consistently underperforming” in a manner “as determined by the state.” We had lengthy discussions about this. These issues in education are filled with conflict and filled with different opinions. I said many times during the debate that working on an issue like education is kind of like being in a football stadium on game day at Penn State or the University of Tennessee: Everybody in the stands has played football, and they know what play to call, and they usually do. So you may have had to work these things out and we wrote down carefully the agreement we had. We wrote down that the Secretary of Education may not impose new requirements or criteria on State accountability systems, such as the timeline for the identification of lowest performing schools. Yet the regulation prescribes an exact timeline of 2 years.

No. 5, the regulation requires States to resubmit their plans to the Secretary every 4 years.

The law says that each State plan “shall . . . be periodically reviewed and revised as necessary by the State educational agency.” Yet the regulation says States must review and revise their State plans “at least once every four years” and “submit its revisions to the Secretary for review and approval.”

No. 6, the regulation dictates exactly how schools districts with significant numbers of low-performing schools must measure resources for students.

The law says States must “periodically review resource allocation to support school improvement” in districts that are serving a significant number of low-performing students. The law says the Secretary cannot tell States what to review. Yet the regulation says that in addressing resource inequities, States must review differences in the following: rates of ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers; access to advanced coursework; access to full-day kindergarten and preschool programs; access to specialized instructional support personnel; and per-pupil expenditures of Federal, State, and local funds.

But the law said the Secretary could not tell States what to review.

No. 7, the regulation tells States how to count students in subgroups.

The laws says each State decides the minimum number of students who should be included in the State’s count of subgroups. So, a State might decide that for students to be included in the State’s subgroup data, there needs to be more than 25 students for a group of students, of a subgroup in a school. The law says the Secretary may not impose new requirements or criteria on State accountability systems. Yet the regulation we are seeking to overturn says the Secretary may pick a number below, of course, of 30 or States will have to explain themselves to the Secretary. That is in violation of a specific prohibition passed by this body with 85 votes and signed by the President of the United States.

There are seven ways the regulation specifically violates prohibitions in the law that were intended to keep the Secretary from doing what the Secretary then turned around and did.

Here are six more ways the regulation extends the authority of the U.S. Department of Education. To some, this may seem minor. To some, it may seem dull. It is not dull to me. I don’t think it is dull to most Senators, Article I of the Constitution says, are elected to write the laws, and anytime we turn over to somebody else—whether it is the court, whether it is the executive branch—that constitutional prerogative, we violate our oath, in my opinion.

No. 1, the regulation limits how States measure school quality or student success. The law says States must include at least one measure of school quality or student success that has to be “valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide.” The Secretary cannot tell States what measures to use in their State accountability system. Yet the regulation tells States they can only choose indicators that meet the criteria the Department came up with.

No. 2, the regulation limits how States measure school quality or student success, specific to high school. The law says States must include at least one measure of school quality or student success, specific to high schools, and it has to be “valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide.” The Secretary cannot tell States what measures to use in their State accountability system. Yet the regulation tells States they can only choose indicators that meet the criteria the Department came up with.

No. 3, the regulation tells schools marked as low-performing that they will always be low-performing unless they improve on indicators the U.S. Department of Education has identified.

The law says something different. The law says that tests and graduation rates have to count more in the State accountability systems than indicators that school quality isn’t student success. The Secretary of Education may not prescribe “the weight of any measure or indicator used to identify or meaningfully differentiate schools.”
The regulation says that a low-performing school must continue to be identified as low-performing unless it improves on tests and graduation rates, even if the school is making significant progress on other measures of school quality or student success, such as, for example, engagement, something chosen by the State.

No. 4, the regulation requires school districts where schools aren’t testing 95 percent of students to develop and implement a Federal improvement plan.

The law says States must annually test not less than 95 percent of all students and each subgroup of students. The law leaves it to States to determine what to do in school districts with schools that are failing to meet the participation requirement. Yet the regulation tells States how to address school districts where schools aren’t testing 95 percent of students. It invents out whole cloth the idea of a Federal improvement plan, and then it mandates it.

No. 5, similarly, the regulation requires schools that aren’t testing 95 percent of students to develop and implement a Federal improvement plan.

The law says that States must annually test not less than 95 percent of all students and each subgroup of students. The law leaves it to States to determine what to do in schools that are failing to meet the participation requirement. Yet the regulation tells States how to address schools that aren’t testing 95 percent of students.

Again, it invents out whole cloth the idea of a Federal improvement plan with four federally prescribed elements, and then it mandates it.

No. 6, the regulation tells States how to measure high school graduation rates.

The law says each State will establish long-term goals for “all students and each subgroup of students in the State,” including the goal of high school graduation rates using either the “four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate” or “at the State’s discretion, the extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.” Yet the regulation says States can only use the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate to identify low-performing schools in their accountability systems.

You will see throughout these examples there appears to be a deliberate attempt by the Department of Education not to interpret the law but to ignore the law or, specifically, to contravene the law, to thumb the nose at Congress as written.

No. 7, the regulation requires each State to come up with a definition for an “ineffective teacher.” The law says each State must describe how low-income and minority children enrolled in schools are not served at disproportionately rates by ineffective teachers. Yet the regulations says States have to define “ineffective teachers.” It is going to make it nearly impossible for States not to implement an entire teacher evaluation system.

No. 8, in the same way, the regulation requires each State to come up with a definition of an “out-of-field teacher.” That is what the regulation does, but the law just says States will describe how low-income and minority children enrolled in schools are not served at disproportionately rates by “out-of-field teachers.” The regulation says you have to define that.

No. 9, the regulation requires each State to come up with a definition for an “inexperienced teacher.” The law simply says a State will describe how low-income and minority children are not served at disproportionately rates by “inexperienced teachers.” Yet the regulation goes on to require a definition.

No. 10, the regulation tells States to report the number and percentage of all students and subgroups of students who are not included in the State’s accountability system.

The law says each State will report a clear and concise description of the methodology used for determining the minimum number of students that the State determines are necessary to be included in each of the subgroups of students. Yet the regulation requires States to provide new information to the scope of what is required by the law.

No. 11, the regulation tells States how to rate schools and that the State accountability system has to produce a single rating for each school.

That was not envisioned by the law. The law says that States must create a system of evaluating all public schools in the State. It says, further, that the Secretary of Education may not prescribe the specific methodology used by States to evaluate schools. Yet the regulation tells States that the results must lead to a “single summative determination” for each school. A State might choose to do that or a State might choose not to do that. That was the decision of the Congress, but the Department decided differently.

No. 12, the regulation adds a requirement that the State’s accountability system has to include at least three levels of performance. The law required States to develop their own criteria for schools to exit from being identified as in need of improvement. The law says that the Secretary of Education may not prescribe what the exit criteria are. That is a decision left up to States, but the regulation narrows the States’ ability to develop their own criteria for schools to no longer be identified as the lowest performing.

No. 14, the regulation prescribes how States intervene in school districts with schools that are labeled as the lowest-performing. The law says that if a low-performing school does not meet certain criteria for no longer being identified as lowest-performing, then the State must take a “more rigorous State-determined action.” The Secretary of Education cannot prescribe, under the law, any specific strategies to improve schools. Yet the regulation requires the State to tell school districts to take interventions the Department has prescribed.

The law says if a low-performing school does not meet statewide criteria for no longer being identified as lowest-performing, the State must take a “more rigorous State-determined action.” The Secretary of Education cannot prescribe, under the law, any specific strategies to improve schools. Yet the regulation requires a school to take federally prescribed actions.

We have already tried Federal one-size-fits-all actions under the School Improvement Grant program in No Child Left Behind. We rejected that. We don’t think Washington should be in the business of telling schools how to fix themselves.

Finally, No. 16, the regulation limits how States award school improvement funding to school districts and schools.

The law says States must establish the method they will use to award school improvement funding to school districts. The regulation tells States how much they have to award to low-performing schools receiving school improvement funds.

Here is what this resolution overturning the regulation would do. The resolution would ensure that the law fixing No Child Left Behind is implemented as Congress wrote it. The regulation violates the law and its clear prohibitions on the Secretary by prescribing new requirements through regulations as a condition of a State plan approval.

In the law we passed, Congress reached an agreement about requiring States to identify a certain number and types of schools that need to be improved, but we left it to the States to determine how to go about fixing those schools and how long they had to fix the schools. The regulation prescribes how States and school districts intervene in and improve schools that do not meet the requirements.

Secondly, this resolution restores State flexibility. The regulation is in direct conflict with the intent of the law to allow States and school districts
to have greater flexibility to implement the law, as Congress intended.

Congress reached an agreement that there are some essential elements of a State accountability plan that need to be included in a State plan. The other half of the agreement was that we left to the States the decisions about how to include these factors into their accountability systems. This is about article I of the Constitution.

Congress wrote the law with specific rules in it. The Secretary of Education and his or her bureaucracy do not get to treat Congress as a minor impediment to the education system of their choosing. If they want to write the laws of the land, they should run for Congress and get themselves elected, draft a bill or an amendment—not wait for Congress to finish our work and try to undo it through a simple regulation.

This resolution, overturning the regulation, would preserve local decision-making. As I mentioned, the Wall Street Journal editorialized, when we passed the law, that it was "the largest devolution of Federal control to States in a quarter-century."

The regulation tried to restore Washington, DC, decision-making with mandates that States comply with specific requirements instead of letting States determine how to best proceed. This resolution scuttles new and burdensome reporting requirements. The regulation required States that are currently under accountability provisions on States and school districts that will drive up compliance costs and divert resources away from students and classrooms.

Let me conclude by dealing with some of the arguments and misinformation that I have been hearing about the resolution. No. 1, I want to make clear that this resolution overturning the regulation strengthens accountability in our public schools the way Congress determined to fix it in the law fixing No Child Left Behind. We transferred most of that responsibility for accountability from Washington, DC, to States and local school boards. We did not want a national school board.

The law also includes Federal guardrails to ensure a quality, public education for all students, including, for example, requiring States to identify and provide support to low-performing schools and lowest-performing the bottom 5 percent of each State’s schools—and requiring academic and English language proficiency indicators to be included in each State’s accountability system. The law’s Federal guardrails will shape how States design their accountability systems because a State plan would not be following the law if the State fails to include accountability provisions in their plan.

The repeal of this regulation does not let States—the ones who are supposed to be addressed accountability—off the hook by any means. Repealing this regulation simply ensures that individual States and their Governors, legislators, chief State school officers, local school boards, superintendents, principals, parents, and classroom teachers are responsible for these decisions.

This resolution, overturning the regulation, will allow States to implement the new accountability system and submit their plans and have the Department’s review and approve State plans.

U.S. Education Secretary DeVos has said that she favors the current administration’s position and former Secretary King. She said this at her confirmation hearing before our committee. She confirmed that after taking office.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Secretary DeVos’s letter of February 10 to the Chief State School Officers outlining the timeline be printed in the RECORD.

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


DEAR CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER: Thank you for the important work you and stakeholders in your State are engaged in to develop your State’s Accountability Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 as ESSA. I am writing to clarify that I fully intend to implement and enforce the statutory requirements of the ESSA. Additionally, I want to provide you with an update on the timeline, requirements, and process for the ESEA Accountability Plan, then I will explain how a State Educational Agency (SEA) may submit a State plan, including a consolidated State plan, to the Department. States should continue to follow the timeline for developing and submitting their State plans to the Department for review and approval.

On November 29, 2016, the Department issued final regulations regarding statewide accountability systems and data reporting under Title I of the ESSA, as amended by the ESSA, and the preparation of State plans, including consolidated State plans. However, in accordance with the memorandum of January 20, 2017, from the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, titled "Regulatory Freeze Pending Review," published in the Federal Register on January 24, 2017, the Department has delayed the effective date of regulations concerning accountability and State plans under the ESSA until March 21, 2017, to permit further review for questions of law and policy that the regulations may have raised. In determining that the Department is currently considering a joint resolution of disapproval under the Congressional Review Act (CRA) (5 U.S.C. 801(6)) to overturn these regulations, the CRA requires that if the CRA disapproves any of the regulations, "the non-disapproved regulations shall have no force or effect.”

In aDear Colleague Letter dated November 29, 2016, the Department notified SEAs that it would accept consolidated State plans on two dates: April 3 or September 18, 2017. The Department also released a Consolidated State Plan Template that States were required to use if they submit a consolidated State plan. Due to the regulatory delay and review, and the potential repeal of recent regulations, the Department is currently reviewing the regulatory requirements of consolidated State plans, as reflected in the current template, to ensure that the requirements found in the new template are consistent with the requirements under section 8302(b)(3) of the ESEA. In doing so, the Department, in consultation with SEAs as well as other State and local stakeholders, will develop a revised template for consolidated State plans that meets the “absolutely necessary” requirement by March 13, 2017. The Department may also consider the following options for States working together to develop a consolidated State plan template that meets the Department’s identified requirements through the Council of Chief State School Officers.

The regulatory delay and review, and the potential repeal of recent regulations by Congress, should not adversely affect or delay progress that has already made in developing their State plans and transitioning to the ESSA. The Department will be notifying States and the public of the revised template once it becomes available.

In the meantime, States should continue their work in engaging with stakeholders and developing their plans based on the requirements in the ESSA. In doing so, States may consider using the existing template as a guide, as any revised template will not result in significant change. Other materials that States will be required to provide other than those already required under the ESSA. The Department will still accept consolidated State plans on April 3 or September 18, 2017.

For your reference, the following programs may be included in a consolidated State plan:

Title I, part A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies;

Title I, part C: Education of Migratory Children;

Title I, part D: Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or Above;

Title II, part A: Supporting Effective Instruction;

Title II, part B: A State Plan Template for Children and Youth Who Are English Language Learners;

Title III, part A: English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act;

Title IV, part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants;

Title IV, part B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers; and

Title V, part B, subpart 2: Rural and Low-Income School Programs.

In addition, pursuant to ESSA section 8302(b)(1)(B), I am designating the Education for Homeless Children Program under subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as a program that may be included in an SEA’s consolidated State plan.

I appreciate the hard work and thoughtful attention you are giving to implementing the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA. I understand that a great deal of work has already gone into the planning and preparation of your State plans, whether that is a consolidated State plan or individual program plans. In my mind, the Secretary is to ensure that States and local school districts have clarity during the early implementation of the law. Additionally, I want to ensure that regulations comply with the requirements of the law, provide the State and local flexibility that Congress intended, and do not impose unnecessary burdens.

In the near future, the Department will provide more information on its review of existing regulations, as well as additional guidance and technical assistance. I want to make clear that we will implement the ESSA. I look forward to working with you, districts, and parents to ensure every child has the opportunity to pursue excellence and achieve their hopes and dreams.

Sincerely, Betsy DeVos.
Mr. ALEXANDER. So there is no confusion, let me clearly state what that timeline is. No. 1, States should continue to submit State accountability plans by the April or September 2017 deadlines. No. 2, States should continue to implement a State accountability system in the 2017–2018 school year. No. 3, States should continue to identify the lowest performing schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement by the beginning of the 2018–2019 school year.

To write these plans, States need simply to consult the law. The Every Student Succeeds Act requires States to submit a plan for peer review and approval by Secretary DeVos and the Education Department. The Department is committed to working with States by providing technical assistance, issuing non-regulatory guidance and other support materials. If one believes there are a variety of ways to answer the questions. The Department will continue to provide States with clarification on how to comply with the law through the use of non-regulatory “Dear Collegue” letters, frequently asked questions documents, webinars, phone calls, and in-person conferences. In other words, if there are any questions about how to comply with the new law, there are plenty of ways for Chief State School Officers and others to ask the U.S. Department of Education to provide the answers.

It is important to emphasize that this resolution does not in any way give the Secretary of Education the authority to create a new Federal voucher program. Some of my friends on the other side of this debate have been resorting to scare tactics and alleging Secretary DeVos will use this opportunity to regulate into existence a mandate that Secretary of Education does not have that power, and this Secretary of Education has said she does not want it. Secretary DeVos clearly affirmed her opposition to federally mandating school choice, saying that she does “not and will not advocate for any Federal mandates requiring vouchers. States should determine the mechanism of choice, if any.”

A school choice program cannot be unilaterally created by the U.S. Department of Education. Only Congress could create a voucher program. I tried to do so during the debate about fixing No Child Left Behind. I offered an amendment called Scholarships for Kids that would have allowed States to use existing Federal dollars to follow the children of low-income families to schools of their parents’ choice. Senator SCOTT of South Carolina offered a similar amendment, but only 45 Senators voted for our proposals. If you pay attention around here, you know that the most important things usually take 60 votes to gain approval.

Also, the 2015 law that we passed actually includes provisions that would prohibit the Secretary from mandating, directing, or controlling a State, school district or school’s allocation of State or local resources, and it bars the Department of Education from requiring States and districts to spend any funds or incur any costs not paid for under the law, for example, vouchers. Now I agree that previous Secretaries of Education have imposed their own personal, policy preferences on States and school districts. I opposed such mandates and worked to reverse them. I opposed the law, but I opposed the law, not the Secretary and not the bureaucracy.

Instead of using this scare tactic to rile up teachers and parents around the country, misleading them and confusing them about what the Secretary of Education might do, I would take that argument and turn it around. If Congress takes a stand here now and says that this regulation exceeds the authority granted by Congress—the authority to reverse the Secretary of Education—because the Secretary imposed conditions on States not allowed by the law, then that means any current or future Secretary of Education would be similarly prevented from imposing such mandates on States.

So there could be no legal method of forcing States to adopt a voucher program, unless Congress passes a new law. There could be no legal method of reinterpreting the Every Student Succeeds Act’s school voucher program. The Secretary of Education does not have that power, and this Secretary of Education has said she does not want it. Secretary DeVos and I are on the same side of this debate. She has written explicit prohibitions about Secretary so that States would not be allowed to make such mandates and work to reverse them. It is not sufficient or future Secretary of Education might do, I would take that argument and turn it around. If Congress takes a stand here now and says that this regulation exceeds the authority granted by Congress—the authority to reverse the Secretary of Education—because the Secretary imposed conditions on States not allowed by the law, then that means any current or future Secretary of Education would be similarly prevented from imposing such mandates on States.

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school districts into chaos just as they are beginning to implement our new law. Secondly, it will give Secretary DeVos a blank check to prompt her anti-public school agenda. Third, passing this resolution would be a retreat from bipartisan law. President Obama called a Christmas miracle one that takes us down a strong partisan path instead, which could undermine ESSA’s civil rights protections and guardrails.

But before I go into that, I want to remind my colleagues of what we are working on here and what this resolution would unwind. As many of my colleagues remember well, in 2015, the senior Senator from Tennessee and I came together, with so many others in this body, to fix No Child Left Behind. We both agreed—in fact, nearly everyone in the country agreed—the law was badly broken. No Child Left Behind relied too much on high stakes standardized testing. It gave schools unrealistic goals for test scores, and it gave them insufficient resources to meet those goals. And it included a one-size-fits-all punishment if those goals weren’t met.

We knew overhauling our public education law was not going to be easy, but we knew the time to listen to teachers, to parents, and to students around the country, to make sure their voices were heard. And I am proud that we were then able to break through the partisan gridlock in Congress, find common ground, and pass the Every Student Succeeds Act with strong bipartisan support.

After a major law like the Every Student Succeeds Act passes, Federal agencies usually issue rules to implement and clarify that law. The Every Student Succeeds Act maintains the Secretary’s authority to issue rules and clarifications that are consistent with the law. This rule before us today is consistent with ESSA, and it provides clarity to States, school districts, and schools.

Using such a blunt instrument like this resolution to overturn the entire rule will be a retreat from bipartisanship. Here is how: This resolution would roll back a critical Department of Education rule that gives States more flexibility in key areas while at the same time maintaining strong Federal guardrails to ensure our most vulnerable children don’t fall through the cracks. This rule provides clarity to States, school districts, and schools.

Thus, it’s clear that DeVos’s move will be a retreat from bipartisan law. The Department of Education did not simply come up with this rule on its own. It incorporated over 20,000 comments from education stakeholders, State chiefs, and district superintendents, many of whom—including the State chiefs and superintendents—applauded the Department of Education for listening to their concerns and incorporating those comments into the final rule that was then released last fall.

During the debate around the Every Student Succeeds Act, there was some misunderstanding about what this new law would mean. The bipartisan law would roll back a critical Department of Education rule that gives States more flexibility in key areas while at the same time maintaining strong Federal guardrails, until this point, when Republicans now want to tear down the rule that ensures those guardrails go into effect.

Now I want to get into some of the challenges that would be created if this resolution passes and this rule was eliminated. One important thing this rule did was clarify State submission plan requirements and set deadlines for the submission of those plans. Based on this, States have been working now with the Department of Education for months on their State plans. Approximately 18 States and the District of Columbia intend to submit their plans in the beginning of April, but if this rule goes away now, if the rug gets pulled out from under these States, there could be chaos and confusion and the undermining of confidence in this new law.

By the way, we are already seeing this start. In February, Secretary DeVos sent a letter to our State chiefs suggesting a new template for their State submission plans would be “coming,” even before the Senate voted on this resolution, and that the new template would be available less than a month before State plans are due. This could force those impacted States to abandon their plans and start from scratch, and it does not allow enough time for the stakeholder review process that is required in the law.

So that is the first reason we should oppose this legislation because there is simply no reason to insert more chaos into a system that is finally settling into a formula. The second reason is, passing this legislation would then give Secretary DeVos a blank check over implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act to promote her anti-public school agenda.

As we saw in her confirmation hearing, Secretary DeVos, we know, has dedicated her career to privatizing public education. She has a long record of fighting to cut investments in public schools and shift taxpayer dollars to private schools. In her confirmation hearing, she showed a lack of even basic understanding of key concepts in public education policy, and she has openly questioned the role of the Federal Government in protecting our most vulnerable students.

After her hearing, millions of people across the country stood up, made their voices heard, and called on the Senate to reject her confirmation. Although she squeaked through with a historic tie-breaking vote from Vice President Pence, clear people across the country rejected her anti-public school agenda. Instead, they want the Department of Education to stand with students and with our schools.

One month into her tenure as Secretary of Education, Secretary DeVos has not done a lot to reassure parents who had serious concerns. She has grossly misrepresented the origins of the HBCUs to failing to protect transgender students in schools, proving what the American people saw at her confirmation hearing; that her lack of understanding of public education is high and with our students, in good conscience, provide Secretary DeVos another potential tool to implement ESSA, our bipartisan bill, with her anti-public education slant, and that is exactly what passing this resolution would do.

If this resolution passes, make no mistake, I will do everything I can to ensure that Secretary DeVos implements ESSA, as Congress intended.

Let me be clear. Congress did not intend Secretary DeVos to be Secretary of Education. Secretary of Education could use this law to encourage, prioritize, or even require States to incentivize private school choice. We will work to ensure that she does not take advantage of the change that will follow, if this rule is overturned.

Providing Secretary DeVos a blank check would absolutely be the wrong way to go in the early stages of this law’s implementation. So that is the second reason.

The third reason is, at its heart, the Every Student Succeeds Act is a civil rights law, and the rule that this resolution would eliminate reflects that reality. We know from experience that without strong accountability, kids from low-income neighborhoods, students of color, kids with disabilities, and students learning English too often fall through the cracks. Now it is up to all of us to uphold the civil rights legislation sec- ond resolution, and its promise for all of our students.

I was proud to work with my colleague, the senior Senator from Tennessee, on this law. I know he is proud of what we accomplished, but I am disheartened to see my Republican colleagues jamming this partisan play through in the same fashion they did with Secretary DeVos’s nomination.

Voting for this resolution will ruin the bipartisan nature of our Every Student Succeeds Act, and it will hurt our students, but by voting against this resolution, we can make sure ESSA works for all of our students, regardless of where they live, how they learn, or how much money their parents make.

Finally, I want to make one more point. Even people who had concerns with the final rule do not—do not—want to see it overturned. In fact, the American Federation of Teachers, civil rights groups, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—groups that aren’t always actually on the same side of education issues—are all speaking out against rolling back this rule, and parents,
teachers, and community leaders are all on the same page.

In a letter to the Senate, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers union said: “Repealing these regulations now would not only be destructive and disruptive but would demonstrate a disregard by Congress of school district’s operation and timelines.”

In a letter to my colleagues, Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and various education groups including the National Center for Learning Disabilities, wrote that rolling back this rule will cause unnecessary confusion, disrupting the work in states and wasting time that we cannot afford to waste.

So if unions, business, and civil rights groups, disability advocate organizations, and the States are not asking for this, we must ask the questions, Why are my colleagues jamming this resolution through? What perceived problem are we trying to solve?

Millions of students, parents, and teachers have made their voices heard about the importance of public education. They want us to work together to uphold and build on our bipartisan law, not just the latest partisan exercise that only hurts our students.

A vote against this resolution is a vote for our students, it is a vote for our schools, it is a vote not to give Secretary DeVos power she can abuse, and it is a vote to keep working together to build on this bipartisan law, not tear it apart.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BUDGET CUTS

Mr. Nelson. Mr. President, I rise today to express serious concern about reports in the press that the administration is considering deep cuts in funding to crucial aspects of our Nation’s national security and our homeland security to pay for the construction of a border wall and also for a crackdown on illegal immigration.

The first target that alarmed me was America’s maritime guardian, the U.S. Coast Guard.

Even as the administration says it plans to secure the borders and increase funding for our military by $54 billion, which, in fact, may be a good thing, it is reportedly considering cuts on the defense side—and that includes the Department of Homeland Security—with a cut of $1.3 billion, or 12 percent, to the very military service that secures our vast maritime borders, and that is the Coast Guard. That plan just doesn’t make any sense, especially when it comes to securing our borders. You would be putting a bunch of money in a wall, but you are losing the security of the border over here on the oceans.

The 42,000-member strong Coast Guard plays a vital role in protecting our Nation from natural disasters, combating human smuggling, preventing and responding to maritime environmental disasters, and protecting lives and property at sea.

By the way, in other foreign parts of the globe, the U.S. Coast Guard is assisting the U.S. military in our military operations.

If securing our borders and supporting our military is a true priority for the administration, then it ought not be slashing the Coast Guard’s budget. Instead, we should be supporting the Coast Guard’s ongoing and much needed fleet recapitalization program, including the design and construction of the new offshore patrol cutter and the continued production of the new fast response cutter. These are desperately needed assets for the Coast Guard.

This Senate has personally visited dozens of Coast Guard units all around, not just in my State of Florida but in the last State I visited. Rebuilding the Coast Guard does is amazing. What I have witnessed firsthand is what they do in service to our country.

The constant theme I have heard from my visits is the need to modernize the Coast Guard and have the funds to do so. The Coast Guard does not have the funds to do so, and they are not getting any funds from the administration.

In the Caribbean, it is a Coast Guard patrol that has the legal authority as a law enforcement agency to stop, apprehend, and property at sea.

The 42,000 member strong Coast Guard plays a vital role in protecting the oceans.

Funding is vitally important to the ongoing and much needed fleet recapitalization program, including the design and construction of the new offshore patrol cutter and the continued production of the new fast response cutter. These are desperately needed assets for the Coast Guard.

The administration’s second target—this has just been reported. What is the third target? You are not going to believe this. It is TSA, the Transportation Security Administration. If we target TSA for budget cuts—is that really what we want to do in a threat environment? Every time we go through an airport, TSA is on the forefront of protecting our country from terrorist attacks.

I remind the administration why TSA was created? It was after the September 11 attacks in 2001.

Funding is vital to ensure the success of TSA’s mission. In fact, just last year Congress responded to concerns over insider threats and security at airports by increasing TSA’s budget and expanding the random and physical inspection of airport employees.

Remember the case at the Atlanta Airport? For several months, people had a gun-running scheme going from Atlanta to New York. They didn’t drive up Interstate 95 to take the guns; they had an airport employee in Atlanta...
who could get into the airport, without being checked, carrying a sack of guns. That airport employee would go up into the sterile area where passengers are, go into the men’s room, and would exchange knapsacks with a passenger who had come through TSA clean, and that passenger, over several months, would try to get the same sack on the airplane flight from Atlanta to New York. The New York City Police Department couldn’t figure out how they were getting all those guns on the streets of New York. That was a gun-running scheme over several months. Thank goodness they were criminals and not terrorists. And you want to cut that kind of security?

Do you want to cut the strongest security we have at an airport when screening passengers who are going through? It is the nose of a dog, the VIPR teams. The trained dog teams and their handlers are the most efficient way to screen passengers. It is amazing what those dogs can sense. When we did the FAA bill last year, we doubled the number of VIPR teams, the dog teams, and you want to cut this? That was all done in a bipartisan manner. We doubled the number for the protection of the American public.

In that bill, we also expanded the grant funding to assist law enforcement in responding to mass casualty and active-shooter incidents, which is very important. Another tragic example of that is the recent shooting in Fort Lauderdale at the airport.

To continue the issue of long lines, which I know we all had to go through last spring, the legislation included provisions to expand TSA Precheck and require the TSA to evaluate staffing and checkpoint configurations in order to expedite passenger security screening.

Does that sound like a bunch of administrative mumbo jumbo? Perhaps. Let me tell you that it works and that all of it is designed to protect Americans going to airports and getting on airplanes.

None of this is possible without continued funding and, in fact, even more funding. Any cuts are certainly going to impair the TSA’s ability to keep our country safe.

The bottom line here is that we must do whatever is necessary to keep our country safe and our citizens secure. Slashing the budgets of the U.S. Coast Guard or FEMA or the TSA is only going to make us less secure.

Need I say more about these proposals to pay for some of these other things, like a wall, by slashing these kinds of budgets? Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, along with the Presiding Officer, I have the distinct honor of serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and am the ranking Democrat on that committee. There are many areas of challenge for our national security. We could talk about what we think is the greatest threat to the national security of the United States. Unfortunately, there are a lot of candidates.

One could certainly be China. China has been very provocative in the China Sea, raising concern about maintaining maritime security, which is so critically important to world commerce. Clearly China could be a candidate.

North Korea could be a candidate. We know that if it has a nuclear weapon the capacity to be able to deliver that nuclear weapon beyond just the region in which they are located. So we could pick North Korea.

We certainly could mention the threat of ISIS, which is a growing threat of terrorism that challenges not only the Middle East but our own country.

We could mention the security threat of Iran, Iran is one of the greatest sponsors of terrorism of any country in the world, which is causing major problems for the Sunni Gulf States, in Syria, and in the Middle East. Clearly Iran is a candidate for major interest in our national security.

But the country I would pick as the greatest threat to America’s national security would be Russia. Russia has been very aggressive in trying to dominate beyond its own geographical border. It has moved into other countries and has attacked the United States of America.

I want to take us back to 1975 when the Helsinki Final Act was passed, through the leadership of the United States and the USSR. I have had the opportunity through several Congresses to be either the chair or the cochair or the ranking member of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. I have spent a lot of time on the Helsinki work.

What was remarkable about that document that was entered into in 1975 was that it recognized that security is beyond just military in that for a country to be secure, it must pay attention to its borders, yes, and its military, but it also must have economic security and must respect human rights.

What was also very unique in the Helsinki Final Act’s commitment that these standards we agreed to would not only be of internal interest to the member country but that any country to the Helsinki Final Act could challenge the actions of any other country. We have not only the right but the responsibility to call out countries that fail to adhere to the basic principles that were agreed to in 1975. The Helsinki Final Act now applies to about 56 countries—all of the countries of Europe, Canada, the United States, and all of the republics of the former Soviet Union.

Let me review with my colleagues the guiding principles that were agreed to in 1975 under the Helsinki Final Act, signed by Russia, so that they are bound by these principles. As I read through these 10 principles, let me talk about how Russia has violated every single one of the basic 10 principles they agreed to in Helsinki.

1. Sovereignty and respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty.
2. No. 2, refraining from the threat or use of force.
3. No. 3, the inviolability of borders.
4. No. 4, the territorial integrity of states.
5. No. 5, the peaceful settlement of disputes.
6. Russia shoots first. They took their troops into Ukraine. They took their troops into Georgia. They have not used peaceful methods.
7. The sixth principle is the non-intervention in internal affairs.
8. Russia attacked the United States of America in our free election system. That is not subject to any dispute today. They attacked America. They interfered with our internal affairs. They tried to influence our election. That is an attack against America and a violation of their basic commitments.
9. Let me read through the remaining.
10. No. 9, cooperation among states.

Let me conclude with the 10th principle: fulfillment in good faith of international legal obligations.

Russia entered into an agreement with regard to Ukraine’s sovereignty, only to invade Ukraine a few years later. Ukraine gave up its nuclear stockpile, believing that Russia would
live up to its commitments. Russia has violated the Minsk agreements that were entered into to resolve the problems between Ukraine and Russia. Russia has not lived up to its international agreements.

Let me sort of summarize why I think Russia is the No. 1 candidate for concern with regard to our national security. They have violated the sovereignty of many countries of the world. They have violated the sovereignty of Ukraine and continue to do so. They have violated the sovereignty of Georgia and Moldova. They have attacked the United States of America through cyber. It may not have been a MIG, but it was a mouse, and its intended purpose was to bring down our democratic election system and to favor one candidate. That cannot go unanswered.

Today, Russia is engaged in Syria and supports the Assad regime, which attacks humanitarian convoys, uses the children as ammunition, and by the use of a systematic and routine violation of the protection of civilians, gasses its own people—violating basic international human rights and committing war crimes. That is what President Putin is doing in Syria today.

Russia's human rights records are deplorable. Kara-Murza has been poisoned not once but twice. He is an opposition leader. He is now in the United States and is recovering from the second poisoning episode. The Russian authorities tried to kill him. Why? Because he dared to oppose the Putin regime.

We need to speak out. We need to know more about that. It does not end there. Russia is violating the INF, the International Nuclear Force agreement, which is a major concern to all of us.

Russia’s bottom line is that they are trying to dismantle the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which has been the bulwark of security since the end of World War II, the partnership between Europe and the United States, providing a blanket of protection not just for our physical security, but providing international leadership in dealing with the development of democratic countries around the world. That is what Russia is trying to do today, to dismantle that protection.

What should we do? We have identified Russia as our No. 1 concern, and I think most Members of the Senate would agree with that assessment. I have talked to many, particularly on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. What should we do? What is the role of Congress?

We know we are waiting for President Trump to give us his foreign policy as it relates to Russia, and that is an important thing for us to know—how the President intends to deal with a country that has done so many things against our national security interests.

We have a role. We are the first branch of government that is mentioned in the Constitution, article I. We have responsibilities to act. We need to take steps, and I have encouraged my colleagues.

There have been a lot of accusations made around here about Russia’s contacts with Americans and that Russia has used cyber and planting that information through WikiLeaks in order to influence elections. There is the potential contact with General Flynn, what happened with the Russian Ambassador, and what happened for domestic wiretaps. These have been a lot of comments made around here, but we do not have the facts.

First and foremost, we need an independent commission that is similar to what the Congress constituted after the attack on 9/11 so that we get independent, nonpartisan experts, without restriction to jurisdiction or turf, who can determine exactly what Russia’s game plan is and what steps we can take to protect ourselves in moving forward. We should not take against Russia. That is the first thing we should do. Congress should also pass a resolution. I have introduced one that would set up that type of an independent commission to look at what Russia has done.

There is a second issue, though, that I want to bring to our attention, and I know the Presiding Officer is very familiar with it. It is the Countering Russian Hostilities Act, which is a bill I filed. I am very proud that this bill was not created by one Member, it was created by a group of us working together and recognizing that Congress needed to speak with a strong voice.

I am proud that, in addition to my sponsorship, Senator McCAIN helped draft this bill. Senator MENENDEZ is a key leader on this bill. Senator GRAHAM is one of the architects of the bill. We have Senator SHAHEEN, Senator RUBIO, Senator KLOBUCHAR, Senator Sasse, Senator DURBAN, Senator PORTMAN, Senator MURPHY, Senator GARDNER, Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator SULLIVAN, Senator DAINES, Senator DONNELLY, Senator Young, Senator WHITEHOUSE, Senator COONS, and Senator CORKY

You might notice that I alternated between Democrats and Republicans because this is not a partisan effort. We all recognize the seriousness of what Russia has done to the United States. We all recognize that Congress needs to respond. When you are attacked, you don't stand by; if you do, you will get attacked again and the next time could be even more devastating. So we have to take action to protect ourselves.

So what is the Countering Russian Hostilities Act does, first and foremost, is it codifies the sanctions currently imposed against Russia for its cyber attack on the U.S. election. Secondly, it extends those sanctions for what we call secondary sanctions—businesses doing business with those that are sanctioned—we can enforce the sanctions.

The Presiding Officer recognized that when we were working on the North Korea sanctions law, we needed to strengthen that, and I congratulate the Presiding Officer on the work he did regarding North Korea, and I was pleased to join him. I am pleased he is joining this group. What we can strengthen our sanctions and pressure on Russia to know that they can't get away with this type of an attack against America, but then we go even further.

We recognize that Ukraine today—we have sanctions against Russia, but we can strengthen those sanctions. We can apply those sanctions to the energy sector. We can apply those sanctions to prevent American companies from financing the Russian economy through the moneys they need for sovereign debt or privatization. So we extend the program of sanctions to include those types of activities.

We take up two other major issues that we just want to share with my colleagues because these are contributions made by the Members who joined together to file this bill. We recognize that the rules of engagement have changed. Russia is using tactics today that we never thought could be used. They attack our country, get private information, give it to WikiLeaks, use it as part of a strategy to get news out there that could influence our elections. Then they develop fake news, use their news through social media to make it look like real news in an effort to try to affect our free election system in the United States. This is pretty frightening. We have to meet them. We have to protect ourselves.

So this legislation provides for a democracy initiative similar to what we have done on our security initiative with Europe. We have stationed NATO troops on the border countries of NATO with Russia to let them know we will not tolerate the invasion of a NATO country. We have done that. That is our security initiative. We have to have a democracy initiative to protect the democratic institutions of Western Europe because Russia will use the democratic institutions to try to undermine the democratic institutions—the free press, the opportunities of free speech, the opportunities to try to influence their money the election process. They have done that. They tried to do it in Montenegro during the parliamentary elections to affect Montenegro's accession into NATO.

We have to protect the democratic institutions. This legislation would authorize that protection.

It sets up a resource so we can fight this propaganda, so we can find ways to counter Russia's use of propaganda in order to carry out their nefarious activities.

This is a comprehensive bill. I urge all of my colleagues to take a look at it. We are looking for input. We are looking to make sure this does exactly what we need it to do—to speak as one
voice in Congress to make it clear to Russia that it is not business as usual; that we intend to take action and be strong and let them know they cannot do this type of activity; that America will protect its national security.

The bill, let me just mention, that Senator Graham is the principal sponsor of that I have cosponsored and others have cosponsored also. It is the Russia Sanctions Review Act. I mention that one because we had a great debate in the last Congress on the Iran nuclear agreement. One part of the reasons we had a great debate is because the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was able to pass a review act and get broad consensus on it, get it signed by the President, which gave us a role. More importantly, it gave the American people a role in getting transparency on a very important agreement—the Iran nuclear agreement. So we had time for public hearings. We had time for national debate. The other questions are. Because that law passed, I am convinced the agreement was stronger. The administration knew there were millions of eyes looking at what they were doing; they just couldn’t do it in the dark of night. It helped us, I think, that we had time to get organized.

As a result, he was arrested, served 10 years in prison, and they tried to keep him out of politics because he did not represent Mr. Putin’s politics.

Well, he has been very active. He no longer lives in Russia for fear of his own life. He has been here championing the cause for good governance within Russia and the importance for the international community to be engaged in that. As left my office yes­terday, he said: Please continue to speak out. The United States must lead when a country driven by Mr. Putin does what it does. It is our responsibility to speak out about this conduct—threating the integrity of so many countries and violating the human rights of so many people.

We can make a difference. The Congress can make a difference. It is for all of these reasons that we need to act.

I urge my colleagues to take a look at the legislation I have talked about on the floor and which so many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have supported. And today let’s speak with a united voice and let Russia know we are going to protect the national security of the United States of America, and we are going to protect the rights of our friends.

With that, I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I am pleased to join with my colleagues from the great State of Maryland and to commend him for his tireless work on the Foreign Relations Committee and on the floor today, as well as his great work with the Helsinki Commission, his tireless bipartisan work with our committee chairman, and with many others.

We have just heard detailed, in terms of the legislation he has put forward, the effort, the time, and the engagement he has put forward in terms of standing up. I think it is important for all of our colleagues and the American people to hear us working together to put back on Russian aggression and on Vladimir Putin’s regime for its interference in our most recent election and its long and sad record of appalling human rights violations.

In 1990, the CIA delivered a report to then-President Harry Truman that outlined two key goals of the Soviet Government. The first goal was “destruction of the unity among the Western peoples, isolating the leadership and undermining the Government.” The second goal was “alienating the Western people from their governments so that the efforts of the Western countries to strengthen themselves would be undermined.”

Nearly 70 years later, the regime of Vladimir Putin in Russia remains fundamentally committed to these same two goals, but today his government has a whole new arsenal of cyber tools and information tools which it uses to interfere in democratic elections here in the United States and across Europe—among the nations that are our vital allies—to launch propaganda and misinformation campaigns that spread falsehoods and create a climate of doubt and uncertainty among citizens and democracies around the world.

Last week, on this floor, I rose to speak with my friend and colleague, Senator Marco Rubio, to highlight the American-led, rules-based international order that has been sustained by both Republican and Democratic Presidents and leaders in this body since the Second World War. Just yesterday, so Senator Graham yesterday participated in a hearing of the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina. We heard directly from representatives of the Governments of Ukraine, Poland, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. All of these nations know better than any others just how serious the Russian Government is today about fulfilling the goals the CIA quoted and outlined in that report from the 1950s. Russian troops today are massing on the borders of many of these countries. In the case of Ukraine, Russia has recently invaded and continues to illegally occupy Crimea while arming and supporting separatists in the eastern 20 percent of the country. Russia previously invaded Georgia in 2008 and continues to occupy about one-fifth of its territory, backing rebels in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian Government has tried and, in several cases, succeeded in executing cyber attacks against these countries’ governments, most famously against Estonia in 2007. Its ongoing disinformation campaigns have created widespread doubt about Western institutions like NATO, the European Union, the OSCE— institutions that have helped to maintain a stable and peaceful world for seven decades.

These Ambassadors and the Foreign Ministers who testified yesterday before our appropriations subcommittee made clear their countries depend on the United States not just for leadership, not just for military strength but for leadership and our commitment to effective foreign assistance. These are the same requests I heard last August from Eastern European leaders, when I led a bipartisan congressional delegation—two Republican House Members, two Democratic Senate Members, and three Senate Ambassadors from Estonia, and the Czech Republic, and we heard exactly the same message—that they are threatened by a constant wave of attacks of disinformation, both overt and covert efforts to subvert their democracies and to change the direction of their nation.

Maintaining our forms of American leadership, our support for the democracies, the civil societies, and the military, and the strength of these nations in Eastern Europe is not charity. A world committed to democracy and the rule of law is a more stable world. A stable world means Americans are safer and more economically secure. It
is that simple. That is why we must push back against Russian aggression in a bipartisan way and stand up for our allies and our values.

Conversations like this one on the floor today are important to educate our American people about the nature of the Russian threat we face. The Russian Government’s current strategy relies on disinformation and propaganda in an effort to divide the American people, both from their government and from the rest of the world.

Our discussion this afternoon makes clear that both Republicans and Democrats in Congress haven’t lost our will to highlight, to condemn, and to fight Russian actions. Unassailable facts must serve as the basis for a bipartisan foreign policy. A clear-eyed understanding of Russian intentions and actions will protect us from their anti-Western propaganda and avoid the internal divisions that Russia seeks to leverage in an attempt to project its influence worldwide.

To that end, I am determined to support the efforts of Senator CARDIN. I am also determined to support the efforts of Senator GRAHAM to provide sufficient funding that specifically targets the Russian people. I support the Senator’s successful actions. I will also continue to work with my colleagues, such as Senator CARDIN, to see that his bill, S. 94, the Counteracting Russian Hostilities Act, is marked up this work period so that the full Senate can consider this important legislation. As Senator CARDIN commented, there are 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans who have already cosponsored this important bill.

Why is this bill, the Counteracting Russian Hostilities Act, so important? It will make sure the Russian Government pays a price for breaking the rules by supporting sanctions for its occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea, for its egregious human rights violations in Syria and elsewhere, and, most importantly, for directly interfering in our election. This bill would prevent the lifting of sanctions on Russia until its government ceases these activities that caused those sanctions to be put in place in the first place. The bill would also support civil society, pro-democracy, and anti-corruption activists in Russia and across Europe.

Today Vladimir Putin has a whole array of powerful modern tools that he intends to use to undermine democracy and promote his brand of authoritarianism, but as that 1950 memo to President Harry Truman made clear, Russia’s goals haven’t changed. Russia’s goals are to oppose us, our vision, our values, and our democratic way of life. We must make it clear that America’s vision of a freer, safer, and more democratic world hasn’t changed either.

I thank Senator CARDIN for organizing this discussion, thank Senator MENENDEZ for everything he has done to support these important efforts, and thank Senator GRAHAM for hosting yesterday’s important hearing. I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to continue with this fight.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues in this important conversation on the Senate floor and, once again, to demand answers to the many questions raised about Russia’s interference in our elections.

Not so long ago, I came to the floor to speak out against a belligerent act from an adversarial nation, an attempt to undermine American democracy and foment chaos and uncertainty on the world stage, an effort that we now know from our own intelligence community’s assessment was ordered by President Putin himself, a campaign that senior intelligence officials have said included covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users, or ‘trolls.’

To undermine our 2016 Presidential election.

In recent weeks, the American people have been confronted by a daily drumbeat of headlines regarding Russian interference with our elections and possible ties to President Trump’s campaign. They have learned that the President’s former National Security Advisor, LTG Michael Flynn, was not truthful about the nature of the conversations he had with the Russian Ambassador shortly after President Obama sanctioned Russia for meddling in our elections.

They learned that Attorney General Jeff Sessions, the highest law enforcement officer in the land, did not fully disclose at least two meetings he had with the Russian Ambassador during his nomination hearings.

They have learned, through reporting in the news media, that U.S. law enforcement continues to investigate Russian agents’ contacts with President Trump’s inner circle.

Yet despite these revelations, the American people now face more questions than answers. Has anyone else on the President’s team been in contact with the Russian Government? What was the nature of those conversations? How credible are reports of business dealings between Russian oligarchs and the Trump organization?

But here is the reason I came to the floor today, as serious as those questions are. Getting answers to these questions, whether it be through a special prosecutor, or an independent commission—on which Senator CARDIN has legislative and which I strongly, strongly support and believe it is the ultimate vehicle—or the Senate Intelligence Committee’s investigation—those efforts are not about President Trump. It is about the American people. It is about protecting our free and democratic way of life and our time-tested system of self-governance. It is about showing our constituents that, when the stakes are high, when the allegations are this startling, when the implications are this alarming, we are capable of setting politics aside and getting to the truth.

Time and again, the President has dismissed the significance of Russia’s interference in our elections, and he derides reports about his financial interests and campaign contacts with Russia as “fake news.” Well, this isn’t fake news. On the contrary, these are real threats—real threats from a real foreign adversary: real threats that undermine the integrity of our elections and, therefore, the security of our country; real threats from a brutal leader who sees the erosion of Western democracy as a strategic imperative for Russia’s future.

So let’s be clear about why these threats matter. Vladimir Putin’s rise to power in Russia was marked by the suppression of the freedom of the press, the oppression of the Russian people, the murder of political opponents, and the transfer of wealth and assets from the Russian people to a handful of powerful oligarchs. Putin’s rule is one of corruption, wealth, and aggrandizement. Putin’s government is one of influence worldwide.

President Putin sees the spread of Western democratic values that we enjoy here in our country and others in the Western world—like freedom of speech, the rule of law, and human rights—as a threat to his power. So Russia has embarked on a systematic campaign to undermine the democracies that uphold the international order established after World War II and that has been the bedrock of peace and tranquility, generally speaking, since then. These threats must be taken seriously.

Russia’s aggressive behavior reaches back years and extends to this day. We saw it in 2008, when Russia backed ille- gitimate separatist forces in Georgia, declaring South Ossetia and Abkhazia independent states. We saw it in March of 2014—when I was in Ukraine—when Russia authorized the use of military force to annex Crimea, blatantly violating the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people and the Budapest Memorandum, a memorandum that we—the United States, Russia, and others—signed, saying that we would observe the territorial and sovereignty rights of Ukraine if they gave up the nuclear weapons that had been left to them after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They did just that. They did just that, and what happened to them afterwards? Their territory has been annexed and invaded. Today, Putin continues to break treaties, to sow discord, and incite violence throughout eastern Ukraine—an effort that to date has claimed 10,000 lives and displaced 2 million people.

Unfortunately, Russia’s interference in our 2016 Presidential election is not an isolated instance. According to U.S. intelligence reports, these efforts are only the most recent manifestation of
the Kremlin’s ongoing campaign to undermine Western democracy.

In recent years, we have seen Russian oligarchs funnel money to fringe political movements across Europe, and Russian operatives conduct sophisticated disinformation campaigns. After the revelations that Russia interfered with our own elections, Putin has shown no signs of slowing down. On the contrary, just weeks ago, Russia’s Defense Minister announced that the Kremlin will begin using troops to enhance disinformation operations, emphasizing that “propaganda must be smart, competent, and efficient.”

Again, Russia’s end goal here is no mystery. Putin aims to undermine European unity and fracture the transatlantic alliance—an alliance that has served as a bedrock for international security, peace and stability, and economic cooperation between the United States and Europe for the past half century.

In the Middle East, President Putin continues to disregard international norms. He aligns Russia with Iran, the world’s leading state sponsor of terror. He aids Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in his atrocities against innocent civilians in Aleppo. Russian bombs fall on homes; Russian bombs fall on schools and hospitals; Russian bombs fall on aid convoys that only seek to feed starving, trapped families, and rescue children from the rubble.

Just as Russia violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty when they illegally launched a cruise missile, showing no regard for an agreement that has been a hallmark for nuclear security cooperation for nearly four decades. That is not an insignificant act.

The United States cannot ignore such destabilizing behavior. That is exactly why Senator Graham and I introduced the legislation authorizing $100 million for the State Department and other agencies to counter Putin’s propaganda. The time for action—and for answers—is now. We can get to work immediately by holding hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ensure that the United States has a strategy in place to protect the security of our democracy and promote stability abroad. From the spread of extremist propaganda across Europe and the denigration of American democracy, to the bombing of civilians in Aleppo and the cyber attacks against the Democratic National Committee, Putin’s intentions are not up for debate.

Russia’s use of disinformation behavior should make it absolutely clear to the President of the United States that the Russian Federation is not our friend. But when the President hesitates to acknowledge this reality or fails to address such aggressive behavior, it is up to Congress to act. There can be no hesitation when it comes to protecting the security and sanctity of our elections.

But to take action we need answers. That is why we need an independent investigation into Russia’s interference in the 2016 elections. What President Trump fails to realize time and again is that this investigation is not about whether or not Russia successfully swayed the outcome of the election. This investigation is not about him. This investigation is about the American people. It is about ensuring that our elections are free, fair, and secure so that our government that we elect is responsive and accountable to the people. It is about understanding Russia’s tactics in cyber space and preparing for future attacks. It is about standing with our allies, preserving peace and avoiding war, and preventing the need to send our young men and women into harm’s way.

It is about ensuring that when the President of the United States faces tough decisions, the American people can trust that he puts their interests first above his own. It is about any other interests he has abroad.

It is time to protect the integrity of our elections and to secure our democracy against the cyber threats of the 21st century—whether they come in the form of election machine tampering, or paid propaganda on social media, or targeted hacks on political and public officials.

Russia poses a real strategic threat to the United States, to our core values, and to our international order. I call on the President to treat these threats with the seriousness they deserve.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to protect the integrity of our elections here at home, to defend democracy abroad, and to ensure that the transatlantic alliance, so vital to international security and stability, remains strong for generations to come. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from New Jersey for his excellent statement summarizing the challenge we face. I thank my colleagues from Maryland and from Delaware as well.

This afternoon, we had a hearing in the Judiciary Committee. There is an individual seeking the Deputy Attorney General spot. Of course, he is seeking this position—a key position—at a critical moment in American history.

The Attorney General of the United States of America, Jeff Sessions of Alabama, announced publicly last week, on Thursday, that he was going to recuse himself from any prosecution involving the Russians and the last Presidential campaign. That is historic, and it was the right thing to do. Many of us on the Democratic side have called on him for weeks to do just that.

Senator Sessions had been an active participant in the Trump campaign, and when he became Attorney General, we felt that, in the best interests of preserving the integrity of the Department of Justice, he had to step aside from the Russia investigation. That investigation of Russian involvement in that campaign.

Of course, in the meantime, during the course of this national debate, the National Security Advisor to the President of the United States, General Flynn, resigned after he misrepresented to the American people and to the Vice President of the United States conversations he had with the Russian Ambassador. It came to light last week that then-Senator Sessions, during the course of his confirmation hearing, gave misleading comments and answers to a question by Senator Franken, saying that he had had no contact with the Russians, either. In fact, he had.

He sent a clarification letter, but yesterday’s hearing was about his successor, the Deputy Attorney General, who would have the power to oversee this investigation. The gentleman who was nominated is well known to the Senate, from a time when he served as U.S. Attorney there for a number of years—since 2005. He served under President Obama. He was initially appointed under President Bush, a rare bipartisan selection, who, by every indication, is a professional prosecutor.

The disappointing moment at the hearing is when we asked Mr. Rosenstein if he had read the intelligence reports that were published in January about the Russian involvement in our election campaign. It is an unclassified report. It is on the internet. It is about 15 pages long. It is as precise and conclusive as you can expect the intelligence community to inform us. The Russians did attempt to change the outcome of the election, that they were, in fact, working to benefit Donald Trump and against Hillary Clinton.

I quickly added that there was not published by the Democratic National Committee. This was by the intelligence agencies of the U.S. Government. I was disappointed when Mr.
Rosenstein said no, he had not read it. He was asked over and over again why he would not read a piece of information, a document so critical to his service as Deputy Attorney General.

I will set that aside for a moment and just observe the obvious. If you believe our intelligence agencies, there is no question that Russia was trying to change the outcome of the Presidential election. They were engaged, we believe, with up to a thousand trolls in some office buildings in Moscow, invading the internet, invading emails in the United States in an attempt to glean information that they could feed back to the public through Wikileaks and other sources.

Although there is no evidence to date that they had any impact on the actual casting or counting of ballots, their intent is clear. They wanted to pick Donald Trump as President. They believed he was a better choice for Russian interests than Hillary Clinton.

Is that worthy of an investigation? I certainly hope so. To our knowledge, it is the first time in the history of the United States that a foreign power—and one that has been an adversary time and again to our interests around the world—would invade our country. It was, in fact, a day that will live in cyber infamy in terms of this Russian effort.

If we ignore it, we can expect several things. They will do it again. Do you think they learned something during the course of the last one? Do you think the Russians will be involved again? It would be naïve to believe otherwise.

Secondly, there is a critical element here that we cannot ignore. Three weeks ago I visited Warsaw, Poland; Vilnius, Lithuania; and Kiev, Ukraine. I talked to those leaders—in a couple of instances, the Presidents of those countries, as well as opinion leaders, parliamentarians—and they continued to raise the same question to me. It came down to this: If the United States does not take seriously the invasion of Russia in your own Presidential campaign, will you take it seriously when Putin invades our country? You have told us under the NATO alliance, article 5, that you will stand by our side and protect us. If you don’t take Putin seriously when he invades your own Presidential election, there is a lot of doubt regarding that.

Questions are being asked. Several Republican Senators have stepped up. I want to salute them. I will start with LINDSEY GRAHAM, who yesterday, again before the Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee on Appropriations, made it clear that he believes we have to thoroughly investigate this Russian involvement in our Presidential election.

A few others have said the same. Unfortunately, the reaction by many Republican Senators has been lukewarm to cold. They don’t want to spend the time to look into this. They would rather start talking about investigatings leaks in the Trump administration or even the President’s far-fetched tweets suggesting that somehow President Obama was engaged in a wiretap. It is something that has been denied not only by the former President but also by the former Director of the National Intelligence or the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

To date, there is not one shred of evidence for the claim made by President Trump in his tweets in the early morning hours of Saturday. At the same time, the investigation continues. You have heard cataloged in detail—and I will not repeat it—Russian aggression over the last several years.

I have seen it. I have seen it throughout history, at least during my lifetime, and I have seen it more recently in Ukraine, in Georgia, and threats that go on every single day in countries in the Baltics and Poland. It is clear to them that they are fighting a hybrid war, an illegal war, an illegal threat, which is very real, but also cyber threats that at one point closed down the Estonian economy—a Russian cyber invasion closed it down—and propaganda threats, which are nonstop threats through cable television known as RT, as Russia Today. They continue to broadcast false information into countries like the Baltic states and try to do it with impunity. That is the reality of what we are facing.

The question we face, though, as the U.S. Senate sworn to uphold this Constitution, is whether we are prepared to defend against foreign powers that will undermine it, in this case the Russian Federation.

There has been a suggestion that the intelligence committees can have an investigation of this matter. I would say that in and of itself is not objectionable, but it is certainly not complete and satisfactory. The Intelligence Committee is going meet behind closed doors. We will not see the witnesses. We will not hear their testimony. The American people may not ever hear who testified and what they had to say.

Some parts of this must continue to be classified, and I understand that. But by and large, the American people have a right to know what the Russians did and how they did it so that we can make sure we defend ourselves against this in the future. The Intelligence Committees have a role, but not in its entirety. I think there should be a special prosecutor from the Department of Justice to see if any crimes have been committed. I don’t know where the evidence will lead, but we should have someone we trust, a person of integrity, who will step up and assume that role and make that investigation for the Department of Justice.

One other thing: I think this is of sufficient gravity that we should have an independent investigation by a bipartisan commission. My colleague, Senator CARDIN of Maryland, is the sponsor of that legislation, which I am happy to cosponsor. That is the ultimate answer.

Let’s get to the bottom of this once and for all to make certain we know what the Russians tried to do to us and to make doubly certain that it never happens again. That is the reality of this Russian behavior.

I hope we can get bipartisan support for it. When it comes to sanctions against Russia, we have had good bipartisan support, and that is encouraging. Twenty Democrats and 20 Republicans saying they should pay a price for what they did. Let’s get the investigation to its conclusion.

Leon Panetta is a friend of mine and served in our government at many different levels. In the Sunday talk shows, he talked about what he would recommend to the Trump administration. He said to them very simply: Get in front of this. Don’t keep reacting to this. Say that if you have done nothing wrong you are going to cooperate fully with any investigation we put to the bottom of it. That is the way to deal with it.

I hope we will have an end to the tweets and a beginning of the cooperation that is necessary so that we can get to the bottom of it and actually know the facts, wherever they may lead us.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in recess until 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday.
Mr. VAUGHAN. Mr. Mr. President, we have now had a little more than 24 hours to get a peek at the Republican plan to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. Now we know why they kept it in hiding for as long as they did—because it will wreak havoc on the healthcare system in the United States of America and severely harm millions of Americans. After 7 years in waiting, is this really the best we can do? The people need to know about the Republican plan to replace the Affordable Care Act—let’s be clear. This is not a fake replacement. The first thing they need to know about it is—it will strip away affordable healthcare for millions of Americans in order to give the wealthiest households a huge tax cut.

How big is that tax cut? First of all, it goes to households who make over $250,000 a year. Here’s the thing: The richer you are, the more money you make over 250,000 a year, the bigger the tax cut you are going to get under the Republican healthcare plan, under TrumpCare. In fact, if you are a millionaire, you are going to get a $200,000 tax cut under the Republican plan to get rid of the Affordable Care Act.

That is great news if your name is Donald Trump or you are one of the billionaires or millionaires in his Cabinet. It is great news if you have loads of money. I want to be clear. I have nothing against millionaires. The more millionaires, the better in terms of growth in the economy, but certainly at this point in time, they don’t need a tax cut, and they certainly shouldn’t have a tax cut when the impact of that is to harm tens of millions of Americans and hurt their healthcare.

I guess we are beginning to learn exactly what President Donald Trump meant when he said that his healthcare was going to be “much better.” Yes, if you are one of those folks in the top one-tenth percent of American income earners, if you are in the wealthiest 1 percent of the country, you are going to get a big tax break. So I guess it is much better for you from that perspective.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from Maryland.

TRUMP CARE

Mr. VAUGHAN. Mr. President, we have now had a little more than 24 hours to get a peek at the Republican plan to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. Now we know why they kept it in hiding for as long as they did—because it will wreak havoc on the healthcare system in the United States of America and severely harm millions of Americans. After 7 years in waiting, is this really the best we can do? The people need to know about the Republican plan to replace the Affordable Care Act—let’s be clear. This is not a fake replacement. The first thing they need to know about it is—it will strip away affordable healthcare for millions of Americans in order to give the wealthiest households a huge tax cut.

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The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from Maryland.
You know whom else this is going to be better for? It is going to be better for insurance companies and their CEOs. It is really hard to believe, but if you look at the House bill—and now I know why it was under lock and key for so long. If you look at it, you are going to find that their plan gives insurance companies a new tax break when they pay their CEOs multi-million-dollar bonuses. In fact, the bigger the bonus the healthcare company pays to the CEO, the bigger tax break the company gets, the more American taxpayers will be subsidizing those bonuses for those insurance CEOs.

So you know what, you are a CEO of an insurance company, you raise the premiums, the company makes more money, and you get a bigger bonus. Taxpayers foot the bill in terms of larger taxpayer subsidies to those CEOs. All in all, when you add up all the tax breaks for these CEOs and the insurance companies and the wealthiest Americans, it is a tax break windfall of $600 billion. That is the number by the experts in the Joint Committee on Taxation here in the Congress. These are the nonpartisan experts who look at legislation and determine what the fiscal impact will be. What they say is that the TrumpCare bill will provide tax breaks in the amount of $600 billion over the next 10 years. I guess that is what President Trump must have been referring to the other day when he tweeted about his “wonderful new bill.” It will be beneficial for those who are getting those big tax breaks.

We know who the winners are. Who are the losers? Well, just about everybody else ends up on the short end of the stick—just about everybody else in America. That is why you are seeing such strong opposition coming from all over the country. First, there are the millions of Americans who are going to lose their healthcare coverage altogether. They won’t be able to afford the huge additional premiums and copays and deductions they would be faced with under these plans that would be offered. Then there are tens of millions of more who will pay much more for much less coverage.

Older Americans are going to be especially hard hit, which is why we are all hearing from AARP. You know AARP—they sometimes give their opinion, they weigh in a little bit here and there, but they are out full force against this TrumpCare bill because it is going to have a very negative impact on seniors in America. They call it a sweetheart deal to big drug companies and other special interests. They argue—and we will talk about how it will harm Medicare. One of the promises Candidate Trump made was that he wasn’t going to do anything that would harm Medicare. That is what he said then, but, in fact, in January, Congress received a letter from the Medicare actuaries. These are the professionals who evaluate the various proposals on the Medicare system. What they concluded was, this proposal to provide tax cuts to wealthy Americans would actually reduce the life of the Medicare program by 3 years.

Here is what they are proposing. We are going to give a tax cut—and one of the tax cuts means that wealthy Americans will not have to pay a portion of their Medicare taxes. That portion of their Medicare taxes today goes into the Medicare trust fund. You say to those wealthy Americans: We are going to give you a tax break that is going back in your pockets. That means it is no longer going into the Medicare trust fund. That shortens the life of the Medicare trust fund. That is the reason why the American Medical Association says, and I have here a book by the American Medical Association, totally outside the regular Senate without any committee consideration, totally outside the regular Senate without any hearings. And then we are hearing from groups that are concerned about Medicare, the American people. That is why you are hearing from so many people that it is such a bad deal for the American people.

It is ironic because I remember that during the debate over the Affordable Care Act, which took months and months—I mean, it took over 7 or 8 months—our Republican colleagues accused us of moving too fast, of not having sufficient debate and input. Yet what we are seeing right now, now that the bill has come out of hiding, is an effort to try to move that bill through the House in a matter of weeks without any hearings. And then we are hearing over here in the Senate that the plan will be—and maybe the Republican leader can clarify this at some point, but perhaps the Republican leader can clarify this at some point, but perhaps the Republican leader can clarify this at some point, but the plan will be to not send it to any of the committees in the Senate for a review but to try to bring it up immediately here on the floor of the Senate without any committee consideration, totally outside the regular Senate, and without any hearings—and now we are hearing about the middle class being squeezed, which is very real out there in America, all the talk we heard about strung out in America, all the people are trying to push through this Congress so quickly.

But ordinary Americans are going to be very badly hurt, which is why apparently people are trying to rush this through the Congress so quickly. It was in some remote room, and you needed bloodhounds to go out to try to find out where it was, and now we know why it was kept so secret—because it is such a bad deal for the American people.

Make no mistake, by providing a tax cut, and particularly the tax cut to the wealthy paying into the Medicare Program right now, you are hurting Medicare.

I know that the President says he is a terrific negotiator, just a terrific negotiator, and I have here a book by Trump, “The Art of the Deal.” I don’t know whether Donald Trump is a good negotiator or a bad negotiator, but I do know this: If you look at this TrumpCare plan, whoever did the negotiating was negotiating on behalf of very wealthy special interests at the expense of people in the rest of the country. So all the talk we heard throughout the campaign and since about looking after the little guy, all the talk we heard about the middle class being squeezed, which is very real out there in America, all the talk we heard about strung out in America, all the talk we heard about strung out...
March 8, 2017

Mr. President, I know you and our colleagues know that CBO is the referee on which we all rely. I know some people like to make up their own alternative facts, but you need to have some referee here in Congress when it comes to budget issues because otherwise people just make up whatever numbers they want.

It is also important to know that the current head of the Congressional Budget Office is somebody who was jointly selected by the Republican chairman of the House Budget Committee and the Republican chairman of the Senate Budget Committee. In other words, the current head of the CBO was picked by the Republican chairmen of the House and Senate Budget Committees. It is important that we have a nonpartisan referee in these discussions. Yet, in the House of Representatives, they are acting on TrumpCare right now in committees without even the benefit of the analysis from the Congressional Budget Office. Apparently, they are afraid of what it might be and what it might say.

If people want to defend this TrumpCare proposal, they are obviously free to do it, but we should do it in the regular order, and we should do it based on information from sources like the Congressional Budget Office. People can have all the facts when they make these decisions which will impact their lives.

One fact we know right now is the fact that I mentioned at the outset, which is from the Joint Tax Committee, the nonpartisan experts, saying that TrumpCare will provide a $600 billion tax cut windfall. We also know it is a fact from the Medicare Actuary that by providing very wealthy Americans with this tax break, you are going to take some years off of the life of the Medicare Program. Those are real facts.

So when I look at this deal, whoever negotiated this deal was clearly looking out for the very wealthiest in this country. That is where the facts lead.

We are going to have a little more time to debate here in the Senate, apparently, than in the House, but I would hope we would send this through the regular order because it requires a thorough vetting of the facts, and the American people deserve that kind of transparency in this process. I am absolutely confident that when the American people get a good look at this deal, they will know it is a very bad deal for the country and for millions of Americans.

I hope we will get on with that process. I hope the bill will never arrive in the Senate. I hope the folks in the House will recognize that it is a bad deal for the country and go back to the drawing board because when I heard the mantra “repeal and replace” and when I heard President Trump say that replacement was going to be much better and cover more people for less cost, I think people took that seriously. Now when they actually take a look at TrumpCare, as it is emerging from the House, they see something very different. They see something that is, quote, wonderful for the 1 percent of Americans who are going to get a tax cut, but it is really lousy for everybody else in the country.

We need to defeat this charade. This is not a replacement. This is a fake. The American people are catching on quickly. That is why it is very important that we not try to rush this through, that we have an opportunity to discuss it in the light of day. I am absolutely confident that if we do the right thing in terms of a full democratic debate, TrumpCare will go down.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to reject this resolution to roll back accountability for the billions of dollars that are sent to States to help educate children.

When Congress updated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015, it was a bipartisan achievement. Republicans and Democrats came together on the 50th anniversary of that landmark civil rights law to rewrite it into what became the Every Student Succeeds Act. When President Obama signed this K-12 legislation into law in December of that year, he called it a “Christmas miracle.” It received 85 votes in the Senate. It was one of the most important pieces of bipartisan legislation passed in the last Congress.

It wasn’t the bill I would have written, but it was a bipartisan compromise. It gave States and districts the flexibility to come to them to improving their struggling public schools. At the same time, it also maintained critical civil rights and accountability protections to ensure that when the Federal Government gives States billions of dollars to improve the education of their students, that money goes to the schools and students that need those Federal resources the most. It was a critical step toward making sure we are building a future not just for some of our kids but for all of our kids.

When Congress passes big, complex legislation like the Every Student Succeeds Act, it always leaves some of the implementation details to the agency that has to enforce the law. That is why I fought hard to make sure the Department of Education had the tools it needs to write clarifying rules and guidelines to enforce the Every Student Succeeds Act. That was a condition of my vote and the votes of lots of other people. We won that fight. The authority to enforce the rules is right even though the people who wrote the law, and it was part of the bipartisan agreement between Republicans and Democrats.

Last November, the Department of Education—after careful consultation with teachers, school leaders, State education leaders, and parents—issued new rules to enforce this law. Today, congressional Republicans are trying to take a sledgehammer to these new rules. When these new rules were issued, everyone who works in education agreed that they were critical and necessary. Teachers were fine with the new rules. State education leaders were fine with the new rules. Civil rights leaders were fine with the new rules. Everyone was ready to get to work. Apparently, congressional Republicans do not care. Instead, they want to blow up these critically important accountability rules even though the people who wrote the law around public education did not ask them to do so. This makes no sense.

Groups that often disagree with each other over public education policies are united in their belief that this resolution is a dumb idea, supported by teachers; civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and the National Council of La Raza; and organizations representing students with disabilities, such as the National Center for Learning Disabilities. It is even opposed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce because they know this resolution will only make it more difficult for States as they try to implement the new education law. And this resolution will undermine the work States are currently doing right now to improve their public schools with the new law.

Last week, many of these groups signed on to a letter that states: “This action will cause unnecessary confusion, disrupting the work in states and wasting time that we cannot afford to waste.” In fact, even conservative education policy experts at the Fordham Institute—a right-leaning educational policy think tank—argue that congressional Republicans should not swing a wrecking ball to these guidelines.
They identified over 20 provisions in these rules that actually provide more flexibility to States by clarifying ambiguous sections in the law, and they concluded: “Senate Republicans, then, should scrap their plan to use the Congressional review act to kill all of the accountability regulations outright.”

Killing these new rules now would lead to chaos and confusion just when States, districts, and school leaders are beginning to implement this new K–12 education law to states, have already spent months drafting their plans for complying. Eighteen States, including Massachusetts, intended to submit their implementation plans to the Department of Education next month. If this resolution passes, all of that work will be thrown into limbo.

These clarifying rules include important provisions that allow States to send additional Federal resources to struggling schools, whether or not those schools already receive Federal dollars; provisions that give States more flexibility in educating their English learners in the manner that best meets the needs of each individual student; provisions that ensure that parents have more information about how well their child’s public school is doing and sets clear guidelines with what States and districts must disclose to parents and when they must disclose it; and provisions that promote transparency by preventing States from manipulating their graduation rates or data on how much money they are investing in each student. These regulations were carefully crafted over the course of 1 year of input from teachers, school system leaders, and student advocates. Both Republicans and Democrats should support these provisions.

I think we all know what is going on here. Betsy DeVos is the new Secretary of Education. Congressional Republicans have decided they want to hand over the control of public schools to those who could be hiding conflicts of interest. This is the same Secretary of Education whom Jeff Sessions and the

Vice President of the United States had to drag across the finish line in an unprecedented tie-breaking confirmation vote. She is the one to whom Senate Republicans want to give a blank check to figure out where she wants to drive public education—a blank check that they want her to push her radical privatization agenda.

States and school districts are planning for the next school year right now. They are figuring out how to implement this law and improve the education of our kids. They are doing her work every day while Congress wastes time and creates more confusion.

Handing this law over to an Education Secretary with no experience in public education without any accountability rules to guide its implementation is an insult. It is an insult to teachers, an insult to school leaders, and an insult to families everywhere.

This is not a game. Congress should not be playing politics with the education of our children. Instead of disrupting the important work that States and districts are doing to educate our kids, Congress should get out of the way and let States finish what they have been working hard to get to work. That is why I urge my colleagues to reject this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RUSSIA

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon following Senators MCCAIN and Senator CARDIN, to speak to the legislation that I am cosponsoring and that they have introduced to ramp up sanctions on Russia. I think it is important to emphasize that this is a strongly bipartisan legislative effort.

Indeed, for more than seven decades, Congress has stood strong on a bipartisan basis, first against the Soviet Union and now against Russian threats against the United States and our European allies. Working across the aisle in Congress, we have supported the NATO alliance. Beginning after World War II with the Marshall Plan and continuing to this day with the European Reassurance Initiative, we have helped to build the richest economies and the most robust democracies the world has ever seen, protected in large part in Western Europe by NATO.

Today we face new and unprecedented threats from an increasingly aggressive Russia. Russia continues to militarize the territory it has annexed in Ukraine. It is on the march in Syria, and it is building up its military presence and making threatening moves toward the Baltic States and in the Balkans.

There is growing evidence that it is actively interfering to spread disinformation and manipulate the outcome of elections this year in France, Germany, and across Europe. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that they were involved in the Brexit vote and in the Dutch referendum last year.

Right here in our own country, Russia has used brazen cyber attacks and other measures to aggressively interfere in our Presidential election last fall. This was an attack on our sovereignty, on our democracy, and on the American people, and it was unprecedented. It requires the strongest possible response, short of armed force, to demonstrate to Vladimir Putin that this behavior will not be tolerated and it must not happen again. That is exactly the purpose of these comprehensive sanctions.

I agree with Senator CARDIN, the ranking member on the Foreign Relations Committee, that the Foreign Relations Committee should play a pivotal leadership role in both our legislative and oversight capacities in pushing back against Russia in all its forms. By all means, this includes making the case that the skills and experience of our State Department and USAID professionals are more important than ever.

In Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, and all across the world, they are working to increase the resilience of our allies by strengthening democratic institutions, fostering the rule of law, and fighting corruption. These initiatives have played an indispensable role in helping the United States prevail in the Cold War, and they are every bit as important today as we oppose Russian aggression.

We had the opportunity in the Armed Services Committee to hear from an expert talking about Russia and about Russia’s strategy. One of the things he pointed out is that, just as Russia is building up its military might, just as it is expanding its propaganda initiatives through television broadcasts like “Russia Today” and “Sputnik,” it is also looking at how it can undermine Western democracies as a way to interrupt the transatlantic alliance—the alliance between the United States and Europe. This has been so important to stability in the world for the last 70 years.

That is Russia’s real goal. They want to undermine Europe. They want to undermine the West and the United States. One of the ways they are trying to do that is by disrupting our elections. We can’t allow this kind of aggression to go unpunished. If we do, we will surely face further attacks from an emboldened Russia looking to disrupt our democracy. Indeed, I think this is part of how Russia is working with the most punishing economic and financial sanctions that we can muster, and we need to work even harder to
As we look at the upcoming French and German elections, there is no doubt that Russia is trying to interfere with both elections, as well, with the goal of underminding our democracy. When one begins to mess around with our elections, they strike at the heart of a democracy that is the foundation of this country.

I commend Senator McCaul and Senator Cardin for introducing this bipartisan sanctions legislation, and I hope that Senators on both sides of the aisle will join us in passing these comprehensive sanctions against Russia.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING JACK ROBINSON

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the life and legacy of Jack Robinson, who passed away on March 1, 2017, in Pierre, SD, at the age of 92.

Jack dedicated his life to public service—first to his Nation in the U.S. military and later to thousands of students as a teacher in Pierre.

When Jack graduated from high school in 1942, he was awarded a scholarship to Yankton College, but instead of furthering his education, he answered the call of duty amidst World War II and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

After transferring from the infantry to the Army Air Corps, he completed navigation school and became a crew member on a B-17 bomber. He and his team were eventually sent overseas to England and completed 27 combat missions over Germany before being shot down on March 2, 1945. Shortly afterward, Jack returned home to South Dakota.

Throughout the rest of his life, he was a strong advocate for the military and a true patriot. With the stories he told and the love of country he shared, he showed what it meant to be a true American hero. For that, he affectionately adopted the nickname “Captain Jack.”

There are not enough words in a dictionary to describe what we owe to the men and women who fought in World War II to save our Nation and to save democracy for the world. Jack Robinson put his own dreams aside and put his own life in great danger for our country and for all of the future generations of Americans.

After World War II, Jack graduated from Yankton College and taught high school science at Highmore, SD, for 2 years. Then he earned his master’s degree in biology from the University of South Dakota. For the next 35 years, Jack was a teacher at Riggs High School in my hometown of Pierre. There, he created advanced biology and aeronautics programs for his students and inspired several young South Dakotans to become doctors. Dr. Brent Lindblom of Pierre is another and Dr. Robert W. Robinson the reason he became a doctor. “Mr. Robinson was a great teacher,” he said. “He taught us how to study and inspired us to pursue our dreams.”

I couldn’t agree more.

As a teenager, Jack taught me navigational skills needed to properly fly an airplane, fueling a lifelong passion that continues today. As Jack would say, “you have to know the difference between compass course and compass heading.”

Over the years he taught many others navigational skills as well. But he didn’t just teach young people how to fly in the skies. He was a tremendous role model for all of us and for all the students he taught.

As a bomber crew member, Jack defended our gift of democracy. As a teacher, he gave us what we needed to become responsible adults and pursue our own dreams. In 1984, Jack was inducted into the South Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame as a combat crew member.

I can state that he was very proud of that moment. But more important than his many achievements as a war hero and a teacher was his life as a husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

We are a better people because Jack touched so many lives with his knowledge, kindness, and passion for living. His loss is felt by countless South Dakotans.

With this, I welcome the opportunity to recognize and commemorate the life of this great public servant and personal role model of mine, Mr. Jack Robinson.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I want to talk about an upcoming CRA that will be on the floor potentially this week that would cancel out an important regulation that is designed to build upon this country’s history of making sure there is a marriage between civil rights and education to make sure that children in this country, regardless of their race, regardless of their ability, regardless of their religion, regardless of their income, get an equal chance at education.

Frankly, the whole reason the Federal Government is involved in the question of education is due to civil rights. This used to be a purely local concern, and the Federal Government stepped into the question of local education because Black kids throughout the country were being denied equal education. They were living in segregated schools and getting an education that was of far lesser quality. So the Federal Government has always been involved in education because it is a matter of civil rights.

I want to talk about this issue through the prism of one individual. I am going to call him James, but this is a true story—a story, frankly, that could be told millions of times over across the country.

James went to school in an urban district in Connecticut. He was a 10th grader. At the beginning of James’s 10th grade year, he had a habit of walking out of class. In the middle of class, he would just get up after 10 or 15 or 20 minutes, and he would wander the halls of this big, urban high school until inevitably he was met by a security officer or a teacher or an administrator. They would bring him down to the office, and he would call his grandmother, as he lived with her. He would get suspended for a couple of days, and then he would come back.

It played out so often—this cycle of James walking out of class, being brought down to the principal’s office, being suspended—that somewhere around the end of October, during his sophomore year, he had been out of school more days than he had been in school.

One day, though, James goes through this cycle again. He is in the hallway, and he runs into an assistant principal. He is sort of sick and tired of this story playing out over and over again. He raises his voice. He has some words. James has never hurt anybody in his life, no history of violence, but the assistant principal decides to call the police. The police come and they arrest James for disorderly conduct, essentially for having words with an assistant principal. Now James, at 16 years old, has a criminal record. At the time, he was treated as an adult in Connecticut, so he has an adult criminal record.

It turns out that James was walking out of class every day because he couldn’t read, and he was mortified. He was embarrassed because he had been socially promoted through the years. He had a learning disability that was going untreated, and he was in the 10th grade with the ability to only read at an elementary school level. No wonder he was walking out of class every day. He literally couldn’t follow along. It was embarrassing. He didn’t want to be called on by the teacher so he left. Nobody ever figured that out until he got home, and then he went to see the lawyer, who happened to be my wife, who identified his disability and the fact that it was being unaddressed.
The fact is, a big part of this story is tied up in the fact that James was Black, and he was a big kid. So the police got calls maybe because he appeared to be threatening in a way that he simply was not. I can say that because the fact is that Black kids and disabled kids are treated very differently in schools today. Wherever you are, whether in Connecticut, in North Carolina, or in California, Black kids—especially Black boys—are suspended and expelled at a rate that is the very best of the peers for the exact same behavior. Take mouthing off to a teacher. When that happens, Black kids, Black students, are twice as likely to be suspended for mouthing off to a teacher than a White student.

James’s story is not unique. It is not unique because it happens in every State across the country, and it is not just in suspension and expulsion rates, it is also in achievement rates as well. We know the statistics. The graduation rate for African-American students is 16 percent lower than their White peers. I can go down the line and tell you about the different story when it comes to achievement and treatment of African-American students as compared to White students.

Racism isn’t gone in this country. It might not be overt. Sometimes it might not even be conscious, but it is still there. Discrimination against kids who are different, whether they be Black or disabled, didn’t vanish. It is still all over.

JOHN LEWIS is a civil rights icon. We celebrate him every day. Republicans and Democrats, in the U.S. Congress. He got mercilessly beaten over the head simply because he wanted to vote. JOHN LEWIS is still alive, but you know what, so are the people who beat him.

We are only a generation removed from an era of open, unapologetic racism in this country. I think that we don’t need civil rights protections for kids any longer is to deny reality. Racism doesn’t look the same as it used to. Discrimination against kids who are different isn’t as overt as it used to be, but the data is the data. It is still there.

No Child Left Behind got a lot wrong, but one of the things it got right was that it shed a light on this disparate treatment, these disparate outcomes between Black students, Hispanic students, disabled students, and their peers, because it forced States—and this was a Republican and Democratic accomplishment at the time—it forced States to disaggregate results. So you had to look at how were disabled students doing, how were Black students doing, and if they weren’t measuring up and if they weren’t getting closer to the performance of their non-disabled or White peers, then you had to do something to turn those students around, turn their performance around.

Now, the part that No Child Left Behind got wrong is big and significant. Part of it is that it required every single one of those kids to hit the 100-percent proficiency mark, when progress is important to measure as well. It also told States exactly what to do to turn around the experiences of those kids. It is not the same in Connecticut as it is in North Carolina, and it is not the same in an urban district as it is in a suburban district. So when we got together on this floor and passed, in a bipartisan way, the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we did something that preserved those requirements to disaggregate results for Black kids and for Hispanic kids and for kids with disabilities, but then we left it up to States to decide what proficiency is, and we left it up to States as to how they would turn around the experience for these kids if they weren’t meeting those State-set goals.

We gave an enormous amount of discretion and flexibility to States, but it is important for a variety of reasons. One, it is important because there are some really vague terms in the statute that do need clarification.

So the regulation we are talking about here today was not one of those that came out of left field. It was not one of these regulations that was political in nature; no, it flows from a bipartisan act that preserved accountability requirements for kids.

It is important for a variety of reasons. One, it is important because there are some really vague terms in the statute, and the clarification.

For instance, one of the things we voted for, Republicans and Democrats, is we voted to say you have to show that you are providing improvement for African-American students, let’s say, and if they are not showing continuous improvement, then you have to have a turnaround plan. By the way, that turnaround plan is totally yours. None of these groups were concerned.

The regulation makes it clear: Give States that flexibility.

So that is why States didn’t ask for this CRA. This is different than these other CRAs. States didn’t ask for this CRA. All of the educational groups we listened to—teachers, superintendents, principals—they weighed in on this regulation. They didn’t love every piece of it, but they were ready to implement it. None of those groups were coming up to the Congress asking for this regulation to be withdrawn. Would they have liked it to be fixed or tailored? Sure. But here is what they understood, and here is why I am really concerned.

Secretary DeVos could fix the things she doesn’t like or Senator Alexander doesn’t like through the regular notice and comment period. I think there is 80 percent of this regulation that every single person on both sides of this is clear whether you can have different ones for different levels of learners. The regulation makes it clear: Give States that flexibility.

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ever again. So one of the things the regulation says is that you get a 1-year delay because it is just too quick to come up with accountability systems for this coming school year. That is gone. When this CRA passes, every school district in the Nation has to develop accountability systems this calendar year because without the regulation, you don’t have that flexibility.

So what makes me, frankly, so disturbed about this CRA is that it could happen again—and which would never happen under the way things are done now. Democrats and Republicans could agree upon. In my mind, that agreement was predicated upon the ways and means of being able to enforce the rules—essentially it felt like the committee was hiding her from public view. Democrats and Republicans didn’t see any need for the regulation to go forward. This is different. We agreed on 80 percent of this one, but the 80 percent is likely gone by passing this CRA, which is unnecessary, but it doesn’t have to happen this way. What pains me is not just this CRA, which is unnecessary, but it doesn’t have to happen this way. What pains me is a committee process that when I got here had a reputation for being truly bipartisan, for being one of the more functional, if not the most functional, committees in the Senate. This is being blown up most significantly by the rush job—the rush job on the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act, which nobody in the American public is going to have enough time to look at it and see it. We begged for the CRA not to come before this body because there was another way to get it done that didn’t violate the spirit of our agreement around the rewrite of the No Child Left Behind law. But we didn’t do it in that request. Now we are voting on a CRA that is potentially going to be devastating not just for kids out there who need protection but also for States that want this flexibility.

Finaly, we are on a schedule, according to the majority leader, that is going to bring a healthcare bill that will rewrite the rules for one-sixth of the American economy to the floor of the Senate without any debate in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pen-sions Committee, without a single hearing on the bill, without a markup, and without any ability for amendment. I listened for 6 years to my Republican friends telling me that the Affordable Care Act, or the Affordable Care Act, was rammed through Congress and that the biggest problem was the fact that it was done outside of the public view for expediency’s sake. Now, I was there in the House of Representatives, and let me express the unbelievable irony of those complaints now that there will be no process for the committees to consider the replacement to the Affordable Care Act.

The House and the Senate had hundreds—hundreds—of meetings and hearings. The HELP Committee alone—I don’t have the numbers in front of me—considered hundreds of amendments and adopted over 100 Republican amendments in the markup process. That’s second longest in the history of the Senate, in for more than 20 days debating that bill. The reason there was so much tempest out in the American public over the Affordable Care Act was because it was open for debate for so long.

The Finance Committee had a full process. The HELP Committee had a full process. The Ways and Means Committee had a full process. The Energy and Commerce Committee had a full process. None of that is happening here. This bill is being jammed through, as we speek, the Ways and Means and the Energy and Commerce Committees. This bill is going to be jammed onto the floor, perhaps without any committee process, in the Senate. The target is from introduction Monday to passage in the House in 3 weeks and perhaps just a few more weeks before it passes the Senate. So spare me the complaints about this process. The Affordable Care Act being rushed into place when this process is going to make that look laborious in comparison.

What pains me is not just this CRA, which is unnecessary, but it doesn’t have to happen this way. What pains me is a committee process that when I got here had a reputation for being truly bipartisan, for being one of the more functional, if not the most functional, committee processes. That is being blown up most significantly by the rush job—the rush job on the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act, which nobody in the American public is going to have enough time to look at it and see it.

I ask my colleagues one more time to reconsider their votes on this CRA. We are at our best when we come together around the idea that every kid in this country should have a chance at a quality education, no matter what color their skin is, no matter what their learning ability is. I know my colleagues have a couple problems with this regulation. I get it. But by passing this CRA, the regulation is gone and nothing coming back. Single States that want the flexibility, that are begging for the flexibility, won’t get it. It will just be an unworkable section of the bill. A section that was supposed to be bipartisan now fundamentally won’t be workable. We can’t get a regulation passed that is at all substantially similar to the good parts or to the bad parts.

This body is at its best when we stand together—Republicans and Democrats—and say that no matter what you look like, no matter how well you learn, no matter how much money you have, you get a quality education. We did that when we voted together on ESSA, and we are going back on that bipartisan commitment by passing a CRA that is unnecessary. As to the bad stuff you don’t like, it can be gone in a matter of months by a regular process of notice and comment in the Department of Education.

This is part of a disturbing new trend line in this committee toward partisanship and away from a history of commitment to our kids—Republican and Democrat. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the following leader remarks on Thursday, March 9, the Senate resume consideration of H.J. Res. 57, with the time equally divided in the usual form until 12 noon, and that at noon, the Senate vote on passage of the resolution with no inter-rogation of the bill. So ask that, notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, the Senate then resume executive session for the consideration of
EXECUTIVE CALENDAR NO. 18, AND THAT THE CLUTE VOTE ON THE NOMINATION OCCURS AT 1:45 P.M. THE PRESIDING OFFICER. WITHOUT OBJECTION, IT IS SO ORDERED.

MORNING BUSINESS

REMEMBERING THE SOLDIERS OF 2ND BATTALION, 131ST FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT


FIVE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-TWO SOLDIERS OF THE BATTALION, ALONG WITH 371 SURVIVORS OF THE USS HOUSTON WERE TAKEN PRISONER. AS MANY AS 163 SOLDIERS DIED IN CAPTIVITY, AND OF THOSE, 133 ARE ESTIMATED TO HAVE DIED WORKING ON THE RAILROAD.

IN AUGUST OF 1945, AFTER 42 MONTHS OF CAPTIVITY AND FORCED LABOR, THE SURVIVORS OF 2ND BATTALION, 131ST FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT AND THE SURVIVORS OF THE USS HOUSTON WERE RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES. MARCH 8, 2017, MARKS THE 75TH YEAR SINCE THEIR CAPTURE ON THE ISLAND OF JAVA.

I AM HONORED TO RECOGNIZE A VERMONT VETERAN, DR. ROBERT BACKUS, OF THE 131ST FIELD ARTILLERY, FOR HIS SERVICE IN THE PACIFIC THEATER OF OPERATIONS. DR. BACKUS DISCOVERED HIS PASSION FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES AS A YOUNG HUNTER. AFTER SERVING WITH THE PEACE CORPS IN BRAZIL, HE TRAVELED TO AUSTRALIA TO COMPLETE A MEDICAL INTERNSHIP AND HIS RESIDENCY. YEARS LATER, WHILE ON A TRIP ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, DR. BACKUS FOUND HIMSELF MEANDERING ALONG THE WINDING ROADS OF VERMONT’S ROUTE 30, AND HE DISCOVERED THE PLACE HE CONTINUES TO CALL HOME TODAY. THE PEOPLE OF TOWNSHEND ARE GLAD HE NEVER LEFT.

AFTER SETTLING IN VERMONT, DR. BACKUS WENT ON TO COMPLETE HIS PREMEDICAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AND, LATER, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE. HE THEN RECEIVED HIS DOCTORATE IN MEDICINE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT IN BURLINGTON. SOON AFTER, DR. BACKUS TOOK A JOB WORKING AS DEPUTY TO DR. CARLOS OTIS, THE REVERED FOUNDER OF VERMONT’S GRACE COTTAGE HOSPITAL, ONE OF THE STATE’S LEADING RURAL PROVIDERS.

DR. BACKUS IS PERHAPS MOST WELL-KNOWN FOR ALWAYS BEING THERE FOR HIS PATIENTS, EVEN IF THEY ARE ADMITTED TO A DIFFERENT HOSPITAL. HE IS ALSO KNOWN FOR HIS STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY. FOR EXAMPLE, EACH MONTH, DR. BACKUS DEDICATES HIS TIME TO COLLECTING ITEMS FOR THE FAMILY DINNER, AN EVENT THAT SUPPORTS THE WORK AND PATIENTS OF THE HOSPITAL. HE ALSO ENJOYS SINGING IN THE WEST RIVER VALLEY CHORUS WITH HIS WIFE, CAROL.

DR. BACKUS REMAINS COMMITTED TO STAYING ACTIVE IN HIS COMMUNITY. AFTER RETIRING, AND AS A GRANDFATHER TO SIX CHILDREN, HE IS ALSO LOOKING FORWARD TO SPENDING MORE TIME WITH HIS FAMILY.

I AM PROUD TO HONOR DR. BACKUS’S COMMITMENT TO OUR STATE, AND TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF VERMONTERS. I KNOW WE WILL CONTINUE TO SEE GREAT THINGS FROM HIM, AND I WISH HIM THE VERY BEST AS HE ENTERS A WELL-DESERVED RETIREMENT.

Tribute to Dr. Robert Backus

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, today I am honored to recognize a Vermont treasure, Dr. Robert Backus of Grace Cottage Hospital, who is retiring after nearly four decades of dedicated service to his Vermont rural community of Townshend, VT.

Dr. Backus, or “Dr. B” as his patients often call him, is a natural healer. He discovered his passion for medical sciences as a young hunter. After serving with the Peace Corps in Brazil, he traveled to Australia to complete a medical internship and his residency. Years later, while on a trek across the United States, Dr. Backus found himself meandering along the winding roads of Vermont’s Route 30, and he discovered the place he continues to call home today. The people of Townshend are glad he never left.

After settling in Vermont, Dr. Backus went on to complete his premedical studies at the University of Massachusetts and, later, Dartmouth College. He then received his doctorate in medicine from the University of Vermont in Burlington. Soon after, Dr. Backus took a job working as deputy to Dr. Carlos Otis, the revered founder of Vermont’s Grace Cottage Hospital, one of the State’s leading rural providers.

Dr. Backus is perhaps most well-known for always being there for his patients, even if they are admitted to a different hospital. He is also known for his strong commitment to the community. For example, each month, Dr. Backus dedicates his time to collecting items for the family dinner, an event that supports the work and patients of the hospital. He also enjoys singing in the West River Valley Chorus with his wife, Carol.

Dr. Backus remains committed to staying active in his community after retiring, and as a grandfather to six children. He is also looking forward to spending more time with his family.

I am proud to honor Dr. Backus’s commitment to our State, and to the health and well-being of Vermonters. I know we will continue to see great things from him, and I wish him the very best as he enters a well-deserved retirement.

CRA DISAPPROVAL OF BLM PLANNING 2.0 RULE

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate approved H.J. Res. 44, a joint resolution of disapproval under the Congressional Review Act, CRA, that overturned the Bureau of Land Management’s resource management planning rule, commonly referred to as the planning 2.0 rule. I oppose this misguided revocation of a rule that would allow public involvement in the land-use planning process, increased government transparency, and improved the efficiency in making sustainable multiple use decisions for our public lands.

The BLM is responsible for administering 245 million acres, or over 10 percent of the total area of the United States, and 700 million acres, or 30 percent, of the Nation’s mineral estate. The majority of BLM lands are in the 11 western States and Alaska.

An accurate and timely resource management plan has been far too slow. State, local, and tribal governments and the public have been frustrated with the BLM’s inability to complete resource management plans that support key infrastructure projects like pipelines, utility corridors, oil and gas leasing areas, and other management designations. It takes an average of 8 years to complete a resource management plan and the public is provided few opportunities for input. By the time a plan is completed, it is almost already out of date. Since public involvement doesn’t occur until nearly the end of the planning process, public information preparation and the end can require revision and cause further delay. Litigation also can stall the process and add significantly more time and costs.

Nullifying planning 2.0 through CRA disapproval permanently forces the BLM to use a planning process that wastes taxpayer money and is inefficient at best.

Planning 2.0 provided earlier and more frequent opportunities for public involvement as part of the new planning assessment step. By inviting State, local, and tribal governments and the public to share information and participate in developing alternatives before the draft resource management plan could be published, planning 2.0 made it possible to discover the issues and potential conflicts and work out solutions before huge investments of time and labor were expended.

Early involvement and collaboration in the planning process can require revision and cause further delay. Litigation also can stall the process and add significantly more time and costs.

Under planning 2.0, the formal planning process remained largely unchanged, with a draft environmental impact statement and a draft plan were still required, but with an expanded public comment period, from 90 days to 100 days. Draft plan amendments are often changed: a draft environmental impact assessment step. By inviting public participation as part of the new planning approach, planning 2.0 made it possible to discover the issues and potential conflicts and work out solutions before huge investments of time and labor were expended.

Early involvement and collaboration with the public and all stakeholders made the planning process more efficient and effective.

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