

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Donald C. Coggins, Jr., of South Carolina, to be United States District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

Mitch McConnell, John Hoeven, Thom Tillis, Tom Cotton, Cory Gardner, Jerry Moran, John Barrasso, Luther Strange, Mike Crapo, John Cornyn, Richard Burr, Mike Rounds, Orrin G. Hatch, David Perdue, Marco Rubio, John Thune, John Boozman.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 314, Dabney Friedrich.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Dabney Langhorne Friedrich, of California, to be United States District Judge for the District of Columbia.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Dabney Langhorne Friedrich, of California, to be United States District Judge for the District of Columbia.

Mitch McConnell, John Hoeven, Thom Tillis, Tom Cotton, Cory Gardner, Jerry Moran, John Barrasso, Luther Strange, Mike Crapo, John Cornyn, Richard Burr, Mike Rounds, Orrin G. Hatch, David Perdue, Marco Rubio, John Thune, John Boozman.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls with respect to the cloture motions be waived.

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

The majority whip.

TEXAS CHURCH MASS SHOOTING

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, only 4 days have passed since the terrible tragedy in Sutherland Springs occurred, and, of course, the grieving and

pain of the families who have lost loved ones and who had loved ones injured during the course of that terrible shooting incident—our thoughts and prayers are still with them. I am going to be traveling to Sutherland Springs this weekend to offer my condolences and ongoing support in person. It is important that we give the community the time and space they need to grieve.

By now, we all know that 26 people lost their lives during a church service at the First Baptist Church. This included an unborn child. Twenty more were injured, and some of them still remain in critical condition. What is amazing to me is that First Baptist will hold a church service this Sunday, just 7 days after a gunman stormed the building and committed the deadliest mass shooting in Texas's history. What resilience, what incredible resolve to come together 7 days after this terrible shooting and have the congregation that lost 26 of its members come together for a church service.

One little guy many of us will be praying for is 5-year-old Ryland Ward. Ryland was shot four times and was partially shielded by his mother, Joann, who, tragically, did not survive. Ryland is fighting for his life at University Hospital in San Antonio, and he remains in critical condition. I know we will all continue to think of him and pray for his recovery.

We continue to hear more about what led to this atrocity—a gunman with a history of domestic violence, animal cruelty, and mental illness. Because of his troubled history, which included convictions for domestic abuse in the military, he was legally prohibited from purchasing a firearm, but he lied about it. Unfortunately, the background check system, which is supposed to alert the dealer not to sell a firearm to a person with disqualifiers such as his, simply did not come back at all to demonstrate that he was, in fact, disqualified from purchasing a firearm. He was legally disqualified because he had beaten up his wife, had fractured the skull of his stepson, and he was legally disqualified because a military court in New Mexico had handed down a felony sentence for his attacking his own family. But as we know now, and as I have said, that information was not uploaded by the U.S. Air Force or the Department of Defense in the Federal background check database. Under the law it was supposed to be uploaded, but it wasn't. So he got away with lying about his record.

That is what we have to fix. After terrible incidents like this, the most common question I hear people ask or the most common statement I hear them say is this: We have to do something. But here that something we have to do is crystal clear. Troubled individuals like this monster should never have gained access to a gun. When he tried to purchase them, the person who checked the Federal database should have seen his name and

criminal convictions and said: No way, no how.

I have had conversations with many of our colleagues across the aisle and in the Chamber about this problem and what we need to do to fix it. Next week, I plan to introduce legislation to fix these flaws in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System and to ensure that all Federal agencies upload required conviction records like these in the NICS system as fast as possible. Clearly, that is not being done now, and we must do it and do it quickly to make sure that other potential killers will not be sold a firearm because of the defects in our National Instant Criminal Background Check System. It is imperative that this information be shared, that violent felons' convictions be uploaded, and that dangerous individuals not gain illegal access to firearms. Unlike law-abiding citizens, these individuals can't be trusted to do what is right because we know that in the wrong hands, guns can do tremendous harm.

I must add that in the right hands lives can be saved too. All we need to do is regard the actions of Stephen Willeford. When he heard the gunshots going off in the church, he grabbed his AR-15—what some people call an assault rifle. It is a semiautomatic legal weapon. He is an NRA, or National Rifle Association, certified instructor. He took that gun and shot at this killer to try to stop him from killing more people, and he was successful. He wounded the killer and put himself in harm's way. To me, this demonstrates not only the heroism of Mr. Willeford, but it demonstrates another reason why law-abiding citizens should be able to keep and bear arms, in the terminology of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Law-abiding gun owners are not a threat to the public safety. It is only so when they get in the hands of felons, the mentally ill, and domestic abusers, like the killer in Sutherland Springs. So in the right hands, guns can save lives too.

As somebody who is a sportsman and believes in the Second Amendment and believes that law-abiding citizens ought to be able to keep and bear arms to defend their families and communities, I am proud of the work that Stephen Willeford did on that terrible day. I know there are those who believe that the NRA is somehow complicit in some of these terrible events, but I will tell you that the NRA did us all a favor by training somebody like Stephen Willeford so he was prepared on that horrible day to stop the shooter before he killed more innocent people. I applaud him for it, and I applaud them for teaching people gun safety and self-defense so they can protect their families, their property, and their communities as well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

NOMINATION OF STEVE GRASZ

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I rise today to share my strong support

for Steve Grasz, who has been nominated by President Trump to fill a vacancy on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. The junior Senator from Nebraska and I asked Nebraskans to express their interest in this position, and we conducted a thorough process of the applicants. I must say that, with more than 5,700 lawyers, Nebraska proved itself to have a talented legal community that has demonstrated an unwavering dedication to the rule of law.

However, in our search, one candidate stood out above the rest, and that was Steve Grasz. He is an outstanding Nebraskan and a talented legal mind. The President agreed. That is why he accepted our recommendation in August, and he nominated Steve for the Eighth Circuit.

Like so many other Nebraskans I have heard from during this process, the President recognized Steve's temperament, intellect, and skill as worthy on the Federal bench.

Steve excelled in his education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska College of Law. He then built a distinguished legal career, practicing appellate litigation over the past three decades. For 12 years, Steve served Nebraska as the chief deputy attorney general. He did so with dedication to justice, passionately defending our citizens and upholding the laws of our State.

Steve has handled numerous constitutional litigation matters in the Nebraska Supreme Court, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. Supreme Court. In doing so, he has earned the respect of the Nebraska legal community.

For many years Steve has earned the Martindale-Hubbell "AV Preeminent" peer review rating, the very highest available. This peer-reviewed rating is based on legal knowledge and ethical standards, a nonpartisan litmus test.

Steve also serves on the executive committee of the appellate practice section of the Nebraska Bar Association, and he was selected as a fellow by the Nebraska State Bar Foundation, an honor reserved only for the top lawyers in my State. Nebraskans agreed that Steve has the extensive legal experience needed to serve on the Eighth Circuit. Yet the American Bar Association has rated Steve as "not qualified" for this position on the Federal bench.

As someone who spent months reviewing Steve's extraordinary qualifications for this judgeship, I was shocked when I heard the assessment. Something didn't add up.

But after a review of how the evaluation was conducted, things became more clear. The ABA rating of Steve Grasz appears to be based on his work defending Nebraska's pro-life laws as well as his personal views, which he shares with a majority of Nebraskans. Both evaluators discounted his remarkable legal career, choosing instead to focus on innuendo in their report because he associates with political organizations they disagree with.

There is nothing wrong with participating in the democratic process. Indeed, Steve's own evaluators have done just that. Steve's first evaluator, Cynthia Nance, has received several awards from the Democratic Party of Arkansas. His second evaluator, Laurence Pulgram, a San Francisco attorney, works as a liberal activist and has donated thousands of dollars to the Democratic Party. Again, the fact that these Americans have decided to engage in the political process is not shameful. They have every right to do so, just like everyone else. But here is the problem. They claim to be leading an impartial evaluation of Steve, when in fact they are really trying to take down his nomination and further their own political agenda.

A deeper review of the ABA evaluation shows a report that is long on anonymous sources and short on substantiated evidence.

This is not the first time that the ABA has been criticized for using anonymous sources, either. In 2006, while discussing Vanessa Bryan's ABA rating, the senior Senator from Connecticut stated:

I have even greater concern with the credibility of anonymous sources when those sources are used as evidence for a subjective characteristic such as judicial temperament. . . . I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to only consider anonymous criticisms when such criticisms can be verified from other sources.

Even worse, the sourced evidence the ABA produced for their report doesn't hold up to scrutiny, either. One of the Nation's leading experts on judicial appointments also agrees that the facts are few when it comes to Steve's ABA rating. In his examination, Ed Whelan, the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, called the ABA evaluation "feeble beyond the point of incompetence" because it "selectively quotes" portions of an article written by Grasz to misrepresent his views. Whelan concludes that "it would thus seem that . . . the ABA . . . is unable to distinguish between its role as advocate and its role as adjudicator of the merits of judicial nominees."

As we learned more about this evaluation process, it is clear that the ABA uses its power as a reviewer of judicial nominees as a way to support its partisan agenda, instead of making a determination based on the merits of judicial temperament.

During Steve's confirmation hearing last week, my colleagues on the Judiciary Committee asked good questions that brought even more details to light. That is how we discovered that Steve was asked a number of inappropriate, leading questions during his ABA evaluation. These questions had no relevancy toward his ability to serve our Nation as a judge. He was asked for his personal opinion on social issues, including abortion, and he was later questioned about where his children went to school.

In response to a line of questions from the junior Senator from Arizona,

Steve explained that his ABA evaluator continued to use the term "you people" during the interview. When Steve finally asked what he meant by "you people," the evaluator told him he meant "conservatives and Republicans."

Steve also told the committee:

At least a half hour of that time was devoted to discussing a white paper that I had written on the judicial selection process for state judges in Nebraska. There was one paragraph in that rather lengthy article [where] I had criticized the oversized involvement of the American Bar Association in that process, and I had mentioned some of their political activities including their role in the debate over abortion rights as well as Second Amendment rights of individuals.

He continued:

It seemed to be a topic of great concern to the interviewer.

These tactics used by the ABA are not right. They show contempt for ideas that do not fit the interviewer's personal beliefs and in no way portray an attempt to consider carefully whether or not Steve Grasz is capable of being a fair judge. This wasn't an evaluation. It was a partisan, shameful attack. It was intended to further the political agenda of the two evaluators and damage Steve's sterling legal reputation.

In the days since the biased ABA rating was released, Nebraskans have spoken out, and I couldn't be more proud of them. In letters, online, on Facebook, and in the pages of our State's newspapers, our citizens have come to Steve's defense.

Richard Kopf, a senior U.S. district judge for Nebraska said he was "stunned" reading the ABA assessment of Steve. The ABA interviewed Judge Kopf about Steve, and although he did not know Steve personally, on two occasions he told the evaluator he believed Steve was "well qualified."

Judge Kopf wrote in the Omaha World-Herald:

One can only speculate, and my speculation was that Mr. Grasz, who is by all accounts a brilliant and honorable person, would do his best. I certainly have and had no evidence to the contrary. . . . I respectfully suggest that the committee got it wrong when it gave Mr. Grasz a "not qualified" rating.

Additionally, the president of the Nebraska State Bar Association, Timothy Engler, quickly responded to the evaluation by noting that his organization did not participate in the report or the ABA's grade. Mr. Engler also noted that his own personal view was that he always found Steve "to be professional, civil, and ethical in all respects" and that Grasz "would have no questions regarding his judicial temperament as a member of the Judiciary."

We received numerous letters of recommendation on Steve's behalf. Nebraskans from across the political spectrum have pointed to Steve's thoughtfulness, fairmindedness, high ethical standards, and brilliant abilities as a jurist.

The respect and admiration for Steve is also bipartisan. This includes former

Democratic Governor and U.S. Senator Ben Nelson, who wrote that Steve was “an asset to our state and Nebraskans benefitted from having such a capable and thoughtful professional in public service. Today, he is unquestionably one of the foremost appellate lawyers in the state, making him an obvious choice for this seat on our federal appeals court.”

Debra Gilg, the former U.S. attorney for Nebraska and a Democrat appointed by President Obama, wrote:

Steve has always enjoyed a reputation for honesty, impeccable integrity, and dedication to the rule of law. He possesses an even temperament well-suited for the bench and always acts with respect to all that interact with him.

Those who have known Steve his entire life have vouched for him as well. For example, Bill Lydiatt of Bellevue, NE, wrote a letter to the editor to the Omaha World-Herald that said:

As a classmate of Grasz in Chappell, Nebraska, from kindergarten through high school and as a lifelong friend, I can personally vouch that Steve holds all of the attributes to be a successful judge.

Furthermore, pointing to his integrity and fairness, he concluded:

I don't share all his political views, but I can say without any hesitation that Steve Grasz is exactly the kind of person we need as a judge and is perfectly suited to the high honor of joining the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals.

In Nebraska, the truth holds more value than partisanship. Madam President, everyone serving in this Chamber swears an oath to support and defend the Constitution. One of the ways we do that is by confirming judges who we know will faithfully honor that pledge while serving our Federal court system. The Constitution states that we in the Senate, not the American Bar Association, are to advise and consent when it comes to judges. We have a duty to do so thoroughly, without bias, and through the use of all the information available to us.

Both the junior Senator from Nebraska and I trust Steve Grasz to support and defend the Constitution. So do those who know him best—the people of Nebraska who have worked with him for nearly three decades. The Senate should as well.

I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to advance his nomination. The American people deserve to have talented and fair lawyers like Steve Grasz on the Federal bench.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TAX CUTS AND JOBS ACT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today, as chairman of the Senate Finance Com-

mittee, I am releasing a chairman's mark for the Senate version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, legislation that is the culmination of years of effort to reform our Nation's Tax Code. We have been at this a long time, and today marks a significant step forward in this effort. While we refer to this document as a chairman's mark, it has really been a group effort, with significant input from all the Republican members of the Finance Committee and great work from all of our staff. I want to thank everyone involved for their hard work, as well as their feedback, perspectives, advice, and ideas.

The last time Congress enacted a comprehensive overhaul of the Tax Code back in 1986, President Reagan famously noted that the American people would finally have a tax code they could be proud of. And in 1986, that was likely true. At that time, updates to the Tax Code were necessary to keep pace with the technological and geopolitical changes our Nation had been facing. That sounds pretty familiar, Mr. President. It is, after all, what we have been saying for the last several years. The world of 1986 was vastly different from the world we live in today. Advances in the past three decades have been monumental. Yet our Tax Code has not advanced, and it is failing us.

The American people have dealt with years of stagnating wages, sluggishness in labor markets, and weak growth in the economy. Businesses are fleeing our country to find more favorable conditions in other countries. We have been working for years to address these issues and to meet the needs of the 21st-century global economy.

Fortunately, we now find ourselves in a position to make good on all of these years of hard work. A big part of that is the fact that our current President is fully engaged on tax reform, unlike his most recent predecessor. So we have been focused this year on providing middle-class tax relief, reforming the business tax system, and fixing our obscenely outdated international tax regime.

The mark we are releasing today will accomplish all of these goals and more. It will reduce individual rates across the board and direct substantial relief to low- and middle-income families and workers. It will bring down corporate tax rates—a goal long shared by Republicans and Democrats—and provide businesses with new opportunities for growth and expansion. It will modernize our international tax system, bringing to an end our worldwide tax regime, a relic that should have been retired many years ago. We have been laser-focused on reducing taxes for the middle class, and that is exactly what this bill will do.

Combined, these changes to our broken Tax Code in the chairman's mark will give hard-working taxpayers across the country bigger paychecks and more opportunities. They will grow our economy, raising wages and im-

proving the standard of living for all Americans. They will once again make America the best place in the world to create, grow, and keep a business—where we create more jobs and sustain a vibrant, growing economy.

I will have more to say on the specifics of the mark in the coming days. For now, I just want to give my colleagues on the Finance Committee an opportunity to share their thoughts on the steps we are taking today.

Before we get to that, I do want to acknowledge the elephants in the room. Only Republicans will be standing up today to speak in favor of the mark, and I expect we will hear some negative comments from our friends on the other side of the aisle soon enough. On that point, I will just reiterate what I have said many times in the past: Our desire from the outset of this endeavor has been to have Democrats join us in this effort.

I have personally invited my colleagues to come to the table, to share their views, and to work with us in good faith. Yet I expect that we will hear a lot about supposed process fouls in the coming days. Let me make it clear to anyone listening: As chairman of the Senate's tax writing committee, I haven't turned anyone away from the process. I haven't refused to listen to anyone's ideas or suggestions. And I continue to say, with conviction, that I am still willing to have them onboard and hope they will be willing to get onboard and join us in this effort.

A critical objective in the effort is to provide relief and support to the large swath of Americans in the middle class who have been left behind, without economic gain or opportunities for growth.

Our tax reform efforts—represented in the chairman's mark put forward today—show that we are listening to those calling out for relief. We have a historic opportunity to help, and that opportunity should not be squandered by anyone on either side of the aisle for cheap political points.

With that, I am grateful to be a member of this body and grateful to be chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which is a very powerful and hard-working committee—both Republicans and Democrats. I am grateful to make these remarks today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the last time Congress really did the big job that is before us right now was 1986. It did quite a bit to modernize the Tax Code. That was 30 years ago. In the generation since, the Tax Code has grown out of control. Everybody knows that. It has been a dream come true for accountants and lobbyists who make their living from certain provisions of that Tax Code. But for the American taxpayer, the gigantic Tax Code is not a dream, but a nightmare for most Americans.

This has helped the powerful and the well connected, but it has hurt American workers. It has hurt American industry, and it hurts America's ability to compete with the rest of the world.

The bill unveiled today takes a giant step forward to make our Tax Code simpler, fairer, and more competitive. It catches us up with our major trading partners, who have been lowering business tax rates while we stood still, and it keeps us uncompetitive. It will give us an opportunity to export more when we are competitive in the global economy.

This bill will also help bring back jobs and create new ones. It will boost American wages by promoting economic growth and incentivizing investment.

The centerpiece of the legislation is where it ought to be—in the center of our population, middle-class America, so it has middle-class tax cuts. The average middle-class family of four would see a tax cut of more than \$1,400 and an increase in the child tax credit of \$650—above the \$1,000 that is already there per child, which would mean real help for working parents.

Nearly doubling the standard deduction means that many lower income Americans will be removed from the tax rolls completely, and the tax filing season will be much simpler for millions more.

Small businesses will also see significant tax relief from the rate reduction on the individual side but also from an innovative, new small business income tax deduction. Two-thirds of the jobs in this country are created by those very same small businesses, and we ought to give them some better equity with big C corporations.

It will provide much needed tax relief to nearly all small businesses, down to the smallest family-owned corner store and family farmer.

Our bill recognizes the importance of small businesses in our economy. After all, as I just said, they are responsible for a majority of those new jobs. The tax savings they receive could be spent on a new hire. It could be spent on giving raises to employees in those same small businesses. It could be invested in a growing company. All of this adds up to Americans seeing more “Now Hiring” signs throughout our country.

Landmark tax relief during the Kennedy and Reagan administrations grew wages, created jobs, and made the United States more competitive, so there is enough history behind what we are trying to do to know that it will accomplish the goals we are trying to accomplish.

Today, Congress has a golden opportunity to do, again, what was done in Kennedy and the Reagan years, and it has not been done for 30 years: tax cuts, tax simplification, and tax reform.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. President, today is a good day. We have both the House and

the Senate working on tax reform that will have a positive impact for every day, hard-working Americans. This is truly a good day.

So often when you hear us talk about tax reform, it sounds like a lot of numbers. I am not sure how excited or enamored people get with numbers, but I am the kind of guy who believes tax reform is not about numbers. Tax reform is about everyday Americans being able to keep more of their hard-earned money.

Tax reform is about families like the one I grew up in—single-parent households, working paycheck to paycheck, year in and year out, praying and hoping for something good to happen. Today is good news for those single moms and single dads out there.

It is also good news for the working-class families—dual income—making around \$75,000 a year, working every day, trying to make sure they have a little left over for dinner out.

We want to say to those folks who haven't really had a raise in a decade: We hear you. We feel your pain. We want to deliver to your American family the opportunity to see more money in each paycheck. This is good.

And for folks who are looking to start businesses, we have a Christmas surprise for you too.

We have lowered taxes on the average family about \$1,500 a year—\$100 or so a month. Here is what that means. For a family where you are in a single-parent household, you bring home about \$450 a paycheck. That could easily become an extra 10 percent per paycheck. That is a lot of money to a single-parent household.

We have also expanded the child tax credit to make sure that those folks in the middle-income brackets are able to keep more of that hard-earned money. If there is a focus on our tax reform package, it is to make sure that middle America—hard-working income earners—have a chance to see more money materialize in their paychecks.

We have also simplified the Tax Code. People say: Well, how did you do that? There are seven brackets. I understand. It is simple. Simplification means you do not have to itemize. Said differently, 9 out of 10 taxpayers will be able to use the expanded standard deduction to figure out their tax burden, as opposed to going item by item by item and understanding whether you can withdraw it or subtract it from your income.

I had the great pleasure to be a small business owner before entering Congress. Many small business owners represent the backbone of our economy. Most jobs created in the future will be created by a small business owner. We are going to lower your taxes so that you can hire more people and make long-term investments in building the greatest economy this country has known in more than a generation.

This is a good day, and we have good news.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I agree with the Senator from South Carolina. This is, indeed, a good day for the families who will benefit from this additional money in their paycheck, from the increased standard of living they will enjoy.

For those of us who want to see businesses come back home from abroad, they fled this country because we have the highest corporate tax rate in the world. When we say we want to reform that broken corporate tax rate and to bring those businesses and that money home, we join our colleagues—ranging from the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, to Barack Obama in 2011, in a joint session of the U.S. Congress—in advocating for bringing that business rate down so that businesses will stay in America. They will hire Americans, and they will improve wages for all working families.

I am proud to join my fellow Finance Committee colleagues on the floor today to support our version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which was just released a few moments ago.

I congratulate Chairman HATCH for his leadership, but I am extraordinarily impressed with all the members of the Finance Committee who worked so hard together to try to get us to where we are today. We plan for lower rates.

As you heard, we increased the standard deduction, we expanded the child tax credit, and we reformed the Tax Code so that we can give Americans access to more jobs and higher wages.

Our Democratic colleagues have said they want tax reform too. I mentioned Barack Obama and CHUCK SCHUMER, our colleague from New York, who repeatedly said that we should lower the corporate rate so businesses will come home, hire Americans, and help our economy grow here. So we are all in agreement on that on a bipartisan basis, and there is room for further agreement.

I agree with the chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator HATCH. We invite our Democratic colleagues to come together and join us, particularly starting on the Finance Committee on Monday.

If what we want is more, better paying jobs—and we do—then we have to focus on lowering rates on all the job creators, including small businesses, as you have heard. The framework we have developed was designed to cut taxes for middle-class families, not millionaires. It is to help small businesses grow and create more jobs. It is to provide relief for hard-working families by increasing the standard deduction, as our colleague from South Carolina pointed out. One out of ten taxpayers will now have to itemize deductions in order to take full advantage of the law to reduce their tax burden. So it will be simpler, easier to comply with, and lower their tax rate, while enhancing the child tax credit. These reforms will make the 1,000-page Tax Code easier to understand and comply with. Our efforts will simplify what are

now pages upon pages of language that only tax lawyers and lobbyists understand.

I look forward to continuing the important discussions when the Senate Finance Committee marks up and amends this proposal starting Monday.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, it is a good day here in the Senate because today we released our tax reform legislation, and soon we hope to have a final bill on the President's desk.

When you first think about coming to Washington to serve, you dream about fixing big problems and making a real difference in people's lives. Well, today we get to make a big difference.

When I look at the Chamber, I hark back to 1986, which was the last time tax reform was actually passed through the Senate and signed into law by the President. Senator HATCH, the chairman of our committee, was a Member of the Senate at that time; Senator McCONNELL, the Republican leader; Senator GRASSLEY, whom you just heard from—they were all here to vote on that. I was here as a young staffer. At that time, I didn't have kids of my own, and today I am a grandfather. So a lot of time has passed, and tax reform is long overdue.

The whole point of this exercise is to give hope to future generations of Americans, to give them a better opportunity at a better life, to improve their standard of living and their quality of life. In order for that to happen, we need to be taking the steps here and putting policies in place that will create the conditions that are favorable to economic growth and to the creation of better paying jobs and higher wages.

Today we get to bring relief to the parents who are wondering if they will be able to afford a new car that they need to fit their growing family. Today we get to bring relief to the single mom who is wondering how she is going to pay the rent next month. As our colleague from South Carolina talked about, those parents and families who are literally living paycheck to paycheck. Today, we get to bring relief to the middle-aged couple worrying about a secure retirement, to the small business owner who doesn't know how he will meet his tax bill and still make his mortgage payment, to the family farmer who is worried that he will not be able to pass down his farm to his daughter.

The comprehensive tax reform legislation we have introduced today will provide immediate, direct relief to hard-working Americans. It will immediately increase their take-home pay. It will immediately simplify the Tax Code so that it is easier for Americans to figure out what benefits they qualify for so they don't have to spend a lot of time and money filing their taxes.

That is really just the beginning. Our bill is also going to reform the business

side of the Tax Code to give Americans access to the jobs, the wages, and the opportunities that will set them up for a secure future. We are going to make it easier for small businesses to raise wages and to hire new workers. We are going to end the outdated tax framework that is driving American companies to keep jobs and profits overseas, and we are going to make it easier for companies to invest in American jobs and American workers.

It has been a rough few years for our economy and for the American people. A lot of Americans haven't had a pay raise literally in almost a decade. But with this tax reform legislation, we can ensure that it doesn't stay that way.

The American people deserve a tax code that works for them and not against them, that grows their paychecks instead of shrinking them, that expands their opportunities instead of eliminating them, and that is exactly what we are going to give them starting today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, today is America's lucky day. And we all know what the definition of "luck" is—luck is when opportunity meets preparation. We are very lucky as a country and we are very lucky as a Senate that our majority leader, MITCH McCONNELL, was where he is and is where he is at the time he is. It was his vision a few years ago that the tax issue was going to emerge as the central issue in the growth and development of our country and that unless we met the challenges of our Tax Code, opened up opportunity for our public, and expanded opportunity for our businesses, the American people could succumb to a high-tax system without productivity.

We also got lucky because Senator McCONNELL picked a man to be chairman of this committee—ORRIN HATCH—who brought years of experience in the U.S. Senate and the compassion that ORRIN HATCH has as a Mormon and as an American to a tax code that is by no means simple—it was always complex—to make it simpler and fairer, pro-family and pro-jobs.

Let me tell you something. There are a lot of disappointed people overseas right now because those who have been picking our pockets by inverting American corporations to foreign systems because their taxes were lower than ours are out of luck. Now those people are going to be incentivized to come to America, to make investments in our country, to expand opportunities and jobs in our country. No longer will companies want to leave America; companies will invest and be more American. That is fantastic, and that is why this is a pro-jobs tax bill. It is going to create a lot of opportunity, and opportunity is what Americans want and what Americans need.

For the average American family—and let me talk about my family for a

second. I think I am pretty average. My wife and I are fortunate. We have three great children and nine great grandchildren. I was lucky enough to have worked in a small LLC—limited liability partnership—real estate brokerage company, mom-and-pop brokerage company. My wife taught in public schools. Our children went to the University of Georgia and to the public schools of our community. We saved for their education. We did everything we could to invest in hope for them in the future, and today they are all gainfully employed. They are all happy, but they are all struggling, as everybody else is, with a burdensome tax system, with less opportunity than we would like for them to have. By simplifying the tax system, by making it fairer, as we have done here, we have given more opportunity to my grandchildren, my children, and more opportunity to America.

Lastly, I want to make this point: There are only two ways to raise taxes or raise revenue. One is to charge more. That means you raise somebody's taxes. The other way to do it is to create opportunity. So people create companies and jobs because the opportunity is there. When you create opportunity and when jobs are created, revenues increase. When people do better in their jobs, their incomes go up. When companies have people who do better in their jobs, they expand. When they expand, they produce more revenue that becomes taxable. So we raise our revenue not by lowering expectations but by raising opportunity for our people and for our children.

We are very lucky as Americans today. I am very lucky to be in this U.S. Senate today. We are lucky to have had leaders in place at a time that was right to address our country's biggest challenge and do it the right way.

When I was in the Georgia Legislature, I sat next to an oldtime rural-hat politician who ran the Ways and Means Committee of the Georgia Legislature. I will never forget that one day he and I were sitting side by side as we were listening to a gentleman make a speech in the well. The gentleman in the well paused a minute to try to make a point, and he said: Ladies and gentlemen, let me tax your memory. And my old friend, the rural-hat politician, said: Damn, I wish I had thought of that.

That is the way we have done taxes in this country for a long time—just taxed people's memory, tried to look for an opportunity to tax something for us. What we are doing here is we are creating opportunity. We are raising revenue through prosperity. Americans will raise revenue for their pockets first before the country gets the revenue second.

So it is our lucky day—lucky to have good leaders, lucky to live in the greatest country on the face of this Earth. And if we do our job—if we pass this bill before the end of this year and

change the Tax Code of the United States of America to a fairer, pro-jobs, pro-family tax code—then we will have made our contribution to history at a time when it was our opportunity. I hope it will never be said that we let our country down when that opportunity was available to us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I want to echo the message of the Senator from Georgia. This is a terrific opportunity. This is a very big day. It is a big step forward on our path to restoring the economic growth that we have been waiting for all this time. I am very excited about this step forward and the remainder of the process to get this done, to get this bill signed into law.

Why do we need this? We have just lived through the weakest recovery in American history—feeble growth, stagnant wages, and a widening gap between the wealthy and the poor. That is what has been happening for years.

Some people say: Well, that is just the way it is. You just need to get used to it. That is the new normal. That is what America is about now.

That is complete nonsense. There is nothing inevitable about the American economy being weak and denying opportunity for the people we represent. It is a direct result of bad policy, failed policy that prevented us from having the recovery we would normally have after a recession.

What was that policy? Well, we saw it. It is very clear. It is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of fact that productivity growth in America collapsed. It is a matter of fact that investment in the kinds of new plants and equipment that allow for productivity to grow collapsed. It is a fact that new business startups just dried up. People weren't able and willing to do it.

There is no mystery about why our economy was so weak for so many years. We had imposed conditions that made it impossible to have the kind of growth that is normal. Meanwhile, what was happening in the rest of the world? The rest of the world was systematically making their tax codes more competitive. The countries that we compete with around the world, in Europe and Asia, were lowering the rates they apply to business income, they were simplifying their codes, and they were moving to international systems that made it more conducive for them to generate investment into their countries, while we did nothing except let our Tax Code ossify. That is what has been happening these last many years.

What I am excited about is that this bill fixes exactly what is broken. This bill goes to exactly where the problem is and begins to turn this around. How do we do that? One of the things we do—a hallmark of this bill—is we are going to lower the cost of investing in the new plants and equipment that will

allow American workers to become more productive. More productive workers get paid more in wages; that is just a fact. That is what is going to happen as a result of this bill.

Another thing we do in this bill is we get away from this terrible policy we have that is resulting in foreign companies buying up American companies. The way we treat income earned overseas is a disaster, and we are the only country in the world that does it.

I think you could make a case that today the United States has what might very well be the least attractive tax regime in the modern world, in the industrialized world. What is really exciting about this is that we are going to move from this system to what just might be the best tax system in the industrialized world. Think about the result that is going to have. I think the result is going to be breathtaking—new investment, new businesses being launched, existing businesses growing.

Take foreign direct investment alone. If you think about it, we have a global economy. Capital can move around the world with literally the click of a mouse, and people make investment decisions based on the climate of the place in which they are thinking about investing. When we have the worst tax regime in the world, who really wants to invest here? When we have the best, how are we not going to attract investment from all around the world, including very much in the United States?

So the changes we are making are exactly the right changes for this moment. That is true in another respect, and that is, if you think about where we are in this cycle, it has taken way too long to get here, but the unemployment rate is quite low now. We are getting close to full employment. So what happens when we create the incentives for businesses to grow, to invest, for new businesses to launch, for people to invest in America—what happens when that occurs in an environment where the unemployment rate is very low? It sets up a bidding war for workers. There is no other choice. As they grow, these businesses need new employees to get the job done. They have to pay ever more because they are competing with another business down the road that also wants to grow and also wants to invest in new plants and equipment.

What we are going to do is create a bidding war for workers. That means wages are going up. When wages go up, families have more take-home pay. When they have more take-home pay, they have a higher standard of living. This is exactly how people have a chance to live the American dream, when the economy is thriving and growing at the rate that America used to take for granted. I am here to say that those days are coming back.

We have some work to do. We are not done yet by any means, but I am confident we are going to get this done and, when we do, our constituents are going to live a better life as a result.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I really enjoyed listening to my colleague from Pennsylvania talking about this new tax reform plan that has just been unveiled by the Finance Committee. He is right; this is really exciting because it is an opportunity, after a lot of talk over a lot of years, to finally fix our Tax Code.

Our Tax Code is broken. It is broken in a lot of different respects, but one that he pointed out so well is the fact that we actually have jobs and investment going overseas because of our Tax Code. It is the responsibility of the people who are in this body and in the House and in the Presidency to actually fix that. No one else can do it. Workers in America, including in my home State of Ohio, are competing with one hand tied behind their back because we have a tax code that encourages other companies from foreign countries to come in and buy our companies, to take our business, to take our market share, to make it harder for U.S. workers to be able to compete and win. So I think it is way past time, frankly, for us to fix that.

People say: Well, we haven't reformed the Tax Code in 31 years and it is about time, and I agree with that. If we go back to the international part of our Tax Code that created a lot of these problems, we have to go back to John F. Kennedy, who last reformed it. That means that part of our Tax Code should qualify for AARP benefits; that is how old it is. So it is time for us to fix it, and it is really exciting to finally have the opportunity.

There are three parts of this tax reform proposal, all three of which are really important. The first is a tax cut for the middle class. Why is that important? Because right now, even with the economy that is starting to grow a little bit, what is happening? Wages are flat, so expenses are up across the board.

The biggest expense, by the way, is the one the Presiding Officer has been involved with, which is healthcare. People have seen their healthcare costs go up, as well as their premiums and their deductibles and their copays; yet their wages aren't going up, and that creates a middle-class squeeze. But it is more than healthcare. It is food. It is every day purchases. It is tuition, if you are trying to send your kid to school. Those have skyrocketed. So let's do something to actually give the family budget a little help; that is, the middle-class tax cuts that are in this proposal.

You probably saw today that the middle-class tax cut alone provides, on average, \$1,458 for every family. That is the median income family.

One of the reporters here in the hall asked me: Gosh, \$1,500 a family—why does that matter?

I said: It matters a lot if you are living paycheck to paycheck. Maybe you

are not, but a lot of people whom I represent are, and that \$1,500 will help them to be able to make ends meet and maybe begin to save a little bit for vacation or retirement or for the ability to make that car payment. So I think this is really important.

I would say, though, beyond just that important middle-class tax cut, there is something else that ought to be considered, which is, if we do this right—the way this has been laid out by the Finance Committee—what is going to happen is we are going to help to create more jobs and higher wages.

My colleague from Pennsylvania talked about this. With a relatively tight labor market, as we have more investment into these businesses, what is going to happen? Everyone says we are going to see wages go up. The Congressional Budget Office, which is a nonpartisan group, and the Joint Committee on Taxation, also a nonpartisan group, have looked at all of this. They say: Yes, there is actually going to be a benefit to workers if we do these business tax cuts, to be able to get the business rate down below the average of the other industrialized countries, rather than having the highest business rate in the entire industrialized world, which it is now, because that is going to attract more jobs and investment here and we will stop losing jobs and investment.

There are some economists who have looked at this, as well, and they agree that this is going to benefit workers. In fact, there are a couple of economic studies that show that families will get an additional \$4,000, on average, per family. Again, we are talking about middle-class families who will get the benefits that are going to come from more investment and more jobs and higher earnings that are going to happen in the business world.

So it is not just about the middle-class tax cuts, as important as they are; this is also tax reform that is going right to the bottom line. You will be able to figure it out. Go online, use the tax calculator, and figure out what it means to you. But also remember that these other reforms, in an outdated Tax Code that is just crying out for reform, are going to result in additional benefits flowing to you and your family, as well, if we do this right, and we have to do it right.

There is a study that came out recently from a firm called Ernst & Young. The study looked at what has been happening in America over the past decade or so. It said that over the last 13 years, there are 4,700 American companies that have become foreign companies because of our Tax Code that would still be American companies today if we put in place the kind of tax reform we are talking about—20 percent rate—below that average of the other industrialized countries and this international system that allows you to be more competitive—4,700 companies. Think about that.

There is other data out there that says twice as many foreigners are buy-

ing U.S. companies than U.S. companies are buying foreign companies. Why? Because of our Tax Code. It is just true.

This is something that has been happening in this country, not just in the last couple of years but really over the last couple of decades. It is time for us to catch up. America needs to get back in a leadership position, and if we do that, we are going to see more jobs and more investment coming here to this country rather than going overseas.

Finally, the third thing this does that is so important is it levels the playing field internationally. Right now we have between \$2.5 trillion and \$3 trillion of earnings—money—from American companies that are trapped overseas. Those companies aren't bringing it back. Why? Because of our Tax Code. This tax reform proposal actually says to those companies: We want that money back here. We want you to invest in America. We want you to create jobs here and expand plants and equipment; bring your intellectual property, your patents back here, and then send that export out from America. That will create jobs here, including good jobs in research and development.

That is what this proposal does as well. It levels that playing field internationally to tell the foreign companies and the foreign nations that are taking advantage of our current Tax Code: You know what, that is not going to happen anymore. That is done. We now are going to have a competitive tax code where we are encouraging money to come here to this country, and that money coming back here, invested in this country, will also raise the economic condition for the entire country. Economic growth will go up, and, again, that filters down to all of us, including every family I represent.

That is why I am excited about this. I think it is overdue. I wish we could have done this earlier, not just last year but 10 years ago or 20 years ago.

Senator HATCH is on the floor tonight, and he has been talking about this for a few decades. He has been saying that we have to fix this. He is now chairman of the Finance Committee. He can do it.

Senator MCCONNELL is going to speak in a minute. He has talked about this for a long time. We have had commissions on it. We have had bipartisan working groups—five of them—a year and a half ago on reform, and those bipartisan working groups looked at this issue. I cochaired one of those working groups on the international side. Guess what. On a bipartisan basis, we said: We have to have this lower tax rate; we have to go to this more competitive international system. Do my colleagues know who the cochair of that working group was? There was one Republican, one Democrat on all of these working groups. It was CHUCK SCHUMER from New York who is now a Democratic leader. So this has not been a partisan issue in the past, on the international side at least.

Let's figure out how we can come together and get Republican and Democratic support to be able to tell the workers of America: You are no longer going to have to compete with one hand tied behind your back. We are going to give you the tools to be able to be successful for you and your family so that you can achieve the American dream.

I am excited about this. Let's move forward. I look forward to the Finance Committee next week bringing it to the floor, and I hope we can have support on both sides of the aisle to get this done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the distinguished chairman of the Finance Committee is on the cusp of the accomplishment of his career. This comprehensive tax reform will make a huge difference for America. I wish to commend him for the efforts that have gotten us this far.

We have heard members of the Finance Committee speaking to the bill that has been presented to our conference. This is going to be an extraordinary accomplishment, not only for the American people but for the distinguished chairman of the Finance Committee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PORTMAN). The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I wish to add my words to those that have been said.

Let me begin by saying that the achievement of this tax proposal is not about anyone in this Chamber; it is about the working families who for the last 8 years have not done so well. They have either lost their jobs or their wages have been flat and their benefits have not improved or, indeed, the cost of those benefits have risen dramatically. I can say, with the Tax Cut and Jobs Act that is being introduced today, they will increase their take-home pay, they will have higher wages, and they will have a better life.

Now let's talk about how that would be. How will these working families improve?

The Presiding Officer, the Senator from Ohio, mentioned in his remarks that businesses will have money to invest. There will be competition for workers. And if there is competition for workers, then workers are paid more. They are given better benefits. What do those better benefits and better wages mean? It means they can invest more in their family, in their children's future, and that, in turn, will change their family's life for generations to come.

So on behalf of those working families, I echo Chairman HATCH, that if there is a suggestion by anyone that can make this better, I ask them to bring that suggestion forward because this is not about Republicans, this is not about Democrats, this is not about

anybody in this Chamber; it is about those working families who, for the last 8 years, have not done as well as the American dream would say they should.

On behalf of those working families, I congratulate Chairman HATCH for this job. I look forward to the passage of this bill, and I look forward to all of the benefits of this bill coming to help the families of this country and in my State of Louisiana.

Thank you.

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.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss a couple of pressing issues regarding our healthcare system and to ensure that Americans are aware of some critical deadlines for their health options in the marketplace.

It is that time of year. Healthcare open enrollment has started, and Americans across the country can sign up or change their healthcare plans to make sure they are getting a plan that works best for them and their families.

I have long said that the health reform law, otherwise known as ObamaCare, is not perfect, and I have been pushing since I have been here to make it work better for North Dakota families and small businesses. But there are many pieces in that healthcare law that are helpful, and I wish to make sure that Americans and North Dakotans take advantage during this open enrollment period.

Every individual and family should be able to get access to affordable, quality healthcare, and no one should have to go bankrupt to pay for healthcare for a child with a disability, a sick family member, or just an emergency that you never thought could happen. That is why I am encouraging everyone to please make sure you explore your options and sign up for healthcare coverage.

It is more important than ever that folks take advantage of this open enrollment period early because there are many changes this year that, unfortunately, make it more difficult for individuals and their families to sign up for health insurance. Even if you already have a plan, it is worth checking out healthcare plans, as these prices change from year to year.

First, open enrollment today is a month and a half shorter this year than it has been in the past. Open enrollment is from November 2—right now—until December 15. That is just 45 days. Do not wait to check this out. It is best if you go today to find out if

there is a better plan for you or if you need to secure health insurance on the marketplace.

Second, the administration has significantly reduced funding for in-person assistance, called navigators, who help individuals and families sign up for healthcare coverage. This action is leaving millions of Americans and thousands of North Dakotans without the critical help they need to understand their options and enroll in meaningful healthcare coverage.

I want to make a point here. For those of us who in the past have always had the option of getting healthcare coverage through an employer, there is always someone in that employment office, in the payroll office, or in human resources who helps you through. This is not unique in needing this assistance. It is not unique to the marketplace. It is access and information that you have through your employer, if you are getting your insurance through your employer. The idea was that the same opportunity for information should be made available in person on the marketplace, but it is not. So we have to try and fill in those gaps. Because we have these gaps, we are in many ways seeing a number of cutbacks and a number of folks not getting access to the information they need.

In fact, the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board does not have enough funds to operate as a navigator, and they will not be able to help North Dakotans sign up for coverage as they have done in previous years. Another navigator in my State, Minot State University, has had its Federal funds cut by over 96 percent.

Since 2013 the uninsured rate in North Dakota has been reduced from 11 percent to 8 percent, in large part because of the work of these navigators. The navigator grantees in my State have provided an invaluable service by guiding families through the process of determining the best private health insurance coverage for them, as well as through traditional Medicaid and Medicaid expansion application processes. Many North Dakotans who sign up for coverage qualify for Federal assistance to help afford that coverage. So it is vitally important that they understand Medicaid, that they understand Medicaid expansion, and that they understand the tax implications of the plans they are selecting.

But even those numbers that show the decrease in uninsured in North Dakota don't tell the full story. Not only have navigators responded to daily inquiries both during and outside of the open enrollment period, but they have identified and responded to the challenges of increasing enrollment, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas of the State that are less likely to have access to coverage through an employer.

Slashing funding for navigators also has implications for Indian Country. The Indian Health Service has had

challenges delivering quality care to Native Americans in my State and certainly in our region. But those issues have lessened as more Native Americans have enrolled in traditional Medicaid, Medicaid expansion, and private health insurance, enabling these families to access quality, affordable healthcare to stay healthy. Thanks to the increase of third-party payments, we are no longer limited to life-or-limb care at Tribal IHS facilities in the Great Plains service area.

Adding to the turmoil of the enrollment process, the administration also announced that it is cutting off Federal funding that helps make healthcare affordable for families, known as cost sharing reduction payments. As a result, many individuals and families will see their premiums skyrocket by double digits. Due directly to this decision and the uncertainty it has injected into our healthcare system, one insurer has exited the healthcare marketplace in North Dakota and another has reduced its health insurance plan offerings, leaving many counties in my State with only one insurer for consumers to choose from. Ironically, North Dakota was one of the best covered States in terms of options and choices. That option and that source of pride has been diminished as a result of the lack of consistency with cost sharing reduction payments.

A recent report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said that if the administration stopped paying the cost sharing reduction payments, as it has now done, there would be serious consequences for individuals and families across the country. The report said families' premiums would jump about 20 percent, many families would be left without health insurance options as the lack of payment would force many insurers to leave the market, and it would also add \$194 billion to the deficit over a decade.

Despite these efforts to sabotage the marketplaces and jeopardize access to coverage for families, we have fortunately seen a surge of encouraging enrollment numbers in the first week of enrollment. But the American public deserves better, and I will do everything I can to ensure that consumers know their options, that consumers are connected with opportunities for meaningful coverage, and that they are provided certainty in the future about healthcare costs.

On November 1, I had launched a new page on my website, heitkamp.senate.gov, to help provide resources and enrollment information to North Dakotans. I sincerely hope folks who are looking to buy health insurance on the marketplace in North Dakota take advantage of that website.

Access to affordable quality healthcare is a must, and I am proud to have worked with a group of Republican and Democratic Senators, led by Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY, to reach a deal to offer some immediate

fixes to make healthcare more affordable and accessible in North Dakota and across the country. Our bill would specifically address many of the new challenges that face folks during open enrollment.

The deal we unveiled last month would provide certainty for insurers and customers by restoring the cost sharing reduction payments for 2 years and restoring Federal funding for outreach and enrollment efforts in States, including the navigator services that I talked about earlier. It incorporates an idea that I have been championing for many years, which is to create a lower cost copper plan with lower premiums and higher deductibles to increase coverage options for young, healthy families, where they aren't so much worried about the day-to-day costs of healthcare but that catastrophic event that could throw them into a lifetime of poverty.

The agreement would also provide flexibility for States to continue to explore their options to deliver the best healthcare options to their citizens. This recognizes that one size does not fit all and that we need to have more flexibility for States to experiment and to provide the kind of quality of care and the kind of care options that work best for their State.

On top of having significant bipartisan support, there is a bonus. The bonus is that CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation estimate that enacting the legislation would reduce the deficit by \$3.8 billion without substantially changing the number of people with health insurance coverage.

Now Congress needs to pass our bill. I have long said there are good parts of the healthcare reform act and parts that need to be fixed. Our bipartisan deal is an important step to help families afford healthcare coverage so the health reform law works better for North Dakotans.

How rare is it in this body to have this many people come together to propose one piece of legislation? I know that if you put this bill on to the floor tomorrow, it would easily pass with over 60 percent of the Senate. We need to get this done. We need to get it done to ensure the American public that we are serious about responding to their concerns about healthcare but that we are also serious legislators who can, in fact, fix the problems that we have in this country.

This isn't everything that we have been working on, but it certainly is the most important and the highest priority to pass the Murray-Alexander bill. But there are other proposals to improve healthcare that I am working on. I recently introduced a bill to delay the health insurance tax for 2 years and make coverage more affordable for the 156 million consumers across the country impacted by the fee. It would also make the tax deductible moving forward, providing more certainty for families to plan into the future.

Reducing the impact of the health insurance tax—a fee that directly im-

pacts the healthcare affordability for families and small businesses—has had broad, bipartisan support. In 2015 Congress passed a 1-year delay of the fee. This delay benefited consumers, seniors, employers, State employees, and Tribes. The average premium reduction from that delay of the fee was 3 percent.

If we think about the health insurance tax and we think about the sales taxes that many States enact, many States will tell you we don't enact sales tax on the necessities of life, whether it is food or whether it is electricity. Clearly, this is a necessity of life, having this health insurance. This health insurance tax is nothing more than a regressive sales tax on premium costs, and I believe we need to find a better and more commonsense alternative.

Another commonsense bill that I have introduced to help make healthcare more affordable for middle-income families is a bill that would address what I call the current cliff problem on premium assistance that many middle-class families and seniors face when they earn above 400 percent of the Federal poverty level, putting affordable care out of reach.

Right now, those earning just a nominal sum over—\$1 over 400 percent of the Federal poverty level, which is \$47,550 for an individual and \$97,200 for a family of four—are no longer eligible for any premium support to make health insurance more affordable. This perhaps is one of those issues that I have heard more about than almost any other issue in the Affordable Care Act.

What my bill would do is to get rid of the cliff and instead insert a slope. The bill would enable more young, healthy families to be able to obtain affordable healthcare coverage while diversifying the insurance pools, and it would make sure seniors with high medical costs aren't forced to lose those hard-earned retirement savings or go without care. Smoothing out that cliff will make health insurance more affordable, will make this bill more responsive to our middle-class taxpayers and middle-class families, and will provide some certainty for these families as they look at the high cost of healthcare and insurance premiums into the future.

I also cosponsored a bill to provide stability in the insurance marketplace by making the current reinsurance program for individual health insurance market permanent. It would be similar to the successful programs used to lower premiums and spur competition in the Medicare Part D Program. This reinsurance program would provide funding to offset larger than expected insurance claims for health insurance companies participating in State and Federal insurance marketplaces, and it would encourage them to offer more plans in a greater number of markets, improving competition and driving down costs for patients and families.

It is that catastrophic cost, which is unpredictable for the actuaries, that

drives up high cost. If they know that catastrophic cost above a certain amount is subject to a reinsurance plan and those costs are shared more broadly than just within that system, the healthcare that they can provide and the insurance commissioners can secure with a reasonable rate would be greatly reduced.

Lastly, another critical program that ensures access to coverage throughout the country and in North Dakota is the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP. I have to tell you, I know many, many families who, without CHIP and without their ability to find that temporary opportunity to use CHIP to insure their children, would be bankrupt today. They would have incurred healthcare bills just from a simple fall off a swing set, and they would be spending a lifetime trying to figure out how they are going to pay or they would be finding their way into the bankruptcy court.

CHIP is a program that has been used since the late 1990s, and more than 2,000 North Dakota children currently rely on it for affordable healthcare. It provides a critical bridge between Medicaid and private insurance coverage for children. We have to act fast to reauthorize CHIP and let thousands of children across the country who are on CHIP and their families know that we care about them, that we are standing up for them, and that we are not going to leave them behind.

Unfortunately, the authorization for this critical and lifesaving program expired at the end of September. Without action from Congress, some States will already run out of Federal funding before the end of the year. Some already have and require emergency funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to shore up their programs so that they can still provide that continuous coverage while we fail to act here in the Congress.

While my State of North Dakota is not scheduled to run out of funding until April of next year, this is not a way to administer an ongoing and critical healthcare program. We need to get this program reauthorized now before it is too late and we have unnecessarily hurt American children and have created unnecessary unpredictability for families who need and have found some incredible benefit in covering their children with this program.

The Senate Finance Committee has marked up bipartisan legislation, the Keep Kids' Insurance Dependable and Secure Act, to extend authorization for the program for 5 years. Congress needs to act now to make sure these families know their children have dependable and secure coverage. No parent and no family member should have to wonder if their children will get critical care. Put yourself in their shoes.

Since I came to the Senate in 2013, I have said there are parts of the healthcare law and the healthcare system that need improvement to make sure it is working for hard-working

North Dakotans and hard-working Americans. As I have outlined, these are some tangible, commonsense policy proposals that have strong bipartisan support, and we can, in fact, make this system better. We can, in fact, tackle this challenge of healthcare, and then we can roll up our sleeves and reduce costs and make healthcare more affordable and less costly in this country.

We can do all of that. We have a country and a group of American citizens who are counting on us to do our job to make sure that, into the future, they will have the certainty that they need, the predictability that they need, to get their healthcare coverage and to make sure that their families will never have to worry about having to file bankruptcy because a child has fallen off of a swing set.

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

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

THE GREAT LAKES AND UNDERWATER OIL PIPELINES

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, next to our people, the Great Lakes are unquestionably Michigan's greatest resource. They are more than an economic engine. They are more than a source of drinking water for 40 million people. They are more than a destination for tourists, boaters, and anglers from across the globe. While the Great Lakes are certainly all of those things, in Michigan, they are also a way of life. They are, quite simply, home. You cannot sit on the edge of one of our massive inland seas without feeling a sense of awe and gratitude.

Next to me is a photo of the Straits of Mackinac, a 5-mile stretch of water where Lake Michigan meets Lake Huron and where Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas are connected by the Mackinac Bridge.

Unfortunately, today I cannot look out at these straits without feeling a grave concern. The Straits of Mackinac are home to powerful currents. Water, at times, flows through at a volume greater than 10 times that of Niagara Falls. The currents are also unpredictable, as they can flow in any direction and can change not only by the season or even by the day, but they can actually change by the hour.

The straits are also home to twin underwater oil pipelines that are operated by Enbridge, known as Line 5, that are now 64 years old and getting older by the day. A recent study by the University of Michigan found that the Straits of Mackinac are the absolute worst possible place for an oilspill anywhere in the entire Great Lakes Basin.

Without question, there is no way that this pipeline would have been

built today, but it is there, and we need the toughest protections and strictest accountability possible. To put these in place, I worked to pass bipartisan legislation to designate the Great Lakes as an unusually sensitive area, which requires the highest possible operating standards under Federal law.

Rigorous Federal oversight is critical, but pipeline owners and operators must do their part as well by being transparent and forthcoming.

While Enbridge assured us repeatedly that Line 5 is "as good as new," we found out in August that there are bandaid-sized gaps where protective coatings had worn completely away and exposed the bare metal underneath to the harsh underwater environment in the straits. Last month, we learned of six additional locations with damage to the protective coatings, leaving areas as big as 1 square foot of exposed bare metal at each location. Then, on October 27, 2017, just 2 weeks ago, Enbridge disclosed that its pipeline integrity department knew of the damage that it had caused to the pipeline while conducting maintenance in 2014—3 years ago.

I share the concerns that have been expressed by thousands of Michiganders who dread the worst case oilspill scenario, and I share their frustration and their anger at being misled. It is unacceptable that damage to a pipeline running through the Great Lakes could go unreported for 3 weeks, let alone 3 years.

Simply put, Enbridge does not deserve our trust, and we deserve some answers. This is why, earlier this week, I called on the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to exercise its oversight role and conduct a thorough investigation—examine any potential safety or reporting violations—and assure all Michiganders of the safety and integrity of Line 5, if at all possible. I also joined Senator STABENOW in demanding answers from Enbridge's CEO to three very critical questions:

One, what are you doing to fix your broken reporting procedures?

Two, is there any other unreported damage to Line 5?

Three, how can we be certain that regulators are being fully informed by your company?

We need these answers, and we must get them.

I will never stop fighting to hold pipeline operators accountable and to keep our Great Lakes safe and clean. The Great Lakes are home, and I will do everything that I can to protect them for generations to come.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SENATE ANTI-HARASSMENT TRAINING RESOLUTION

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I want to turn to two topics today.

First, the good news is that all of the members of the Senate Rules Committee have come together on a mandatory sexual harassment training resolution that has been submitted with broad support, including from the two leaders and every member of the Rules Committee. I thank Senator GRASSLEY for his leadership, Senator SHELBY for his leadership, as well as Senators CAPITO and CORTEZ MASTO, who were a big help.

We are all too aware that sexual harassment continues in our workplaces. A recent study found that one in four women has been sexually harassed in the workplace and that three-quarters of individuals who have experienced sexual harassment at work have not reported the incidences. Civil service is actually among the top five industries with the highest sexual harassment incidences.

We know that it will not stop on its own, and we will not be complacent bystanders who expect workplace cultures to change on their own. That is why today, with a bipartisan group of 19 of our colleagues, we took a major step forward with this resolution. Once it is adopted by the full Senate, which we hope will be shortly, this resolution will simply require that all Senators and staff receive sexual harassment training, as well as on other forms of harassment, at least once every 2 years—in addition to that, 60 days after it passes.

What happens if Senators do not receive this training? The American people will know.

In one part of this bill—and I appreciate the broad support from Senator MCCONNELL, who has long been someone who has taken leadership in this area for many years, and from Senator SCHUMER, who has also taken leadership in this area—all offices will have to certify to the Secretary of the Senate that they and their employees here in Washington, as well as those working in our home States, have, in fact, taken the training and complied with the resolution. These certifications will be posted online for the public to view.

I thank Senator GRASSLEY, again, as well as Senator SHELBY. Senator GRASSLEY, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, was the author of the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995. I want to thank as well Senators CORTEZ MASTO and CAPITO and all the members of the Rules Committee for coming together, on both sides of the aisle, on this commonsense resolution.

I urge my colleagues to support the Senate Anti-Harassment Training Resolution of 2017. There is more work to be done with regard to the reporting process, and that is something we are going to be working on in the next few weeks through the Rules Committee, but I do want to thank them.

Senator GILLIBRAND has also been working in this area, and I want to thank her. Overall, it is a good effort in which everyone came together and agreed on a plan for mandatory training.

VETERANS DAY

Mr. President, I will now turn to a completely different subject, and that is the subject of Veterans Day.

I rise to honor and thank our veterans, servicemembers, and their families as we celebrate our veterans on Veterans Day. These brave men and women represent the best among us. Whether you served 50 years ago or still wear the uniform today, we thank our veterans for their service and sacrifice on behalf of this great Nation.

No matter when they served, all veterans have one thing in common: a deep love of our country and a patriotism that goes beyond simply feeling pride. All veterans were willing to lay down their lives in defense of this Nation, and many continue to live the spirit of service in their communities once their time in the military is over.

Last week, I attended the change of command ceremony, where we honored outgoing MG Richard Nash for his decades of service and saw him pass the leadership torch to MG Jon Jensen, who was sworn in as the new adjutant general of Minnesota's National Guard.

As General Nash said earlier this year, "Our Minnesota National Guard and the entire state has contributed greatly in a period of history that will be looked back upon as a remarkably important time."

He continued: "We were always ready, always there."

He was right. Our servicemembers are always there for us, and, in turn, we must honor their service.

At a time marked by the volatility of our politics, our commitment to our servicemembers and veterans remains steadfast. We stand united regardless of our politics. Our veterans fought for our freedom, and we need to be there for them.

When our servicemembers put their lives on the line to serve our country, there wasn't a waiting line. When they come home to the United States of America, when they need healthcare or they need a job or they need a house, there should never be a waiting line in the United States of America.

We still have a great deal of work ahead of us to honor this commitment. Here is an example. Amie Muller of Woodbury, MN, enlisted in the Air Force in 1998. After two deployments to Balad, Iraq, where she was stationed next to one of the war's most notorious toxic burn pits, she returned home. Shortly afterward, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at age 36, half the average age for this form of cancer.

When Amie passed earlier this year, she left three small children and her loving husband Brian behind. Since then, I have gotten to know and work with Brian. He has made one thing clear to me: We can't let these toxic

burn pits become another Agent Orange. So as part of Amie's legacy, we are working to create a Center of Excellence within the Department of Veterans Affairs to deal with the mounting evidence that thousands of veterans have gotten sick after being exposed to toxic substances burned in the large pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. This isn't a partisan issue, and I am very pleased to have as a cosponsor of my bill Republican colleague Senator THOM TILLIS of North Carolina. We have been working together to get this bill passed. We are very pleased it was in the National Defense Authorization Act that came out of the Senate.

While our National Guard and Reserve component members often serve with their Active-Duty counterparts on the exact same missions, they are not always ensured the same compensation and benefits for their service. When they return home, our National Guard and reservists are often denied the education and healthcare benefits they counted on during their deployments. We need to close that loophole and make sure that members deployed on the same missions who take the same risks receive the same benefits.

Just as we have made a commitment to serving our servicemembers, we have made a commitment to looking out for their families. Since September 11, 2001, the Minnesota National Guard soldiers and airmen have deployed more than 26,000 times. Actually the Red Bulls, one of our units, is one of the longest serving units in Iraq.

That service can take a toll on families—especially kids. That is why it is important for students and teachers to know which students' parents are servicemembers so they can help make special accommodations like setting up Skype during the schoolday so a young girl can talk to her dad who is serving abroad. That is what happens for students whose parents are on Active Duty in the military but not for those whose parents are in the Guard or Reserves. That makes no sense. Some say it was just an error—some say maybe not. Whatever it is, we need to fix it. I am leading bipartisan legislation to make sure our Guard and Reserve Forces and their families are treated equally.

When our veterans signed up to serve and defend our country, there wasn't a waiting line, as I noted. That is why, on this day tomorrow, we will be honoring them by telling them we believe they deserve the best.

I was reminded of that a number of years ago when I greeted one of the World War II Honor Flights that was coming back filled with veterans from Minnesota who saw, maybe for the first time or the last time, the World War II Memorial. They had gotten up incredibly early in the morning, boarded a plane, spent the day, and flew back. There were hundreds and hundreds of family members waiting for them late at night in the airport terminal with balloons and signs with their names on

them. They got off that flight on walkers and wheelchairs, and they came down to where the families were, tears running down their faces. It was an amazing sight to see.

In typical Minnesota tradition, a polka band was playing by the luggage carousel, and one of the older veterans, who I later found out was in his late eighties, asked me to dance.

I said: Well, I would love to dance. Then the band stopped playing because it was at the end.

Then he said: Oh, that is OK.

I said: I am sorry. I will have to take a rain check.

I don't know why I said that to someone his age, but that is what I said.

Then he said: That is OK. I have a great voice.

He started singing that Frankie Valli song, "You're just too good to be true. Can't take my eyes off of you," and he danced me around and around that luggage carousel.

As I danced with that man, I thought to myself, this is how our veterans should be treated every day. They should be greeted with balloons and signs at the airport, and they should be dancing with their Senators by the luggage carousel.

That is the spirit we have to remember as we go forward into Veterans Day. We are reminded of the exceptional commitment and extraordinary service our democracy demands of all the brave men and women who have stepped forward to protect it. That same democracy demands that we fight for our servicemembers as they fought for us. As General Nash said, they were "always there" for us, and we must be there for them too.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO ALASKA NATIVE VETERANS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as you know, I have been coming to the Senate floor pretty much every week for month after month to highlight someone in my State whom we call the Alaskan of the Week. It is someone who does something important, either for their community or the State or the country, and oftentimes they don't get a lot of recognition. The purpose of this is to say: Look at what these people are doing for Alaska, for America, for their community.

My State is known for many things: its physical beauty, incredible hunting and fishing, adventuresome spirit, size—you don't want me going there. I have difficult conversations with my colleagues from Texas on occasion about the different sizes of our respective States, but I will not go into detail

here. These are all things we have in Alaskan space, but the thing that really makes us a great place to live is our people—strong, resilient, kind people all across our State who look out for each other, often in harsh weather conditions.

We are a patriotic State. I know everybody here claims that, and that is great. We all are.

Nowhere is the spirit of sacrifice and patriotism more apparent than in our veterans across the State. In Alaska, in Missouri—the Presiding Officer's State—we are all celebrating that, and we are going to celebrate that this weekend, going home for Veterans Day.

In Alaska, we like to talk about our veterans. We also like to talk about the fact that we have more veterans per capita than any other State in the country. So it is a very patriotic place—full of service.

In every city, village, and every community across Alaska, you will find proud veterans, many of them working tirelessly together to make sure they get the help and support that our veterans need. A lot of times that happens with the older vets—Vietnam-era vets. They come to make sure the new vets get the help they need.

To all of them: I salute your service and your sacrifice. Thank you so much for all you have done and continue to do for our country. Happy Veterans Day to all of Alaska's veterans. I can't wait to get home to celebrate in Fairbanks and Anchorage this weekend.

It is not just Veterans Day that is approaching in Alaska. This month we are also celebrating Alaska Native Heritage Month, where there is much to celebrate. Almost 20 percent of the population of our great State is Alaska Natives. This is a group of people who, generation after generation, have what I call a special patriotism.

What do I mean by that? Well, Alaska Natives serve at higher rates in the military—just like the lower 48. Native Americans have higher rates in the military than any other ethnic group in the country. This has been going on for generations—World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, Iraq, and Afghanistan. When you think about it, it is special.

Let's face it. In the forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies, even sometimes, unfortunately, today, the Federal Government has not always treated Alaska Natives well. Yet, generation after generation, they go off to the front to fight for this country. It is truly a special kind of patriotism and a unique tribute to the Alaska Native heritage we are supporting and celebrating this month.

I thought it was fitting today to name as our Alaskan of the Week—to make it a collective tribute for all Alaska Natives who have served their country in the military, and it is thousands, to make them collectively the Alaskans of the Week as we look to celebrate Veterans Day.

Mr. President, here is a little bit of history. I know you know this, but a

lot of Americans don't. During World War II, Alaska was the only State in the Union to be invaded and occupied by the Japanese, so we had big military battles in the Aleutian Island chain of Alaska to throw off the invaders of our American territory. Thousands of Alaska Natives volunteered to protect their homeland and to defend their country overseas. Across the State, whether they were in the Alaska Territorial Guard, warriors overseas, code talkers who served with the Marines and others—they were as old as 80 and as young as 12.

This is a great story. It shows the warrior ethic. Alaska Native women, after the outbreak of World War II, originally enrolled in the Alaska Territorial Guard before they realized that women weren't allowed to enroll. In fact, the best sharpshooter in Alaska's Territorial Guard was a woman named Laura Beltz Wright of Haycock, AK.

Here is how the late, great Jerome Trigg—an Alaska Native and a marine—put it in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam war, when he was testifying in front of the U.S. Congress on a very important piece of legislation called the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. He was the president of the Arctic Native Brotherhood and, as I mentioned, a proud marine.

In front of a bunch of Senators, he stated as follows:

We have showed our patriotism as proudly as any Americans on earth. We have answered the call of duty with pride in serving [our country]. We answered the call in [World War] II 100 percent. Every man in every village—old and young—volunteered with the Alaska National Guard.

Remember, this was in 1968 that he was testifying. Then he said:

I have never heard of an Alaska Native burning the draft card or burning our nation's flag.

We are patriots. That service, as I mentioned, didn't end after World War II. Alaska Natives have served in every conflict—the Korean war and in droves during the Vietnam war.

I was honored to be in Southeast Alaska this past summer in a Native village called Hoonah. It is a beautiful place. There was a documentary I saw recently. It documented the classes in 1968 and 1969 in that small Native village in a film called "Hunting and War-time." It was about how almost every single male high school student in Hoonah—every one—went to go fight in Vietnam. That is incredible. It is special patriotism.

Let me tell you a quick, more up-to-date story. We had the Secretary of Interior, Ryan Zinke—a combat vet, a Navy SEAL, a heroic man himself—come to Alaska this summer. I asked him to meet with a bunch of Alaska Native veterans, particularly our Vietnam veterans, who had an issue that the Department of Interior has been working on for years. I wanted him to hear about it firsthand.

It was a very touching meeting. Some in the room talked about what it

was like to be in their villages—places they had never left—when they were 17 and 18 and 19. Then, a few days later, they were in a steamy jungle, thousands and thousands of miles away, in Vietnam. Some talked about what it was like coming back and not feeling that they had the support of their country, others talked about the difficulty of readjusting to life back in Alaska after their service in Vietnam and some of the discrimination they received when they came back home, but even though they went through this hardship, even though they went through some of these very difficult times in the late sixties and early seventies, not one of them said they had made a mistake in serving their country. They were proud, patriotic warriors, and to this day that is what they are.

Secretary Zinke said, after he left that meeting, he began it as their Secretary of Interior, and he left as a brother in arms.

I am so honored to be able to serve these great Alaskans and to celebrate them as our Alaskans of the Week, just like I know everybody in America is going to be proud to go home and celebrate with their veterans.

Once again, for our Alaska Native veterans, thank you for all you have done for our country, and thank you for being our Alaskans of the Week.

ENERGY

Mr. President, I just want to come down to the floor and say a few words about a debate that has been going on in the Congress right now, and that involves the importance of more energy for the United States.

We had a hearing last week on the possibility of opening a very small portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge called the 1002 area—you see it here in the picture—which would be a win-win-win for the United States. It would help create jobs, it would grow the economy, it would increase energy security, and it would also help protect the global environment and strengthen our Nation's national security. These are the two issues I want to touch on this afternoon.

We have the highest environmental standards regarding responsible resource development anywhere in the world. I was actually in charge of these standards as Alaska's commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources. I could tell you, whether it was no impact exploration—what we call that in Alaska—or specific requirements relating to our incredible species, like polar bear or caribou or mandating the best available technology, we have an over 50-year record of responsible resource development in our State.

Let me just give you one example, what we call no impact exploration. On the North Slope of Alaska, we only allow for exploration activities during the winter months. So what does that mean? Companies actually create ice roads and ice pads, where they drive along the tundra with equipment and

with drill rigs to go explore all on ice. They do that for about 4 months during the winter, then they leave. When the spring comes, there is literally zero impact on the tundra—zero impact.

Yet some of my colleagues, particularly my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, have been coming down here for weeks talking about issues with regard to Alaska and the environment and energy. With all due respect, they are using talking points that are about 40 years old.

When we had the hearing recently, the ranking member of the ENR Committee said nothing has changed. Well, everything has changed—the technology, the high standards. The only thing that has not changed are some of the talking points the other side has been using for the last 40 years.

Let me just give you one example. On the bill The Energy and Natural Resources Committee recently put up with regard to exploration in the 1002 area—this is all of ANWR, I believe about the size of Wyoming. This is the wilderness area of ANWR. This is the 1002 area, the coastal area of ANWR that was set aside by Congress to look at the possibility of exploring a very resource-rich area of the country. This red dot—you can barely see it—is a surface area of 2,000 acres—2,000 acres. That is what the bill would say. It would limit development of this area to 2,000 acres.

For a little perspective, Dulles airport is 12,000 acres. This would be about 10 percent of Dulles airport. That is it. That is the surface footprint. Yet my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have been coming out and talking about millions and millions of acres, so it is important that we push back.

Here is the big issue for those in Congress who want to continually shut down resource development in Alaska that they never acknowledge: When you disallow investment in Alaska, which has the highest standards in the world on the environment, you don't end up protecting the environment. You just drive capital investment, exploration, and development activities to jurisdictions in the world with little to no environmental protection—countries like Nigeria, Venezuela, Iran, Russia, many of which are our geopolitical foes.

In conclusion, what we are looking to do on the Senate floor with regard to producing more energy for this country is going to help with regard to jobs, it is going to help with regard to energy security, it is going to help with regard to national security, and, yes, it is going to help with regard to protecting the global environment because we have the highest standards in the world, and we do it right in Alaska.

If we are not doing it here, there will be activities in other countries, other jurisdictions where they don't care about the environment the way we do. So we need to move forward on this important element of the energy and natural resource bill that was introduced

today in the committee. I encourage all of my colleagues to support that bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I was listening carefully to the remarks of my friend from Alaska, and I am very much supportive of the effort to open up this small footprint in the Alaskan wilderness. It struck me that my friend from Alaska is right on point when he said the only talking points that haven't changed are the ones on the other side from 40 years ago. The advances in technology are truly impressive, and the opportunity not only for Alaska but for America to realize these natural resources is something very important to the country. I thank my friend for pointing that out.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 373, 374, 375, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 440, 441, 442, 459, and 460.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Robert M. Duncan, Jr., of Kentucky, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky for the term of four years; Charles E. Peeler, of Georgia, to be United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia for the term of four years; Bryan D. Schroder, of Alaska, to be United States Attorney for the District of Alaska for the term of four years; Scott C. Blader, of Wisconsin, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin for the term of four years; John R. Lausch, Jr., of Illinois, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois for the term of four years; J. Douglas Overbey, of Tennessee, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Tennessee for the term of four years; Mark A. Klaassen, of Wyoming, to be United States Attorney for the District of Wyoming for the term of four years; William C. Lamar, of Mississippi, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi for the term of four years; John F. Bash, of Texas, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of Texas for the term of four years; Erin Angela Nealy Cox, of Texas, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Texas for the term of four years; R. Andrew Murray, of North Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina for the term of four years; Matthew G. T. Martin, of North Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina for the term of four years; and

Christina E. Nolan, of Vermont, to be United States Attorney for the District of Vermont for the term of four years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Duncan, Peeler, Schroder, Blader, Lausch, Overbey, Klaassen, Lamar, Bash, Nealy Cox, Murray, Martin, and Nolan nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 412.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Peter Hoekstra, of Michigan, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Hoekstra nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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