



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2017

No. 56

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, we sing of Your steadfast love and proclaim Your faithfulness to all generations. Make us one Nation, truly wise, with righteousness exalting us in due season.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to walk in the light of Your countenance. Abide with them so that Your wisdom will influence each decision they make as You restrain them from speaking in haste. Keep them from evil so that they will not be brought to grief, enabling them to avoid the pitfalls that lead to ruin. May they put country before self, people before politics, and patriotism before partisanship. Empower them to glorify You in all they say and do.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

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

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 30, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. HELLER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

HONORING OFFICER NICK RODMAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to begin this morning by paying tribute to a fallen hero. Yesterday, Officer Nick Rodman of the Louisville Metro Police Department passed away after a crash in west Louisville on Tuesday night.

Officer Rodman had served in the department for 3 years, where he followed in a strong family tradition of law enforcement. In his life, he showed compassion and dedication, which are among the best virtues of public service.

According to LMPD Chief Steve Conrad, Officer Rodman is the second officer in the department's history to be killed in the line of duty.

Officer Rodman's tragic death reminds us of the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe to all of the courageous men and women like him who daily put themselves into harm's way to defend our communities. They deserve our utmost respect.

This morning, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in expressing our deepest sympathy to Officer Rodman's family, friends, and fellow officers. They will all be in our prayers.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, the Sen-

ate will soon act to prevent workers from being forced into risky government-run savings plans. Then we will turn our attention to an additional opportunity to protect the American people from Executive overreach with another resolution under the Congressional Review Act.

On its way out the door, the Obama administration issued a regulation that prohibited States from allocating certain health preventative-care funds in a way that best serves local communities. It substituted Washington's judgment for the needs of real people, controlling Americans' access to healthcare services while hurting the community health centers that so many Americans—especially women—depend upon. This regulation is an unnecessary restriction on States that know their residents' own needs a lot better than the Federal Government.

Fortunately, by sending the CRA resolution before us to the President's desk, we can once again return power back to the people, and we will do so without decreasing funding for women's healthcare by a single penny.

I would like to recognize my colleague, Senator JONI ERNST, who introduced the Senate companion to the House resolution we will vote on, for her leadership on this important issue. I look forward to supporting it later today.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, many Members came to the floor yesterday to debate the Gorsuch nomination. We will have all of next week to continue the debate. I encourage my colleagues to continue discussing this important nomination.

Two months ago today, before Neil Gorsuch had even been nominated, I spoke on the Senate floor about the rhetoric we could expect to hear from the other side after the President's nominee was announced.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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I predicted then that we would see many on the left “[try] to paint whomever is actually nominated in apocalyptic terms.” It “doesn’t matter who this Republican President nominates,” I said then. It “doesn’t matter who any Republican President nominates, really,” I continued. No matter the nominee, I said back before we had the nominee, “we can expect to hear a lot of end-times rhetoric from the left . . . [and] [i]n fact, we already have.”

I was alluding then to the fact that, sight unseen, we had already begun hearing from those on the far left who vowed to oppose anyone—anyone the President nominated. The Democratic leader even joined in, saying he would oppose anyone from the President’s list of candidates and would “fight it tooth-and-nail, as long as we have to” in order to keep Justice Scalia’s seat open, even for the entirety of the President’s term.

Remember, that was before Judge Gorsuch was even selected, before we knew his credentials, before we had heard from the current and former colleagues of his, before we had examined his judicial record, and well before his hearing before the Judiciary Committee.

Our friends across the aisle made it clear then that their opposition to this nominee would have nothing to do with the nominee himself. In fact, I said we could expect to hear a number of convoluted excuses as to why they wouldn’t support the President’s yet-to-be named nominee—excuses that would amount to little more than their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election.

Sure enough, that is just what we have seen over the past few weeks. They are opposing this well-qualified nominee despite his impressive credentials, bipartisan support, and excellent testimony before the committee.

Judge Neil Gorsuch is such an outstanding candidate, so noncontroversial, so well-esteemed by people across the political spectrum that Democrats have been forced to talk about pretty much anything: President Trump, think tanks, you name it—anything but the nominee himself.

Yesterday’s comments by the Democratic leader are a good example. He gave a lengthy speech about why he wouldn’t support Judge Gorsuch, but when you boil it down, his remarks had little to do with Judge Gorsuch at all.

Essentially, he concluded that because Judge Gorsuch had earned the praise of legal groups like the Federalist Society, Democrats should not support him. By the way, all current sitting Justices have participated in events with this same organization. Let me say that again: All current sitting Supreme Court Justices have participated in Federalist Society activities. That includes Justices who were nominated by Democratic Presidents, including President Clinton and President Obama.

So, yes, Judge Gorsuch has received high praise from a number of conserv-

atives—he certainly has—just as he has earned the support of centrists and leftists as well.

As I have pointed out on several occasions, many long-time Democrats you might not expect have even complimented Judge Gorsuch—people like President Obama’s former Acting Solicitor General Neal Katyal, President Obama’s legal mentor, Professor Laurence Tribe, President Carter’s district court appointee, Judge John Kane, President Clinton’s appointee to the Tenth Circuit and former chief judge of that court, Judge Robert Henry, and liberal Harvard Law Professor Noah Feldman, and so many more.

Judge Gorsuch has such a proven record of judicial independence and impartiality that people from the left to the right and everywhere in between have voiced their confidence in his fitness to serve on the High Court. That would explain why the American Bar Association—which, according to the Democratic leader and former Democratic Judiciary chairman, is the “gold standard” for evaluating judges—gave Gorsuch its highest rating possible: unanimously “well qualified.”

So let’s be clear. The support for Judge Gorsuch is anything but one-sided.

The Democratic leader also noted his concerns yesterday about the process by which we arrived at this point. As we all know, this Supreme Court nominee process has been historically transparent. Here is what I mean. Months and months ago, then-Presidential Candidate Trump took the unprecedented action of compiling a list of potential nominees he would consider nominating to the Supreme Court. These potential nominees were made public for the American people, including every Senator, to review.

Before making his selection, now-President Trump’s White House consulted on a bipartisan basis with each and every Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, as well as numerous other Senators. The President followed through with his pledge, selecting from that public list Judge Neil Gorsuch of Colorado, who we can all agree is well qualified to serve on the Supreme Court and whom the Senate confirmed to his current position without a single vote in opposition.

Since being nominated, Judge Gorsuch has continued this transparent process by meeting face-to-face with nearly 80 Senators—from both parties, obviously.

So you see, this process has been as straightforward and bipartisan as possible from the very beginning—before we even knew that the President would, indeed, be making this nomination.

Only in the upside-down world of my Democratic colleagues is telling the entire world months before one is even elected President the list of people he would choose from, if he became the President, a “secret” process. I can’t think of anything less secret than put-

ting out that list in the middle of a hotly contested Presidential election process.

So, look, it is time to move beyond this hollow rhetoric and get back to the serious business of governing. Confirming Judge Gorsuch would mark a significant step in that direction. He has proved himself a worthy successor to the Supreme Court. He has earned high acclaim along the way from various news publications and lawyers and judges and clerks who represent all walks of life and all political ideologies.

People like David Frederick, a long-time Democrat and board member of the left-leaning American Constitution Society, may have summed it up best in a recent Washington Post op-ed. Here is what he said: “The Senate should confirm [Gorsuch] because there is no principled reason to vote no.”

No principled reason to oppose him, none.

As this American Constitution Society member says, there is not one single principled reason to oppose Judge Gorsuch, so it makes sense that Democrats can’t come up with a single substantive reason to oppose him either.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as we prepare to consider the nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court, I would like to take a moment this morning to discuss the false choice Republicans are presenting about his confirmation.

The Republican majority wants everyone to believe that by the end of next week one of two things must happen: Either Judge Gorsuch will pass with 60 votes or they must exercise the nuclear option and change the rules of the Senate so that he can pass on a simple majority vote. As Republicans tell it, one inexorably follows from the other. They are talking about next week as if they have no choice but to go nuclear if Judge Gorsuch doesn’t earn 60 votes.

It is absolutely false. It is complete hokum. This is not some inevitable showdown. The Republicans control this body. They can choose to go nuclear or not. The ball is entirely in

their court. In the past, when a President's nominee didn't get enough support for confirmation for whatever reason, the President just picked another nominee. If it comes to that, that is what this President should do. If Judge Gorsuch fails to garner 60 votes, the answer isn't to irrevocably change the rules of the Senate, the answer is to change the nominee. It is not Gorsuch or bust.

The Republicans are playing a game of unnecessary and dangerous brinksmanship. If it comes to a rules change—and I sincerely hope that it does not for the sake of the grand traditions of this body, for the sake of the advice and consent clause of the Constitution, but if it does—it will be squarely on the shoulders of the Republican Party and the Republican leader—a Republican Party that broke 230 years of precedent when it refused to even consider President Obama's nominee, Chief Judge Merrick Garland, with almost a year left in Obama's Presidency. There was no vote—not even a hearing—and Republicans accuse Democrats of the first partisan filibuster of a Supreme Court nominee? What Republicans did to Merrick Garland was worse than a filibuster. They didn't even grant him the basic courtesy of a filibuster. Merrick Garland actually was a consensus nominee with Republican buy-in for the Supreme Court.

Second, President Trump totally dispatched with the notion of "advice and consent" by pledging, before he was even elected, to nominate a Supreme Court Justice off of a preapproved list of hard-right, conservative judges put together by the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society. Contrast that with Bill Clinton, who sought and took the advice of the Republican Judiciary Chairman, ORRIN HATCH, in nominating Justices Ginsburg and Breyer. He did not pick his first choice, Bruce Babbitt, because ORRIN HATCH said that would be a bad idea and could not bring the kind of unity we needed. How about Democratic President Obama, who took, again, the advice of ORRIN HATCH when he picked Merrick Garland. There was bipartisan consultation. That is why the process worked. There is none now. The Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society are not simply mainstream organizations, as every Republican knows, but they are organizations on the hard-right of the Republican side who often threaten Republicans if they don't vote the right way—the far-right way. So we are not talking about "advise and consent." We are talking about something that was done without any consultation and a political move by a President to shore up his base with the hard rightwing.

What President Trump did was worse than simply ignoring article II of the Constitution. President Trump actively sought the advice and consent of rightwing special interest groups instead of the Senate. That is another

Supreme Court-related precedent that the Republicans discard. Because President Trump made that choice, now Republicans are saying they have no choice but to change the rules? It is illogical and self-serving. For all the handwringing of my friends on the other side of the aisle that they cannot imagine Democrats voting against Judge Gorsuch, I would like to remind them that only three of the current Senators on the Republican side voted for either of President Obama's confirmed nominees. Let me repeat that. Only three of the current Senators on the Republican side voted for either one of President Obama's confirmed nominees. Most voted for neither, and every single one of them lined up to conduct an "audacious" partisan blockade of Merrick Garland.

It is true the norms and precedents and traditions have been eroded by both sides. We changed the rules for lower court nominees in 2013 after years of unprecedented obstruction by Republicans on routine circuit and district court judges. Still, I am on the record as regretting that decision. But this is in an order of magnitude much greater than that. This is the Supreme Court. This is the Court that is the final arbiter of U.S. law and the Constitution. We Democrats have serious principled concerns about Judge Gorsuch, his record, his long history of ties to ultraconservative interests, and his almost instinctive tendency to side with special power interests over average citizens. We have principled concerns about how Judge Gorsuch was groomed by hard-right conservative billionaires, like Mr. Phillip Anschutz. We have principled concerns about how Judge Gorsuch was selected off a preapproved list of conservative judges made by organizations who spent three decades campaigning to move our judiciary far to the right.

Judge Gorsuch had a chance to answer these concerns in his hearings. We were all waiting and hoping, but our questions were met with practiced evasions. He couldn't even answer whether *Brown v. Board* was decided correctly.

Instead of considering the possibility of another nominee should Judge Gorsuch fail to reach 60 votes, our Republican friends are threatening to press the big red button for him.

Again, the Republicans are creating a false choice—Judge Gorsuch or the nuclear option—in an attempt to avoid the blame if they change the rules, and it just doesn't wash. The Republicans control this body. They are in the driver's seat, and they are the only reason that we are here today. They held this seat open for over 1 year so that this President could install someone hand-picked by the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society—a lifetime appointment for this President, whose campaign is under investigation by the FBI for potential ties to Russia.

I just repeat to my Republican colleagues: You don't need to change the rules if Judge Gorsuch doesn't get 60

votes. You are not required to do so. You just need to change the nominee and do some bipartisan consultation as Presidents of both parties have done in the past.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Now on the ACA, Mr. President. The HHS Secretary appeared before the House appropriators yesterday and testified that, under his direction, the Department of Health and Human Services may try to undermine our Nation's healthcare system in several ways. Specifically, he hinted that he might make it easier for insurers to offer coverage without certain essential benefits and refused to say if he would continue certain programs that stabilize our healthcare markets. That is in line with steps this administration has already taken to undermine the healthcare law, such as when they discontinued the public advertising campaigns that encouraged people to sign up for insurance. All of these things harm our Nation's healthcare system, and they should be ceased immediately.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

DISAPPROVING A RULE SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 67, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 67) disapproving the rule submitted by the Department of Labor relating to savings arrangements established by qualified State political subdivisions for non-governmental employees.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, all time is expired.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

Mr. RUBIO. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON).

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

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 99 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Shelby
Cornyn	Kennedy	Strange
Cotton	Lankford	Sullivan
Crapo	Lee	Thune
Cruz	McCain	Tillis
Daines	McConnell	Toomey
Enzi	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Murkowski	Young
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—49

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

NOT VOTING—1

Isakson

The joint resolution (H.J. Res. 67) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to H.J. Res. 43.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 43, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the final rule submitted by Secretary of Health and Human Services relating to compliance with title X requirements by project recipients in selecting sub-recipients.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 100 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Strange
Cotton	Kennedy	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—50

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

The VICE PRESIDENT. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 50. The Senate being equally divided, the Vice President votes in the affirmative, and the motion to proceed is agreed to.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I yield back all Republican time in relation to H.J. Res. 43.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The time is yielded back.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, this vote had to be held open in order to allow time for Vice President PENCE to come down and break a tie.

My colleagues and I came to the floor weeks ago to make clear that this harmful legislation should not come to the floor. Republicans didn't listen to us, and they didn't listen to women across the country who made it clear that restricting women's access to the full range of reproductive care is unacceptable. We are not going to give up. We are going to keep holding them accountable, and we are going to keep making sure that women's voices are heard.

I want to thank all of my colleagues who have already come and will continue to come to the floor today to stand against this shameful, dangerous resolution.

The march that was held after President Trump was inaugurated was one of the most inspiring events I have ever had the opportunity to be a part of. Millions of people—men and women—marched in Seattle in my home State,

here in Washington, DC, and in cities and towns in between and all across the world. They carried signs, they chanted, and they made it absolutely clear that when it comes to women's rights and healthcare, people across the country do not want to go backward. Since then, millions of people have continued to speak up and stand up. And last Friday, by the way, was no different.

Republicans have been threatening for years now to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, but it took just a few weeks for families nationwide to stand up and fight back and shut down a deeply harmful plan that would have taken healthcare away from tens of millions of people, spiked our premiums, targeted seniors for higher costs, and cut off access to critical services at Planned Parenthood.

I was so inspired by the countless people who bravely shared their personal stories about their health and their loved ones in order to make clear just how damaging—and even deadly—TrumpCare would have been. I am proud to say that women led the way and made it known, in no uncertain terms, that Republicans would be held fully accountable for the disastrous TrumpCare legislation.

And try as they might, last week, Republicans couldn't ignore them. This was an absolute, undeniable victory for women and families in this country.

But while TrumpCare was dealt a significant blow last week, it is clear the terrible ideas that underpin it live on now, today, in this Republican Congress. It is unprecedented that we are here, with the Vice President breaking a tie vote on an attack on women's health across this country.

We are here today, once again, because President Trump and Republicans in Congress are not getting the message. Today, continuing on their extreme, anti-women agenda, Senate Republicans are rushing now to roll back a rule that protects family planning providers from being discriminated against and denied Federal funding.

Let me explain a little bit about what family planning providers mean to our communities. Those providers that are part of the title X program—which has, by the way, bipartisan history—deliver critical healthcare services nationwide, and they are especially needed in our rural and our frontier areas.

In 2015 alone, title X provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services—services like Pap tests and breast exams and birth control and HIV testing—to more than 4 million low-income women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers. In my home State of Washington, tens of thousands of patients are able to receive care at these centers each year, and they often have nowhere else to turn for their healthcare. In fact, 40 percent of women who receive care at health centers funded by title X consider it to be their only source of healthcare.

So taking resources away from these providers, which this resolution would do, would be cruel, and it would have the greatest impact on women and families who need it the most. It would undo a valuable effort by the Obama administration to ensure that healthcare providers are evaluated for Federal funding based on their ability to provide the services in question, not on ideology. In doing so, this resolution would make it even easier for States led by extreme politicians to deny family planning providers Federal dollars, not because of the quality of care that they get or provide or their value to the communities they serve, but based on whether the politicians in charge—the politicians in charge—agree that women should be able to exercise their constitutionally protected right to reproductive healthcare.

This is wrong. It is dangerous, and we cannot let this stand.

If Republicans think that millions of people who stood up last week have suddenly stopped paying attention, they are sorely mistaken. And if they think that Senate Democrats are not going to fight back, they have another thing coming. They can expect every single Democrat in the Senate—and I hope some Republicans who are concerned about losing healthcare providers in their States—to fight back against this resolution with everything they have.

This vote won by a tie vote, and the Vice President was the tie vote. It will take one Republican this afternoon on the final vote to say yes for the women in their State and States' rights to say no. That is all we are asking for the women of this country.

While I have the floor, I want to say we should all be aware there is more headed our way. In a matter of weeks, we all know that government funding is going to run out. Everybody understands this. I know that since they didn't get their way last week and they are pushing this resolution so hard today to the point where they bring the Vice President to break a tie, it is a safe bet that extreme Republicans are going to try to attach riders that try to take away Planned Parenthood funding in the spending bill for the rest of this year.

So I want to be very clear from the outset: That is a complete nonstarter. We have been here before. We have shown that we can win, and we are going to fight these efforts every step of the way.

So I urge people across the country to let their Senators know that this is not acceptable. Stand up for women and families and for their rights to take care of their own reproductive healthcare at the facility that provides for them in their own communities.

I urge my colleagues: Don't make the same mistake again. End the damaging political attacks on women, and stand with millions of women and men and families. They need us.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULIVAN). The clerk will report the joint resolution.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 43) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the final rule submitted by Secretary of Health and Human Services relating to compliance with title X requirements by project recipients in selecting subrecipients.

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

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I rise today in a near empty Chamber. Indeed, there is no Republican colleague here today. Our Republican colleagues have yielded back all their time on this resolution, and the reason they have yielded back all their time is that they apparently have no interest in appearing here and talking about a resolution of disapproval of a rule that is vital to ensuring that women have access to the family planning provider of their choice. It is really that simple. Defending Planned Parenthood is what we have done on this side. Defunding Planned Parenthood has been the interest on the other side of the aisle.

They have also taken an inordinate interest in reinstating gender ratings in health insurance and are now damaging title X networks through this resolution. They have demonstrated an unmitigated desire to cut women's access to healthcare in order, apparently, to win political points. But their actions today show that the politics of this issue and, most importantly, the people of America are not on their side. Title X is a critical program delivering important family planning and preventive health services in underserved areas of our great Nation. In 2015 alone, title X programs provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services. We are talking about Pap tests, breast exams, birth control, and HIV testing for more than 4 million low-income women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers across the country. For 40 percent of women, their visit to a family planning health center is the only healthcare they receive annually. Think of that number for a moment. Forty percent of those women have no access elsewhere except at these healthcare centers.

By overriding this regulation, Republicans will allow States and title X grantees to pick and choose who provides these services based on arbitrary criteria that have nothing to do with the quality of services patients will receive. It is no wonder that none of

them is here to talk about it. Now, if they were here—and they have said so in public—they might argue that they support this resolution because they oppose abortion. So let me be clear. This regulation is about access to family planning services, not about access to abortion.

I know many of my colleagues disagree with me that abortion should be safe and legal. They have shown that disagreement by their repeated attempts to undermine *Roe v. Wade* and make it harder for women to access constitutionally protected healthcare.

While they may disagree, it is still the law of the land. In any event, this regulation is not about access to abortion. This regulation is about ensuring that States cannot discriminate against qualified providers that are an essential part of a safety net that serves women who have no place else to go. Those providers are willing to provide necessary, culturally sensitive care to individuals who otherwise would simply be without access to that care.

Title X funding does not go to abortion services. It goes to provide much needed family planning services. There is so much that the title X program does that I believe my colleagues would agree is absolutely vital to the health of women. I know we agree on wanting to reduce teen and unintended pregnancies. Without the contraceptive care provided by title X sites, the teen pregnancy rate would be 30 percent higher and the unintended pregnancy rate would have been 33 percent higher. We should agree on that point.

We should also agree on wanting to find ways to save money in the healthcare system. In 2010, health services provided at title X centers resulted in net savings of \$7 billion in Federal and State funds. Those savings are indicative of the fact that every dollar invested in publicly funded family planning saves taxpayers \$7. That is a great deal for the taxpayers of our Nation. That is a humane and profoundly significant deal for the women whose lives are bettered. We should all agree that preventing disease and saving health and lives is not only about dollars and cents. It is about the future of our Nation.

Title X began as a bipartisan program to support family planning services over 40 years ago, an era that was less divisive and when this Chamber was less divided. I urge my colleagues to recognize the importance of ensuring these services. States cannot restrict an already overburdened network of safety net providers.

Family planning services are provided through State, county, and local health departments, as well as hospitals, family planning councils, Planned Parenthood, and federally qualified health centers. Providers that focus on reproductive health comprise 72 percent of all title X-supported sites, and they are critical to delivering high-quality family planning services.

They are particularly able to offer the full range of contraceptive methods and to help women start and effectively use the methods that will work best for them individually.

There is simply no excess capacity in that safety net system now. For Republicans to allow States to remove providers from the networks based on arbitrary criteria is simply unwise and, in fact, unconscionable. The foundation of the program's success is the long-standing intent that its provider network be designed by the communities it serves to help patients have access to trusted, highly qualified, family planning providers.

Just a few weeks ago, I met with some providers and volunteers from Planned Parenthood of North Hartford. I was deeply impressed with their dedication, their skill, and their humanity. In a high-need, low-income community like North Hartford, access to primary care is limited. Young men and women who come to this clinic have chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, and headaches. Left untreated, they have to be addressed at emergency rooms at much higher costs.

The clinicians recognized that there was an additional need for health services and for other providers in the community to meet them, but they were currently unable to do so. So they decided to initiate full-scope primary care services in Hartford, in addition to the comprehensive women's health services, so as to fully serve the men and women who choose to come to Planned Parenthood of North Hartford for their reproductive health and family planning care needs.

Patients there are seen for acute conditions and chronic problems, physicals, preventive vaccinations, as well as services to quit smoking. If there were ever a cost-effective program anywhere in the United States, then the North Hartford project is a sterling example.

Just to give one example, recently, a young woman came to this Planned Parenthood for birth control. She was found to have high blood pressure. So her provider started her on blood pressure medication and counseled her on dietary and lifestyle changes. She started exercising regularly and improved her diet, lost 30 pounds, and no longer needed the medication to control her blood pressure. Is that kind of treatment cost effective? The facts speak for themselves—the real facts—giving patients a choice, giving them a chance, giving them the counseling and care they need to save dollars and save lives.

Community healthcare centers like that in North Hartford simply cannot accommodate all the family planning patients who would lose coverage or funding if title X funds to Planned Parenthood affiliates, like Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, are eliminated. That is a lesson of this Planned Parenthood that is undeniable.

That may well be why our Republican colleagues have yielded back all of their time.

The real facts are undeniable. The real need is irrefutable. My colleagues and I are here today not because we are asking for more money or a change in how the funding program is used. We are standing up and speaking out against shortsighted efforts that would restrict access to family planning services for some of the most vulnerable patients—many of them voiceless in these halls; faceless, otherwise—in areas that are least able to absorb this cruel and inhumane change in the rules.

I ask my colleagues to oppose this resolution and to stand strong for women's and men's healthcare across the country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, the Congressional Review Act, or CRA, resolution we are debating today is the latest attack in the unrelenting Republican crusade against funding—or defunding—Planned Parenthood. They have tried everything: passing stand-alone bills, attaching poison pills to must-pass bills, threatening a government shutdown, struggling and failing to pass TrumpCare.

Today, we are debating whether to repeal an administrative action that protects abortion providers, like Planned Parenthood, that receive title X funding. Just a little while ago, Vice President PENCE was here to break a tie because Republicans in Congress couldn't get enough men to tell women what to do with their bodies.

For nearly 50 years, title X funding has helped low-income Americans access vital health services like birth control and cervical and breast cancer screenings. Title X funding has been a healthcare lifeline for millions of women in all parts of the country. But if this Congressional Review Act resolution is passed, Planned Parenthood clinics across our country can be prohibited from receiving title X funding, even though it is currently illegal to use Federal dollars to fund abortion services. Let me repeat: No Federal dollars can be used to fund abortion services, period.

I understand the strong anti-abortion belief held by some of my colleagues, but I don't understand why this translates into relentless attacks on an organization that uses no Federal funds for abortion. Planned Parenthood uses Federal funds to provide vital healthcare services to millions of people, mainly women. Yes, I acknowledge there are men who go to Planned Parenthood also.

In 2014, Planned Parenthood provided over 600,000 cancer screenings and over 4 million tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections. But this is a factual argument, and we have learned over the years that many of my Republican colleagues simply will

not listen to facts when it comes to Planned Parenthood.

Let me share a few stories from my constituents about the transformational impact Planned Parenthood has had in their lives. Perhaps after hearing these stories, we will think twice about attacking the vital services Planned Parenthood provides all across our country.

Hawaii is home to a large military community. Taylor from Honolulu is a military spouse who wrote to me that she and other military dependents turn to Planned Parenthood because of long wait times and confidentiality concerns within the military healthcare system. Taylor wrote:

My friend was experiencing severe cramping and pelvic pain to the point where she had to utilize a sick day. When she visited the medical services provider through the military, they scheduled her for an appointment for four days out. She was sent home with no pelvic exam or ultrasound. The pain was so severe that she went to Planned Parenthood because she could not wait to see her primary care physician. They immediately performed a pelvic exam, an ultrasound, and an STD screening. She was diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease. Annually, 100,000 women become infertile as a result of PID, so receiving quick treatment for this condition is critical.

Taylor continued:

Defunding Planned Parenthood means that individuals who experience common reproductive healthcare issues like this would have lessened chances of receiving quick, necessary and comprehensive medical care. Had it not been for Planned Parenthood, she could have lost her ability to have children in the future.

Do my Republican colleagues want to deprive military spouses of vital healthcare services?

I also heard from Tiffany, a student at the University of Hawaii, who went to a Planned Parenthood clinic after a pregnancy scare. She wrote:

I was afraid because I knew that having a child was beyond my means. I was just starting out my university years at 21; and I have extremely conservative parents who would have surely not approved of my actions. I knew how difficult having a child was for someone in my situation, especially while going to school, and risking sacrificing my future, my key to stepping out of poverty, was not an option. I was unemployed and had Medicaid at the time as well, and Planned Parenthood accommodated my financial situation.

Thankfully, I discovered I was not pregnant, and Planned Parenthood took the extra time to sit me through my options without any judgment whatsoever. I was also prescribed birth control, offered an STD test, and was given Plan B in the event I ever missed my birth control. The sense of relief, reassurance, and care I felt walking out of the clinic left me with a very strong impression, especially after so many days of anxiety.

Do my Republican colleagues want to take away resources that help thousands of young women like Tiffany fulfill their full potential?

These stories aren't rhetoric. They aren't hyperbole. They aren't spin. They are powerful reminders that each day, women turn to Planned Parenthood in a time of need.

Some of my colleagues have argued that all these thousands of women who go to Planned Parenthood clinics can go to community health centers if Planned Parenthood clinics have to close because of defunding.

This morning, I met with over a dozen leaders from Hawaii's community health centers. So I asked them, could you take in all of Planned Parenthood's patients? Their answer was an unequivocal no. Our communities cannot afford to lose Planned Parenthood clinics.

A vote for this CRA is a vote to deprive women like Taylor and Tiffany and millions more throughout our country of these important healthcare services. Let's stop these attacks on women's healthcare. I urge my colleagues to vote no.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I come to the floor to join my colleagues in opposing this misguided measure, which would leave millions of women and families with fewer healthcare options, and it would drastically decrease women's access to basic primary and preventive health services, including lifesaving cancer screenings and HIV testing.

Make no mistake about it, as my colleagues have said, the primary target of this legislation is Planned Parenthood. For years now, we have seen Republican leaders in Congress attempt to defund this essential healthcare provider, which serves millions of women nationwide, including nearly 12,000 women in New Hampshire, most of them with incomes below or near the poverty line. The sad irony of these attacks is that study after study has shown that restricting access to birth control and other family planning methods actually increases the number of abortions.

The authoritative Guttmacher Institute estimates that in 2014 alone, contraceptive care provided under title X helped women avert more than 900,000 unintended pregnancies and 326,000 abortions. Without contraceptive care provided by title X funded centers, the U.S. rates of unintended pregnancy and preventable abortions would be an estimated 33 percent higher, and the teen pregnancy rate would be 30 percent higher.

At the end of the Obama administration, teen pregnancy in the United States was at its lowest point since we have been keeping track. As Senator HIRONO said, these services don't provide abortions. Federal law expressly forbids the use of Federal funds to pay for abortion, except to save the life of the mother.

So the real issue here is not about abortion. This is about ensuring that American women have access to the basic healthcare they need, where they want to receive it. This is just a mean-spirited effort to keep women from see-

ing the provider they want to see and getting care at rates they can afford. For 40 percent of women, their visit to a family planning center is the only care they receive annually.

In 2015 alone, title X provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services such as Pap tests, breast exams, birth control, and HIV testing to more than 4 million women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers. Planned Parenthood plays an essentially important role in delivering health services to low-income, uninsured, and vulnerable individuals, including in rural areas.

I am sure that every person in this Chamber has received letters and emails and phone calls from constituents on this issue. They are pleading with us: Don't take away our access to healthcare from Planned Parenthood.

I received a letter from Sandra Sonnichen of Goshen, NH. She writes:

Planned Parenthood was my only affordable source of gynecological healthcare for most of my life. I received good, wise, and thoughtful care. I think it is not extreme to say they saved my life. Abortions were not involved. They—

Meaning Planned Parenthood—remain very important, especially for poor or uninsured women. There are not enough alternate low cost women's clinics available. Not providing birth control services to women who want it is not a good economic or social solution. Don't let it be defunded.

In a follow-up call, Sandra said that without Planned Parenthood, she would not have had any healthcare at all. Because her mother died of breast cancer, Sandra is deeply grateful that she has been able to receive mammograms, thanks to Planned Parenthood.

I also heard from Meredith Murray of Exeter, NH. She says:

Nine years ago I graduated from college and immediately began my journey to become a medical provider. . . . During this time in my life, I was surviving almost entirely on student loans. And I knew that during this time, especially, I needed to ensure that I was doing all I could to prevent pregnancy. . . . With my insurance—an IUD would have cost \$900. That was not possible for me to afford. Then I remembered—Planned Parenthood. . . . I was informed, due to title X funding, my IUD would be completely covered. I continued to use Planned Parenthood services for the next 5 years for my routine screenings while in medical school. The care I received was phenomenal. As I proceeded through my medical training, I strived to be as kind, compassionate, and knowledgeable as those who work Planned Parenthood health centers. I am now a practicing medical provider, married, and still using an IUD because Planned Parenthood offered me that opportunity.

I received this letter from Samantha Fox of Bow, NH. She writes:

In 2007, I was a 19-year-old just barely starting out when I was denied health insurance due to a preexisting condition. Had I been able to access affordable coverage, my preexisting condition, a reproductive system disorder, would have been easily manageable. . . . At that time, I was able to access care through Planned Parenthood, which likely preserved my ability to conceive in the future.

And finally, let me share this message from Robina Parise of Rye, NH. She says:

I started utilizing the services at Planned Parenthood for birth control when I was about 17 years old. . . . Planned Parenthood made sure I was protected and healthy. They gave me access to vital protection and healthcare when I could not get it anywhere else. They regularly called me with reminders to have exams and to pick up my prescription. Planned Parenthood is the reason my husband and I were able to graduate from high school and college. . . . I'm not sure what our lives would be like now without their support.

I don't know. Do the people who are voting for this CRA believe it would be better to have allowed the people whom I just talked about—to prohibit their access to these healthcare services so that their lives would have been disrupted, so they might not have finished college, so we wouldn't have another doctor in the world, so they wouldn't be able to afford healthcare? I hope we will listen to our constituents who have been speaking out in passionate support of Planned Parenthood and other family planning clinics.

This is about respecting women's access to healthcare services, including millions of vulnerable women who have nowhere else to turn for essential care. This is also about respecting women's constitutionally protected right to make our own reproductive choices. We must not allow Congress to strip away investments in family planning clinics by allowing States to discriminate.

Finally, I want to point out that we haven't heard from any of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are voting for this measure about why they think it is so critical. I don't know. Maybe they are not willing to come to the floor and tell my constituents why they should be denied access to healthcare from the provider they want. Well, I am disappointed that we haven't heard from anyone who is willing to stand up and defend this vote. I hope they are going to have to defend it to the American people.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I want to thank my colleagues who are here speaking out against this shameful resolution that is before us today that goes after women's rights and their opportunity to make their own healthcare decisions with their own provider.

I, too, want to echo the comments that were just made. I find it amazing that the Republicans have yielded back all of their time. They are not going to come out here and defend their vote; they are just going to take the vote.

In fact, it seems clear to me that President Trump is clearly focused on attacking women's healthcare—so much so that he sent his women's health adviser, Vice President PENCE, here just moments ago to break a tie on this latest disgusting attack on women's healthcare. It is truly appalling.

Women and men across the country are watching what is happening here today, watching what Republicans are trying to do, and they are paying attention.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Madam President, I wish today's resolution was the only shameful attack on women's health to talk about, but sadly that is not the case. So I do want to take a few minutes at this time to talk about another one that is very critical to women and families—not just today, but actually for years and years to come it will be happening, and that is the Supreme Court.

Last week I announced I would be voting against Judge Neil Gorsuch's nomination to the Supreme Court, and I will oppose a cloture motion ending debate. I did not reach that conclusion lightly. I consider my decisions about whether to support a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court to be among the most important and consequential choices I make as a Senator. But I made it in part because this is not a normal nomination.

This process really began about 12 months ago when Senate Republicans refused to even consider President Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court, Judge Merrick Garland. And because since President Trump entered office, he has shown complete disregard for the law, for our Constitution, for the well-being of families across the country, leaving me unable to trust that he is acting in our Nation's best interest, I am unable to support his choice for the Supreme Court.

In addition to my deep concerns about this process and this administration, I also have strong concerns about this nominee specifically. Today, as Republicans appear to be rushing Judge Gorsuch's nomination through the Judiciary Committee as fast as they can, I want to lay out why putting Judge Gorsuch on the Supreme Court would be an attack on women's health, rights, and opportunity, one that has the potential to undo decades of progress we have made toward making sure women are equally able to participate in and contribute to our country.

The Trump administration has broken almost every one of its promises, but one it has certainly kept is its promise to do everything in its power to turn back the clock on women's health and women's rights. Extreme Republicans in Congress are doing the same and have more, apparently, in store. Right now, we are debating whether to undo a rule that prevents discrimination against family planning providers based on the kinds of services they provide to women. Congressional Republicans are already gearing up to attach riders to the coming budget bills in order to cut off access to critical services at Planned Parenthood for millions of patients in this country. There are similar attempts to undermine women's access to healthcare in cities and States nationwide.

More often than we would like, the Supreme Court is going to be the place

of last resort for protecting women's hard-fought gains. The buck has to stop with the Supreme Court on women's health and rights.

I do not want Judge Neil Gorsuch anywhere near the bench. Time and again, Judge Gorsuch has sided with the extreme rightwing and against the tens of millions of women and men who believe that in this 21st century, women should be able to make their own choices about their own bodies.

Let me give a few examples. When the Tenth Circuit ruled in the case of *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell* that a woman's boss—a woman's boss—could decide whether her insurance would include birth control, Judge Gorsuch didn't just agree, he thought the ruling should have gone further. That alone would be enough for me to oppose this nomination, but unfortunately there is more.

Judge Gorsuch has argued that birth control coverage included in the ACA as an essential part of a woman's healthcare—one that has now benefited 55 million women—is what he calls a “clear burden” on employers that would not long survive.

When it comes to Planned Parenthood, he has already weighed in on the side of defunding our Nation's largest provider of women's healthcare. What was his reasoning? Well, Judge Gorsuch thought that in light of completely discredited sting videos taken by extreme conservatives, women in the State of Utah should have a harder time accessing the care they need. Just this week, the makers of those false videos, by the way, got 15 felony charges. Women deserve independence and objectivity in a Supreme Court Justice, and that is clearly not it.

Attempts to control women's bodies aren't always about reproductive rights. Sure enough, Judge Gorsuch is on the wrong side here as well. He concurred in a ruling against a transgender woman who was denied regular access to hormone therapy while she was in prison. This ruling rejected the idea that under our Constitution, denying healthcare services is cruel and unusual punishment. Think about that. That is not the kind of judgment I want to see on the bench, and I think most families would agree.

I also want to be clear as well about what Judge Gorsuch's nomination could mean for a woman's constitutionally protected right to safe, legal abortion services under the historic ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, which was, by the way, reaffirmed just last summer by the Court. In his nomination hearings, Judge Gorsuch wouldn't give a clear answer on whether he would uphold this ruling which has meant so much to so many women and families over the last four decades.

Judge Gorsuch has donated repeatedly to politicians who are dead-set on interfering with women's constitutionally protected healthcare decisions, and he has even made deeply inaccurate comparisons between abortion and assisted suicide.

I remember the days before *Roe v. Wade* very clearly. I heard and saw firsthand the stories of women faced with truly impossible choices during those times. Women from all across the country have shared deeply personal experiences because they know what it would mean to go backward. I know that millions of women who have already done so much to lead the resistance against this administration and its damaging, divisive agenda are going to fight this nomination as hard as they can. They know the Trump Presidency will be damaging enough for 4 years, but Judge Gorsuch's nomination could roll back progress for women over a lifetime. I am proud to stand with them and do everything I can to make sure they are heard loud and clear here in the Senate, and I oppose Judge Gorsuch's nomination in light of everything it would mean for women now and for generations to come. Next week is when we will vote on that.

Today here in the Senate, we just saw a historic moment. The Senate Republicans put forth a resolution that would allow States to deny funding to providers in their States who provide healthcare services for women—funding that is desperately needed. They got only 50 votes, and those in opposition got 50 votes, so they brought over the Vice President of the United States, and he broke that tie in order for us to be here to debate this resolution now. This vote will now occur, under the order, later this afternoon, and he will be brought back once again to deny women the healthcare choices they deserve to have. It is a sad day for the Senate.

I want my friends, colleagues, and the women who have stood up and have spoken out since the day after the election, marched here in Washington, DC, and across the country, to know that I stand with them. My voice will not be silenced. I will continue to fight back.

I will say one more time that it will take one more Republican on the other side this afternoon—one—to stand up and let their voice be heard and say that women should get access equally in their States for the healthcare they deserve.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I rise to express my strong opposition to H.J. Res. 43, a resolution of disapproval with respect to the title X regulation—a resolution which effectively endorses discriminatory practices toward family planning and safety net providers.

Title X is the Nation's only Federal grant program that is dedicated solely to providing individuals with comprehensive family planning and related

preventive health services. Last year, title X funding made it possible for nearly 4,000 health centers to provide basic primary and preventive healthcare services to over 4 million low-income women and their families. I am talking about critical services, such as Pap tests, cervical cancer screenings, contraception, breast exams, and HIV testing.

In Maryland, there are 55 title X funded health centers that span the State. These include federally qualified health centers, local health departments, Planned Parenthood clinics, and school-based health centers. In fiscal year 2015, Maryland received over \$3.8 million in title X funding and provided health services to over 64,000 patients. These are low-income, underinsured, and uninsured individuals who would otherwise lack access to such basic healthcare.

As many of my colleagues know, Planned Parenthood, a high-quality health provider, has been under constant attack by the Republicans, who want to eliminate the organization's Federal funding. Just last week, the Republicans' Affordable Care Act repeal-and-replace bill threatened to defund Planned Parenthood, which is a trusted healthcare provider, by eliminating clinics' Medicaid reimbursements. This week, Republicans want to roll back protections that were put in place for family planning clinics and allow for discrimination against our Nation's family planning providers.

What I find even more disappointing is that this is a major policy shift for our Nation, and we are using a procedure known as the Congressional Review Act to make that decision. Yet those who support this are not even taking to the floor to defend it. This is outrageous that one would use a procedure to repeal this type of funding and not even be on the floor to defend those actions.

In December of 2016, the Obama administration finalized the regulation before us today to protect family planning providers from such discrimination. The regulation was intended to protect access to care in States that have issued their own regulations and legislation that block family planning providers from receiving title X funds. By overriding this regulation, Republicans will empower States to pick and choose who provides these services, but it will be based on arbitrary criteria that will have nothing to do with the quality of services the patients will receive. Republicans are actively condoning discrimination against providers, which will, ultimately, deny women and their families access to family planning and preventive health services.

It is not just Democrats who are concerned. Multiple healthcare providers have come out against this resolution because discrimination against any healthcare provider is wrong. Let me name just a few of the groups that oppose this action: the American Acad-

emy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. They are all alarmed because they know low-income, underinsured, and uninsured patients will be unable to access needed health services if it passes.

In Maryland, for example, 84 percent of the 64,000-plus patients served with title X funds have incomes at or below 100 percent of the Federal poverty line. That means that they earn \$11,770 a year or less—under \$12,000 a year. How do you expect these families to be able to get their healthcare needs met if this resolution of disapproval is passed? Ninety-four percent of title X patients in Maryland earn less than \$29,425 a year. Overturning this regulation will hurt our most vulnerable communities.

Let's be clear about this. This is not about abortion. There is no Federal funding for abortion. This is about low-income men and women not having access to pregnancy testing, contraceptive services, pelvic exams, high blood pressure and diabetes screenings, STD and HIV/AIDS screenings, infertility services, and health education. It is a war on the poor, and it is a war on access to preventive healthcare.

The American people deserve better from their elected officials. I am committed to fighting these reckless attempts to repeal a reasonable regulation that has been promulgated to prevent discriminatory practices that will harm thousands of low-income women and their families in Maryland and across our Nation.

I urge my colleagues to reject this procedural resolution, which will allow discrimination and deny adequate care to low-income families.

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

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

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, since coming to Washington, I have observed something interesting about Republican politicians. Republicans talk a big game about respecting women, but when it comes time to vote on laws to help real, live, American women, a lot of Republicans turn their backs.

Take PAUL RYAN, Speaker of the House of Representatives. Just a few months ago, Speaker RYAN was adamant that American women deserve respect. "Women," he said, "are to be championed and revered."

"Championed and revered"—so what exactly does championing and revering women mean to Speaker RYAN? Does it mean he will promote policies that make us healthier, that he will help us access basic medical services, that he thinks we can make our own decisions

about our bodies without government interference? No.

Over the past few months, Speaker RYAN has worked overtime on the American Health Care Act—a bill that would make it harder for millions of women to access healthcare. That miserable bill even included a special provision singling out certain health clinics and stripping them of the funding they use to provide women's health services.

Last week, PAUL RYAN failed to get that bill out of the House, but Republicans are back to take another shot at cutting women's access to healthcare. This time the plan is to undermine the title X family planning program. This plan, just like their healthcare bill, is incredibly unpopular, even with Republicans who had to rush Vice President PENCE over from the White House this morning to cast a deciding vote to start this debate on attacking women's healthcare.

Title X is a bipartisan program started back in 1970. It is the only Federal grant program dedicated to providing Americans with high-quality, low-cost family planning services. Title X funded clinics provide birth control, cancer screening, STI testing, and counseling. Just so there is no confusion about this, title X dollars cannot be used to fund abortion services—none.

In 2015 alone, title X clinics helped 2.9 million women access birth control. They provided over 700,000 Pap smears, performed 1.1 million HIV tests, and gave over 1 million breast exams. And PAUL RYAN's way of making sure that women are "championed and revered" is to try to reduce their access to these lifesaving services.

Last December, the Department of Health and Human Services passed a very simple rule to keep States from pulling political shenanigans to shut down women's health centers. The rule prevents States from blocking a healthcare provider from the program "for reasons other than its ability to provide Title X services." In other words, follow the law. If a provider is doing a bad job at delivering family planning services, by all means, kick them out of the program. But you don't get to kick someone out because you don't like the name of their organization or you don't like their politics or because of your politics or because of any other dumb reason that has nothing to do with their ability to deliver women's health services.

In February, House Republicans voted to overturn this rule. So PAUL RYAN's version of championing and revering women is to let States close down women's health centers. Now Senate Republicans plan to do the same thing. Sure, Republicans give a bunch of reasons, but American women are not stupid. We know pretext when we see it. So let's just call it like it is. Republicans want to weaken the title X program because they want to make

it harder for women to access reproductive health clinics, like Planned Parenthood, that also provide safe, legal abortion services.

Just so we are clear, there are over 3,900 title X funded health centers. Only 10 percent of those health centers are affiliated with Planned Parenthood. The vast majority of centers getting title X money have nothing to do with Planned Parenthood, and the vast majority of Planned Parenthood's activities have nothing to do with abortion. But women should be able to choose a reproductive health provider without the interference of Republican politicians, and millions of women choose Planned Parenthood every year. The Congress representing those women should stop demonizing Planned Parenthood and stand with Planned Parenthood.

Yes, as it stands, title X makes sure that if women's healthcare centers, including Planned Parenthood, offer first-rate care, then their work will be reimbursed. The Senate should reject any efforts to change that.

Women in this country work their tails off. They should be able to choose their own healthcare providers. They don't need a "champion" to choose for them. They don't need to be "revered" into passive silence. Women want the respect that they deserve and to be able to access medical care without Republican politicians getting in the way.

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

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

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the title X CRA. It is just a continued abuse of power, something we have never seen in this body—one after another, after another, along party-line votes—to overturn rules and overturn decisions that this government has made. It is disgraceful that this body is debating yet another effort that will threaten a woman's right to healthcare.

Title X ensures that women across the country have access to affordable healthcare, including family planning at clinics that are convenient and affordable. These are a vital resource for preventive care and for primary care.

Overturning this rule will allow States to discriminate against providers, allow States to pick and choose and potentially put thousands of healthcare centers out of business. We know that because we have seen this kind of activity in some State legislatures. These clinics are often the only places women and men have to turn to for basic health services.

Why do this in the same week that the House, fortunately, failed to throw 20 million people off of health insur-

ance and throw off 200,000 Ohioans who are getting opioid addiction treatment and who have insurance because of the Affordable Care Act? The House did not do that, but now the Senate wants to do this? Again, it compromises people's healthcare, as it takes away, in some cases, their insurance and, in other cases, their clinics and health services they cannot get elsewhere.

Some 6 in 10 women who turn to title X for visits to family planning health centers say it is their regular source of healthcare. Many of them have nowhere else to turn. They either cannot afford healthcare elsewhere or they live too far away from another health center for there to be meaningful access to basic healthcare.

Let's be clear. This is not about defunding abortion, clearly. The Federal Government does not provide funding for abortions. I will say that again. The Federal Government does not provide funding for abortions, period. I support a woman's right to make a personal, private healthcare decision for herself and with her doctor. No matter your personal feelings about abortion, whether you call yourself pro-choice or pro-life or something else, surely, we can agree that cancer screenings and programs that have helped bring down Ohio's teen pregnancy and STD rates are a good thing. Cutting these services will have a real and serious impact on women and families across Ohio.

If these actions by men—and it is, overwhelmingly, by men in Washington—whose healthcare is paid for by taxpayers continue to chip away at women's healthcare access, we will see more undiagnosed cancers, more untreated illnesses, and more unintended pregnancies.

I emphasize again that these are mostly men in this body, or men down the hall in the other body, who are voting—men with insurance that is paid for by taxpayers. Their insurance is subsidized by tax dollars. Last week, down the hall, they voted to take away healthcare—in this case, mostly for women but also for men—for people who are getting opioid treatment.

In case after case, privileged Members of this body, who get insurance paid for by taxpayers, take healthcare services away from, literally, millions of Americans. It is shameful. It is morally questionable. It is something we, simply, should not do.

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

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

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the legislative situation?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is considering H.J. Res. 43.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I wish to speak for just a few minutes about H.J.

Res. 43. I see this as a misguided and unfortunate attack on healthcare for women. Certainly that is what I am hearing from women from the State of Vermont.

Three months into the 115th Congress, the Senate has yet to consider real legislation aimed at addressing the many challenges we Americans face today. Instead, the Senate, with simple-majority votes—permissible through the rarely used Congressional Review Act—is rolling back key protections for the American people that were put in place by the last administration. Never mind that the current administration has the power to address certain aspects of regulations that they wish to rewrite. No. They could address these. They could seek a rewriting of them. They could seek legislation. But, instead, Republicans in Congress are intent on using this blunt procedure to unravel years of very careful and deliberative work. These raw power plays are part of the Trump-Republican "know-nothing, anti-science" agenda, in which the winners are not the American people. They are not the women of my State. They are not the average person you might meet. Instead, they are typically the wealthy and powerful special interests and big polluters. They win, and the losers are real Americans.

Today, we are considering the 12th such resolution, one that rolls back protections under the Title X program. Title X of the Public Health Service Act is the only Federal grant program dedicated to providing those eligible with comprehensive family planning and preventive health services. In rural areas—and every single State has a rural area, but my State is especially rural—we know that Title X is crucial in making sure women have access to the basic healthcare they need. Unfortunately, in recent years, some States have made exceptions about which providers may deliver services under Title X, excluding family planning clinics.

Seeing the burden these rules would place on women seeking healthcare, the Obama administration finalized a regulation in December 2016 that protects these providers from this type of discrimination, and women from these hardships. The resolution we are considering today would undo this regulation, once again allowing States to discriminate against providers, thereby limiting access to healthcare services for millions—that is not hyperbole; it really is millions—of women and their families. Worse still, the resolution would prevent a similar rule or regulation from being implemented in the future.

In Vermont, our sole Title X provider is Planned Parenthood. Even in a State as rural as Vermont, no one has to drive longer than 45 minutes to reach a clinic. That is important to us. We consider 4 to 5 inches of snow a heavy dusting, but we often have 10 to 15 inches of snow. Nobody should have to drive farther than that to reach healthcare.

This type of access is critical for those who need these services. It is especially important because for 40 percent of women, their visit to a family planning health center is the only healthcare they receive during the year. Vermonters are lucky because our State recognizes that this issue isn't about abortion, it is about ensuring the best network of providers for the people of our State. But other States have already worked to undermine family planning clinics like Planned Parenthood.

The passage of this resolution will allow these discriminatory efforts to advance, especially discriminatory efforts against women. There is no question about it: A vote for this resolution is a vote against women. This resolution would not only affect the lives of millions of American women, but it would also affect the lives of men and young people who trust and depend on family planning clinics for their basic healthcare needs, including for annual health exams, cervical and breast cancer screenings, and HIV screenings.

Last year in Vermont—keep in mind that Vermont has a population of just over 600,000 people—Planned Parenthood centers provided vital primary and preventive services to more than 16,000 patients. In a small State like Vermont, this harmful impact cannot be overstated.

Those who support this resolution argue that the States should be able to determine who receives Title X grants, and that women under this program can simply find another clinic to go to. Well, that is simply not the case. In fact, that argument is false. It is a lie. Family planning clinics overwhelmingly serve populations in rural and medically underserved parts of the country where access to healthcare, especially for low-income individuals, is difficult.

It is easy—easy—for Senators to vote to cut off this healthcare for women and children and people in rural areas because each one of us, if we need healthcare, can walk 2 minutes down this hall and walk to the Capitol physician and say “I am a U.S. Senator. I need healthcare,” and we are going to get it. While that may be the reality for 100 people in this body, it is not the reality for millions and millions of people in every single State we represent.

What this partisan resolution would do is force women and families in States who depend on family planning clinics for their healthcare to find another doctor—and often very few are available—or what is more likely, go without care at all. So they don't get preventive care, they don't get check-ups, and they don't find the first indication that they may be facing melanoma or some other serious health problem. That undermines all of our efforts, which we should be joining, to strengthen our Nation's healthcare system, to try to make our healthcare system at least as good as many other countries', and to ensure access to care for everyone.

This Republican resolution marks just the latest overreach and intrusion into women's healthcare.

We even voted for a resolution to allow people to spy on what you do on the internet, and then sell that information for their own profit, destroying your privacy, but making money doing it.

Until the House failed to even take it up, the Senate was scheduled to consider a reconciliation bill this week that would have defunded Planned Parenthood and would have allowed health insurers to deny coverage for maternity care, thus requiring women to pay more for health insurance.

In the last Congress, it was more of the same—deny coverage for maternity care, and then go out and say: We believe in the right to life. Clearly not so much for the mother when she needs maternity care.

Should we really walk back from the remarkable progress we have made as a nation in women's health? Of course not. But I am concerned that we will still see the same irresponsible attack surfacing again and again.

Look, it is 2016; it is not 1917. It is time for the mean-spirited and ideological assaults on women's healthcare to end. Women are not second-class citizens. My wife is not, my daughter is not, and my three granddaughters are not. They deserve the same access to care as men.

I urge my colleagues to vote against this resolution that will degrade the healthcare and access to healthcare, of so many Americans.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to oppose the title X Congressional Review Act resolution of disapproval.

This resolution would permit discrimination against family planning healthcare providers that provide primary preventive and reproductive healthcare services to millions of women around the country. It will allow States to take away Federal funding from family planning clinics and make it much harder for millions of American women to meet with their healthcare providers and access basic care.

I am struggling to understand, amidst all these problems we are having to solve in this country and around the world, why this Congress seems to have such a singular fixation on controlling women's access to basic healthcare. This legislation is so far out of touch with the actual needs of our constituents. If we cut funding for women's health clinics, is that going to create more good-paying jobs? Is it

going to open more factories in our upstate rural towns? I don't believe it will. It is certainly not going to make anyone healthier.

There are millions of American women, including thousands of women in my State of New York, who rely on title X health clinics for treatments, preventive care, and for family planning services. They need these health clinics because they provide contraception counseling, cancer screening, and medical expertise right there in their communities. Many of the women who use these services have nowhere else to go for access because title X clinics are often the only affordable option for them and may even be the only place within driving distance of their communities. Yet, once again, my colleagues are pushing legislation to limit women's options for accessing healthcare and making it harder for thousands of New York women to get the care and treatments they need. I continue to be amazed by how little empathy there seems to be for millions of women in our country who don't have the resources to travel to a major hospital outside of their communities and desperately need these local clinics to stay healthy.

Let's be very clear about who this legislation would hurt the most. This bill will hurt women in small towns and rural communities more than anyone else. It will cause lower income women to struggle even more. Every single one of my colleagues has many women in their States who rely on title X clinics and would suffer if these clinics had their Federal funding taken away.

So I urge my colleagues in this Chamber: When it is time to vote on this legislation, think about the women who live in your States. Think about the women who live in small towns and rural communities who are just trying to access basic women's healthcare services that they can afford. Think about the women who don't have big hospitals or big cities nearby. Think about the women who don't have enough money to travel. The bill is going to hurt them. It will make their lives harder, not easier.

We all have the responsibility to stand up for the women in our States, and that includes defending their access to healthcare and basic family planning services. I urge my colleagues to vote against this very discriminatory resolution.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to the Congressional Review Act measure, which would allow discrimination against title X family planning providers, which in turn could roll back access to family planning and preventive health services for women and their families in New Hampshire and across our country.

Throughout my time in public service, I have always fought to ensure

that women have meaningful access to the healthcare they need. I have fought to ensure that they can make their own healthcare decisions, and, in doing so, control their own destinies.

To compete economically on a level playing field, women must be able to make their own decisions about if—or when—to start a family. They should not have to pay more than men do for healthcare. They should be able to visit providers of their own choice who understand their healthcare needs. To fully participate not only in our economy but also in our democracy, women must be recognized for their capacity to make their own healthcare decisions, just as men are. They also must have full independence to make their own health decisions, just as men do.

During my time as Governor of New Hampshire, I restored family planning funds and pushed to restore State funding for Planned Parenthood, and I am going to continue fighting to ensure that women have the care they need, while standing firm against efforts here in Congress to roll back the progress that has been made.

Unfortunately, the vote we are taking today is a continuation of a partisan agenda that has been focused on restricting the care that women and their families can receive. The fact that Vice President MIKE PENCE was called in to cast the deciding vote to advance this measure shows just how far Republican leadership will go in order to undermine women's access to critical healthcare.

For more than 40 years, title X has provided women and their families with comprehensive family planning and preventive health services. When the legislation was originally passed in 1970, it was part of a bipartisan effort, with the support of prominent Republicans. In the years that have followed, title X has been essential in delivering important services to some of our Nation's most underserved communities. That is why, in New Hampshire, title X and Planned Parenthood still have broad support in our communities, even if they have been the subject of political gamesmanship here in Washington.

Title X has support from Granite Staters because they have seen the real difference it has made in their lives and in the lives of their neighbors. They know that in some parts of the State there are no other options or, if other options do exist, they don't provide women with the same expertise and commitment to reproductive health that title X providers do.

For those in rural communities, for low-income women and men, and for members of the LGBTQ community, title X supported health centers have been a major source of preventive care and reproductive health services, including cancer screenings, birth control, HIV and STI tests, and counseling services. And title X's important public health services translate into savings for taxpayers. In 2010, title X invest-

ments resulted in net savings for Federal and State governments of \$7 billion.

The measure we are voting on today would undermine this progress and the safety net for countless citizens. This measure would allow States to discriminate against providers and take away investments in family planning clinics, ultimately taking away these key services for those who need them most.

Last year, more than 4 million women and men at over 4,000 health centers across our Nation received care through title X. This includes around 20,000 patients in New Hampshire, including roughly 11,000 patients receiving care through title X supported Planned Parenthood centers. Those services can't just be replaced by other providers, even community health centers that do great work. But two counties in New Hampshire don't have a community health center at all. Others don't have the capacity to replace this work or this specialized experience that can make a critical difference to a woman's health.

In New Hampshire and other States, Planned Parenthood and the community health centers are often partners, working in tandem to get patients the reproductive healthcare they need. But when I hear from community health centers around New Hampshire, they tell me they would not be able to pick up the slack if Planned Parenthood is defunded.

Make no mistake about it, this CRA, which would let States discriminate against providers in the title X program, combined with the consistent attempts to defund Planned Parenthood by some in Congress, would be a disaster for women in New Hampshire and all across the Nation. That is why a number of leading advocates have come out against these efforts to overturn title X regulations, including the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association, the Human Rights Campaign, and dozens more. I share their concerns and oppose the measure we will consider today, and I am going to continue to fight against these attempts to roll back access to reproductive health and preventive services.

It is critical that we have a healthcare system that ensures that all women and their families can get the care they need. What we cannot do is eliminate services and discriminate against providers who have been providing critical, cost-effective healthcare to millions of Americans for decades. I strongly oppose this effort to undermine the title X program, and I will vote against this measure today.

We need just one more vote, and I urge my colleagues to listen to the voices of their constituents and vote no today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, last week the Senate watched the House and the American people watched the House because the House was on the verge of taking away access to healthcare for 24 million Americans. Then last Thursday, a week ago from today, the House said: We are going to postpone that vote. We are not sure we have the votes to take healthcare away from 24 million Americans, but maybe we will vote tomorrow, Friday.

That was 6 days ago. Friday came, and the House said: No, we are not going to do that vote today because we don't have the votes.

Why didn't they have the votes? Because across the country, millions of Americans said that taking away healthcare is the wrong thing to do—to take away healthcare from Medicaid expansion, the Oregon Health Plan; to take away healthcare by restricting standard Medicaid as it existed before ACA; to take away the healthcare bill of rights that people so much appreciated; to undermine the ability of low-income working families to buy policies with significant subsidies on the exchange—all of that.

The House set it aside. I thought that was tremendous because this week, we are not going to have a diabolical bill destroying healthcare here on the floor of the Senate. But the majority party decided: No, we can't go a week without destroying healthcare, so we are going to put up this Congressional Review Act that would take healthcare away from 5 million mostly low-income women who gain access to healthcare through Planned Parenthood. We won't bring up on the floor the bill that failed in the House for 24 million Americans; no, we will just focus on 5 million mostly low-income women and take away their healthcare.

That is what this vote is about right now, later today. Clearly this attack on healthcare for women across America is wrong, just as it was wrong to try to destroy healthcare for 24 million Americans. It is an attack on women's right to choose what to do with their own bodies. It is an attack on the basic decency and compassion of the American people.

Since 1970, the title X family planning provider network has been dedicated to providing individuals with comprehensive family planning and critical health services, such as screenings for breast and prostate cancer and sexually transmitted diseases.

Just in 2015 alone, title X provided basic primary and preventive healthcare services, including Pap tests and breast exams and birth control and HIV testing, to more than 4 million low-income women and men at nearly 4,000 health centers across the country. That is a huge impact on the health of the individuals served through title X.

In 2010, title X services prevented 87,000 preterm or low birth weight births. I can tell you, when my wife Mary was carrying each of our two

children, I so much hoped that we would not have a complication that would result in a low birth weight birth or a preterm birth in which the child might not even survive. So failing to provide that care is really setting back not just the health of thousands of babies but maybe affecting whether they live or die.

Title X services prevented 2,000 cases of cervical cancer. That is a big deal, cervical cancer, and it is a good deed to have title X services preventing it.

For 40 percent of women in America, their visit to a title X family planning health center is the only healthcare they receive annually.

So let's be honest about what repealing this rule means. It means family planning providers can be discriminated against by States that want to withhold Federal funding from family planning providers for reasons other than their ability to offer family planning services. It means less access to quality care and less access to affordable care.

By overriding this regulation, Republicans empower States to pick and choose who provides services on a criteria that has nothing to do with the quality of care patients receive. States have done this in the past, and it resulted in dramatically fewer women accessing critical family planning and healthcare services.

We know what this is about. It is about any Federal funding for Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides care and resources to 5 million women every year. They have been doing it for 100 years. And they are the target. But what has been their mission? Their mission has been to provide easy and affordable access to address reproductive health and enable women to make their own decisions about their healthcare. But now, thanks to this Congressional Review Act proposal before us, that principle is under attack, that principle of easy and affordable access to women's healthcare and women's control over healthcare choices, to keep the politicians out of their choices. This resolution is about putting the politician in charge of the individual healthcare decisions of women in America, and that is just wrong.

I encourage my colleagues to take a close look at this. You were spared having to vote on eliminating healthcare for 24 million Americans, but now you are required today to vote on eliminating healthcare for 5 million women—mostly low-income women—in America. Are you going to attack the healthcare of those women? Are you going to injure the babies they are carrying? There will be more low birth weight and preterm babies. That is the wrong thing to do.

Vote no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, just yesterday, the White House held a forum on empowering women. Sean

Spicer said the President made women's empowerment a priority throughout the campaign, but earlier today, Vice President PENCE traveled to the Capitol to cast a tie-breaking vote to move ahead on a resolution to undermine women's access to preventive healthcare. That doesn't sound like women's empowerment to me.

Title X was enacted in 1970. It passed the Senate unanimously at that time and was signed into law by a Republican President. Title X is the only Federal healthcare program dedicated solely to providing comprehensive family planning and other related preventive healthcare services so important to women, as well as preventive services for men.

Last year alone, 4 million women and men at 4,000 health centers all across our country got basic care because of title X funding—critical Pap tests to head off cases of cervical cancer, counseling to help women plan for a healthy pregnancy, contraception, breast exams, HIV testing, vaccinations. These services prevented 87,000 preterm or low birth weight babies and 2,000 cases of cervical cancer. These health services also save money. The taxpayer saves \$7 for every \$1 invested in preventive healthcare.

For more than 2 million people, the title X funded clinic is their only source of healthcare. This matters to small towns and rural communities all across Michigan, as well as all across the country. Title X funds clinics in three-fourths of all the counties in the United States. In Michigan, you can benefit from the services in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where I will be this weekend, where funds support the health department in Iron County, or the Planned Parenthood clinic in Marquette—at the opposite end of the State, down in the southeastern corner—where funds support the health department in Monroe County.

So what are we voting on today? Plain and simple, this is an effort to take away women's family planning and other healthcare services. Right now, title X funds are awarded solely based on the provider's ability to serve the patient, as it should be. Republicans want to discriminate against certain family planning services, certain providers, and reduce access to this care, frankly, based on politics or their own personal beliefs.

The vote this afternoon is very simple: It is about basic healthcare for women. A "yes" vote is a vote against women in Michigan and all across our country. A "yes" vote will take away healthcare. A "yes" vote will take away healthcare for millions of Americans.

I strongly urge my colleagues to vote no.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, the majority is continuing its assault on women's reproductive healthcare rights, this time using the Congressional Review Act to reverse a rule and

tear a hole in our safety net for access to family planning and preventative healthcare. The resolution before us would overturn the Department of Health and Human Services' rule, which reinforces regulations that prevent States from denying title X funds to health clinics like Planned Parenthood, even though none of these funds are used for abortions. Repealing this rule would limit access to healthcare, which would harm public health in communities that rely on this funding.

Congress created the Title X Family Planning Program with bipartisan support in 1970 to help provide comprehensive basic primary, family planning, and preventative services to uninsured and low-income people. It continues to be the only Federal grant dedicated to providing family planning and preventive service. Recipients of the grants use the program's funding to provide basic healthcare, such as cancer screenings, HIV testing, and family planning counseling to 4 million women and men. Both public and private entities run title X service sites. These sites broaden access to healthcare services in rural parts of our country. Often, they are the only option for the populations they serve. About 40 percent of women who use title X service sites say that they are their primary healthcare service provider.

Despite the benefits of the funding, States have taken actions that discriminate against family planning clinics. Texas, for example, slashed its family planning budget by 65 percent. As a result, Texas forced a quarter of its family planning providers to close their doors to patients in need.

To ensure that States do not discriminate against family planning providers, the Obama administration issued a rule that forbids States from withholding title X funding for family planning providers for any reason other than being unable to deliver effective services. This rule prevents States like Texas from attempting to defund needed providers like Planned Parenthood. This rule protects access to vital preventive services that provide a safety net for our country's most vulnerable patients.

All people should have a right to affordable, high-quality healthcare. Reversing this rule will deny critical healthcare services to women, men, and their families. I urge a "no" vote.

Ms. STABENOW. 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.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have to say that this is a sad day for the Senate. I know many of us here today—certainly my Democratic colleagues—are truly appalled. Once

again, instead of working on the many pressing issues at hand, Republicans are continuing their tired, dangerous obsession with attacking women's health.

Once again, women's health is being used as a political football, with Republicans attempting to cut off access to vital healthcare services. Once again, millions of families across the country are watching Congress, wondering why there isn't just one more Republican who will stand up for them.

The Republicans just held a vote open for nearly an hour to force a vote that would allow politicians to discriminate against family planning providers. Of course, whenever they can't make a vote, when women's health is being attacked, whom do Senate Republicans call to break that tie in the Senate? Vice President MIKE PENCE.

We have actually seen this before. We all remember what happened in the nomination of Secretary DeVos, and we all know that enough is enough. This is shameful. This is wrong. It cannot stand.

Families have spoken time and again, and they have made it absolutely clear that when it comes to women's rights and healthcare, they do not want to go backward. But today, thanks to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, thanks to Vice President PENCE, the Senate will hold a vote on whether critical healthcare services should be taken away from millions of women across the country.

Let's not forget, it hasn't even been a week since people nationwide completely rejected TrumpCare, that disastrous bill that would have undermined women's rights and healthcare in so many ways.

Now, here in the Senate today, we are about to vote on whether a young woman should be able to go to the provider that she trusts to get birth control; whether it is Pap tests, breast exams, birth control, or HIV testing, which should be more or less available to women across the country; whether healthcare providers are evaluated for Federal funding based on their ability to provide services or ideology; whether women are able to exercise their constitutionally protected rights to reproductive healthcare; and whether the Senate is going to turn back the clock today on women's health.

For me and for Democrats, and I know even for some Republicans, it is disappointing, deeply disappointing, that we are even having this vote today—a vote that was jammed through, with 48 Democrats and 2 Republicans voting no and Vice President PENCE coming down to break the tie.

Put simply, rolling back this rule today will put at risk women's lives, like a constituent of mine from Tacoma, WA. She wrote me a letter recently to tell me the many reasons this is so important to her.

When she was 20, she was uninsured. She had no other options. A family planning center was there for her. Dur-

ing a routine Pap test, her doctor discovered a precancerous condition in her cervix. That led to surgery, which saved her life and saved her fertility.

Without access to that provider, she would not have been able to get a regular Pap smear and checkup and most likely would have developed cervical cancer. She would not have been able to get pregnant, go on to have a daughter, become a community college counselor, and today, at the age of 65, be cancer-free.

I hope that some of my Republican colleagues are listening and that they think of women just like this, whose lives are healthier and have been saved because of the services of so many family planning centers. That is who I will be thinking about. That is what has always kept me going.

I urge people across the country right now to let Senators know that this vote today, this rule is not OK. It is not acceptable. Make phone calls. Go on Facebook. Tweet about it. Everything helps. Tell your Senator today that in about an hour, with their vote, to stand up for you, for your family, and for women across the country.

We need only one more Republican—one more—to join us. This vote that we are about to have in about an hour is dead even, on the razor's edge. Fifty Senators—48 Democrats and 2 Republicans—will vote to reject this harmful, disgusting resolution. We just need one more Republican to join us, to stand on the side of women and men and families, and put an end to this damaging political attack on women.

I am sure people will hear about this. I am going to be here on the floor. Many of my colleagues are going to be out here talking about it. People nationwide will have the opportunity to know exactly where every Republican stands on this.

I urge our Republican colleagues: Stop to think about what you are doing, taking away the ability of women in communities across our country to go to the provider they trust for the care that is most important to them, their families, and our country's future. I urge them to make the right choice.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, most Americans agree—and I think last week's vote in the House indicated—that there is something special about healthcare. This just isn't the right of every American to own an SUV; it is the right of every American to have access to healthcare. That is really at the heart of our healthcare debate.

There are some who believe that health insurance ought to be another product on the shelf, and if you have enough money, you can buy it. But there are others, like me, who believe it is more fundamental.

Healthcare in America, as far as I am concerned, should be a right—not a privilege, a right—so that it doesn't go

just to wealthy people. Everyone should have that peace of mind.

I have told the story many times on the floor of the Senate—and many of us are products of our own life experience. My wife and I got married when I was a student in law school here at Georgetown, in Washington. God sent us a beautiful little girl right away, but she had some medical problems—serious ones—and I didn't have any health insurance. I was a law student, had no real income, a wife, and a baby with a medical problem.

I ended up sitting in the charity ward of the local children's hospital with a number in my hand, waiting to see who would come through the door to provide me with healthcare for my little girl. I had never felt worse in my life as a father, as a husband, to think that I had reached this point where I didn't have health insurance, and I wasn't sure that I was bringing the very best medical care to my little girl.

Well, I never forgot that experience in the many years since, and I never will. I don't believe anybody should be sitting in that chair, worried because they don't have health insurance—whether they have the kind of healthcare that their family needs.

I think that is at the heart of this debate on our healthcare system in America and its future. What we are talking about today is part of it, as well, because we had decided 40 years ago—maybe more—that we were going to make sure, if you were poor in America, as a woman, you would still have access to basic healthcare. Poverty would not exclude you from healthcare. So we created this title X program to provide healthcare primarily for low-income families but for women and children. The services that are provided are basic life-and-death services—everything from breast and cervical care screening, high blood pressure screening, anemia, diabetes testing, and so on.

There is not much debate as to whether we should provide those services, but you know what this is all about. It is not about what I just read. It is about family planning, and it is about abortion. That is what this is really all about.

The Republicans who are voting to deny women access to healthcare are saying: We are doing this to reduce the incidence of abortion.

There is something they should admit: You cannot spend one penny of Federal money for abortion services, except in cases of rape, incest, or where the life of the mother is in danger. Not here in the United States, not overseas.

What they say instead is: Well, we don't want to provide any money to any place that might use their own funds for abortion services, like Planned Parenthood. So we have this amendment before us.

For thousands of women and families in my State of Illinois, as Senator MURRAY has explained, it means the Republicans—who were all for choice in

healthcare—don't want women of limited means to have their ultimate choice of Planned Parenthood for their services. So the Republicans have brought in the Vice President of the United States to vote in the Senate Chamber.

For those who are following the Senate, that doesn't happen very often. It has to be a big deal. And it must be a big deal to the Vice President and to the Republican Party to bring back one of our colleagues, who has been on the mend from medical care, and to bring in the Vice President to make that difference.

Their argument is: Well, we are just trying to reduce the number of abortions.

Well, if you have taken anything beyond Birds and Bees 101, there are some things that you might know. We had a study in St. Louis that was reported in 2012 that tells many people who are at least aware of the basics of how children are born something that we knew already and knew intuitively. Here is what it found:

The abortion rate in the St. Louis area declined by more than 20 percent from 2008 to 2010, coinciding with a research study that gave free birth control to thousands of area women.

Although the drop in abortions in St. Louis cannot be attributed solely to the project, the abortion rate for the rest of Missouri—

Not in the study—remained constant.

Contraception is key to reducing unintended pregnancies and abortions, said Dr. Jeff Peipert. "We need to remove cost barriers," Peipert said. "I think all women should have equal access."

Teenage participants—

In this study—experienced a birth rate of 6.3 babies per 1,000 girls, compared with the national rate of 34.3, according to the study published . . . in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

There were an average of six abortions a year for every 1,000 women in the project, compared with the national rate of 20.

Coincidence? I don't think so.

When you make family planning accessible to potential mothers and to the families, people are educated and make informed choices. There are fewer unplanned pregnancies. There are fewer teenage pregnancies. There are fewer abortions.

So the Republicans, by reducing the access of women to clinics and agencies that are providing family planning, reduce the likelihood they will get the information they need and the likelihood that abortions will increase—exactly the opposite of what they say they are trying to do.

Common sense dictates that—whatever your position is on abortion and choice—if you believe that an uninformed and uneducated young mother is the right person to make this decision as to whether they are going to have a family, I think you understand what all of us do: Information, assistance, and quality healthcare is critically important for women to make the right choice for themselves and their

families and to avoid unplanned pregnancies.

We are now experiencing the lowest rates of unplanned pregnancies in the United States in the last 30 years and the lowest incidence of teenage pregnancies in the last 30 years, and the abortion rate is going down. It works. It is connecting.

This vote that the Republicans are forcing us to take—which the President, I am afraid, would sign, if it were sent to his desk—really gets at the heart of the issue. If you want to reduce the number of abortions in America, if you want to make them safe, legal, and rare, as they say, for goodness' sake, provide basic family planning information and services to women who otherwise might not have it.

This is a war against Planned Parenthood and a few other facilities that is mindless. It really is stopping information from people who desperately need it. Without that information, there will be bad results—bad results that often lead to abortions.

So I would just say flat out that we don't talk a lot about the A-word, "abortion," on the floor, but that is really what is driving this debate. That is what is really behind it.

I hope that one more Republican colleague will decide that if you are truly against abortion, you should be in favor of family planning and giving basic information and counseling to young women who need it. That was proven in St. Louis. It is proven by our human experience. I hope my colleagues will join me in opposing this effort.

I thank the Senator from Washington for leading this debate on the floor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon on the pending business of the CRA that would allow States to discriminate against women's healthcare providers.

Before I begin, I want to recognize the members of the HELP Committee. Senator MURRAY, who understands this issue as well as anyone in our caucus and speaks powerfully about it, has been such a great leader on these issues, even in these difficult times when we are in the minority. I think our entire caucus is grateful to her and all of the members of the HELP Committee. It is an outstanding group of people.

As my colleagues have explained, this CRA would empower States to discriminate against healthcare providers, specifically title X family plan-

ning providers. The practical result of this measure is that State legislatures would pass laws to deny certain providers the funding they need to operate, which would prevent access to family planning and preventive care for millions of American women.

This CRA is just another example of the Republican war on women. It would let States treat women as second-class citizens who do not deserve the same access to healthcare as men. Some States say this is about abortion, but let me be clear. This is not about abortions. In fact, title X funding cannot be used to pay for abortion services. Some of our Republicans who are sort of tied in a knot on abortion say they are for other kinds of health services, contraception and things like that, but this would take that away. Our Republican friends could not get TrumpCare through, which sought to shut down Planned Parenthood for a year. Now they have moved on to this measure. It is just bad policy.

Title X clinics are a critical resource for women, especially in rural areas. This bill would hurt those areas most. Many of my Republican friends represent rural areas. I would like to remind them that in many of these places—and I have several in Upstate New York—these clinics are the only family planning and preventive care services that are available. Sometimes they are the only healthcare services available at all. I am sure that is why two of my Republican colleagues, with a great deal of courage—the Senators from Maine and Alaska—voted against moving to debate on this measure. They know that it would hurt women and hurt families in their States, particularly in the rural areas, and, of course, Maine and Alaska are both rural States.

For the second time this year, the Republicans had to beckon Vice President PENCE down from the White House to break a tie here in the Senate on a measure that has bipartisan opposition.

President Trump, who once said, "No one has more respect for women than I do," sent Vice President PENCE down here to the Senate to break a tie on a bill that would allow States to discriminate against women's health providers. The next time the President says, "No one has more respect for women than I do," I would ask the women of America to not look at his words but his actions because this is just another example in which the President has said one thing, but his policies have done exactly another.

I urge my Republican friends, particularly those in rural States, where this could really hurt, to please think about it and vote against this CRA. We only need one more vote to stop this resolution that would allow States to dramatically reduce the access for women to essential healthcare services. I urge each of my Republican friends to consult their conscience before they vote in the next hour.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise to express my opposition to the resolution of disapproval that is currently before the Senate, which would decimate Federal title X funding for healthcare providers across our Nation who provide vital preventive care and family planning services.

Let me put it in simpler terms. Republicans in Congress are once again rushing to advance legislation that will make it harder for Michiganians to get the healthcare they need. Just last week, we saw Speaker RYAN and President Trump in their efforts to take away healthcare from 24 million Americans and to defund Planned Parenthood, but this is a new week, and we are seeing a new assault on healthcare.

Today's resolution is just the latest in a long series of attacks against Planned Parenthood. A vote for this legislation is a vote to make it harder for millions of Americans to access birth control, cancer screenings, and testing for sexually transmitted infections.

"Title X funding" sounds arcane, but it is actually pretty straightforward. It is a bipartisan program which was established more than 40 years ago and which provides individuals with family planning and preventive health services. Not one penny covers abortion. Let me say that again. Not one penny covers abortion—not one. This is established Federal law, and anyone who says otherwise is simply lying to you or has no idea of what he is talking about.

We should take a step back and ask, what can we agree on here? I think every Senator would agree that we want to reduce unintended pregnancies and teen pregnancies and save money and prevent cancer. Today, unfortunately, we are voting to do the opposite.

Right now, we have the lowest rate of teen pregnancies in our Nation's history, and we are getting ready to heavily restrict a successful program that saves \$7 for every public dollar invested. Preventive screenings are quick, affordable, and save lives. Cancer devastates families, ends lives, and is expensive to treat. Historically, low teen pregnancy rates have not happened in a vacuum; they have happened because of concerted efforts to promote education and prevention and give women a say in their own health.

The pain inflicted today will not be felt uniformly; it will disproportionately hurt people in rural and underserved areas in which these clinics are more often than not the primary sources of healthcare. Michigan has 19 Planned Parenthood clinics, and half are located in areas that are federally designated as "rural and medically underserved." As a direct result of title X funds, Michigan family planning clinics prevent over 18,000 unintended pregnancies and over 1,000 cases of sexually

transmitted diseases and cervical cancer each and every year.

Every woman has a fundamental right to make her decisions about her reproductive health. The government has absolutely no right to stand in her way. I strongly oppose this resolution and implore just one more of my Republican colleagues to join me in stopping this misguided effort.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues in speaking about the harmful effects of this resolution of disapproval.

I thank the Senator from Michigan for his words and for the very important point that we are seeing the lowest number of teen pregnancies that we have seen for a long, long time. Why would you want to mess with something that is finally reducing the number of teen pregnancies?

I thank Senator MURRAY, who has been here diligently leading in this effort, because rolling this rule back will result in something very simple: It will result in less access to care for women and families.

Title X funding supports vital family planning and related preventive care for low-income, uninsured, and young people across this country. Every year, more than 4 million people, including many who are living in rural and medically underserved areas, go to the over 4,000 health centers that rely on this funding. This includes 41 service sites in Minnesota that provide access to cancer screenings, birth control, and testing for sexually transmitted infections. In fact, 40 percent of women who receive care at title X clinics consider it to be their only source of healthcare—40 percent—which is incredibly important in rural areas.

One thinks of, just recently, in the last few years, the Zika scare. People wanted to go and get birth control. They wanted to know what they could do to prevent themselves from getting Zika in order to save the lives of their babies. This is true, and this is what will be happening if they make these cuts.

The regulation we are voting on today should be common sense. It simply makes clear that funds will be awarded solely based on a provider's ability to serve a patient, and it guarantees that women have access to the care they are entitled to under Federal law.

We should be strengthening our efforts to provide better and more affordable care that best serves patients. Instead, repealing this rule will take essential services away from women when they need them most. By overriding this regulation, States will now pick and choose who provides these services, which will be based on arbitrary criteria that has nothing to do with the quality of services patients will receive. That should be our benchmark—the quality of services.

When States have done this in the past, it has blocked access to critical family planning and healthcare services for many women, including those in rural areas who rely on the health centers that need these funds.

As Senator MURRAY said this morning, women across the country have made it clear that restricting women's access to the full range of reproductive care is unacceptable.

We have a situation in which this existing rule has yielded the lowest number of teen pregnancies in years. We have a situation in which two of our Republican colleagues have joined us in opposition to this repeal. We have a situation in which the Vice President of the United States had to come in and break a tie.

Do you know what I would say? I would say that this resolution should be disapproved of, that rolling this rule back will result in less access to care for women and families, and that this rule should stay in place.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, just as I have many times before, to stop another rightwing attack on title X funding and to defend access to healthcare for millions of women.

Not even a week has passed since the American people successfully beat back Republican efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and give insurance companies permission to charge women higher premiums simply because of their gender. Yet apparently less than a week is not too soon for Republicans to launch yet another attack on women's access to healthcare. This morning, my Republican colleagues needed the Vice President of the United States to come to Capitol Hill and cast a vote to overturn protections for 4 million patients served by title X funded health centers every year.

For many low-income women, title X funding is the lifeline that ensures their access to birth control, testing for sexually transmitted infections, cancer screenings, and other basic health services. In fact, 85 percent of the people served by family planning centers like Planned Parenthood have incomes below 200 percent of the Federal poverty level. Approximately 20 percent of these patients identify as Latina, and approximately 14 percent identify as Black.

In 2015 alone, title X funded nearly 800,000 Pap tests, breast exams to 1 million women, nearly 5 million tests for STIs, and 1 million HIV tests. Title X did not pay for a single abortion. Indeed, no Federal funding goes to abortion-related care. And indeed, for every dollar that title X funding spent, we saved about \$4 and prevented nearly 2 million unintended pregnancies per year.

Family planning services at New Jersey's title X funded health centers

helped prevent 20,500 unintended pregnancies in 2014, which would have likely resulted in 10,000 unintended births and 7,400 abortions. Without publicly funded family planning, the number of unintended pregnancies in New Jersey would be 21 percent higher. Title X funded services produce significant cost savings to the Federal and State governments. Services provided at title X supported sites in New Jersey accounted for nearly \$232.9 million in such savings in 2010 alone.

I hope President Trump knows that when my Republican colleagues vote to defund Planned Parenthood, they aren't voting to stop a single abortion; they are voting to defund the family planning care that helps avoid unwanted pregnancies and reduce the need for abortion.

A vote to defund title X is a vote to defund breast cancer exams. A vote to defund title X is a vote to defund cervical cancer screenings. A vote to defund title X is a vote to defund testing for sexually transmitted diseases.

The American people—those who voted for President Trump—voted for more affordable healthcare, certainly not less. Not one of my Republican colleagues has come to the floor to make the case in favor of repealing title X—not one. But if my Republican colleagues prevail in this cynical vote, they will jeopardize access to affordable family planning services; they will force many health centers to stop providing care to patients; and they will leave doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers working on the frontlines to abandon those who need them the most.

I, for one, refuse to allow the GOP to pander to the extreme elements of their party and in doing so limit a woman's access to affordable, accessible healthcare. This vote is about every one of our sisters, our daughters, our grandchildren. This vote is about women across this country, and I don't understand how we can take away their access to the healthcare they so critically need.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I see my colleague from Illinois is here. While she is setting up, I just want everybody to realize what is happening here. We are debating a rule that, should the Republicans—with the Vice President voting to break the tie this afternoon—put it in place, will allow the discrimination of healthcare providers for women across the country.

I have many Democratic colleagues here making the case for those women, mostly low income, who have no other access, particularly in our rural and urban regions. I just want to note that there are no Republicans out here saying why this rule needs to be passed. They just want it done, over with; the Vice President to break the tie, and it is out of here. We are noticing. Women are noticing. People are noticing.

I thank all of my Democratic colleagues and a few brave Republicans who are with us for their support to get this done. We need one more Republican to be able to defeat this.

I yield to my colleague.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, this vote to allow States to defund Planned Parenthood and other title X funded health programs is simply shameful and dangerous, and millions of Americans across this country, including tens of thousands of women and men in Illinois, are going to suffer as a result.

This vote is particularly devastating to the 2.7 million Americans who depend on Planned Parenthood for their basic preventive healthcare each year. I personally understand what is at stake with this vote because I have been there. When I was working my way through college as a waitress, with the help of Pell grants and student loans and student work-study, I relied on Planned Parenthood for my basic healthcare, for services that are just as simple as a simple physical that I needed to get that waitressing job. I went to Planned Parenthood because that is all I could afford on a student's budget, and I needed to get that second job.

While I can relate to the obvious good that Planned Parenthood does, many of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, unfortunately, simply cannot. They don't understand what is at stake.

Let's take a look at my home State of Illinois. In Illinois alone, Planned Parenthood serves 64,000 patients annually. Of those, 34,000 seek testing for sexually transmitted diseases, and nearly 7,000 are seeking out cancer screenings. So by defunding this organization, what they are really doing is stripping thousands of Illinoisans and Americans all across this country from access to essential healthcare. That is simply unacceptable.

We can't play politics with women's healthcare. Planned Parenthood should be able to do its job and continue providing quality care and services without fear of partisan or discriminatory attacks.

The bottom line is that Planned Parenthood is one of the Nation's largest women's healthcare providers, and it is essential to the health of our families and our country.

This vote makes taking away not just Planned Parenthood's funding but funding from any organization that receives title X easier, turning women around the country into second-class citizens and harming millions of Americans in the process. Why would we make it easier to take away a health center that helps our women's public health system and serves as a lifeline for affordable, preventive services like physicals, disease testing, and cancer screenings? Women and men all over the country need these services. Our States and our local communities need

these services because they meet a need that would otherwise not be met.

I want the men and women across this country to know that I am not going to give up. Democrats are not going to give up. I will continue to fight to protect title X funding and the patients who depend on it. It is just too important.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues here on the Senate floor, and I thank the Senator from Washington for her leadership on this issue. I rise to join my colleagues in voicing strong opposition and deep concern on H.J. Res. 43, a resolution of disapproval we are considering today in the U.S. Senate.

This resolution will threaten access to healthcare for thousands of women and families in the State of Washington and millions of people across the Nation.

H.J. Res. 43 would make it easier for States to discriminate against healthcare providers who serve low-income and vulnerable patients under title X of the Public Health Services Act.

Title X is the only Federal funding program dedicated to supporting the family planning safety net, and it was widely supported by the public when it was enacted with strong bipartisan support. So despite what my colleagues say on the other side of the aisle, this issue is something where all my colleagues should make sure we are not taking away access to healthcare.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle in the House—and I know my colleague, the senior Senator from Washington, can testify to this, have on many occasions tried to de-fund Planned Parenthood. They have used Planned Parenthood as a bargaining chip in a litany of high-stakes legislative negotiations. They even tried to shut down the Federal Government because they didn't want to fund Planned Parenthood. Moreover, during the 114th Congress, Republicans voted 22 times to undermine women's health. Today, they are continuing the same thing.

These health centers are an essential part of communities' delivery systems. They provide preventive services. They help prevent deadly disease. They save taxpayers money. They help families with their healthcare. Time and again, constituents in our States tell us how access to these high quality care centers translates into economic empowerment, independence, and the ability to thrive in their lives and careers. In short, these health centers don't just

provide good healthcare for America. They provide a good economic strategy for America.

In our State, 34 Planned Parenthood centers provide contraceptive care, breast cancer screening, and STD and HIV screening and treatment, and they have prevented thousands of unintended pregnancies thanks to their efforts and outreach. In the very isolated communities of Pullman, Moses Lake, and Shelton, and many more, they are oftentimes the only family provider that will furnish care to low-income individuals. Major medical organizations—representing obstetricians, gynecologists, family physicians, and pediatricians—have also made it clear that this resolution is divorced from medical science and will hurt patients.

I urge my colleagues to resist continuing their senseless political crusade. I hope they will be smart enough to understand that a healthcare strategy is an economic strategy. I hope they will defeat this resolution.

GONZAGA BULLDOGS

Mr. President, what a great moment—my colleague from Washington is here, and my colleague from Nevada is here as well. I just want to clarify something. We definitely want to cheer on the Gonzaga Bulldogs in Saturday's game. But so many people say: Where is Gonzaga? It is in Spokane, WA, and we are very proud of Spokane. It is a city that hosts Hoopfest, a three-on-three basketball game that many people attend, and an enormous Bloomsday race that so many people come to from across the country right on the first of May. I think somewhere around 60,000 people are in that race. But we are also so proud that we also have a Gonzaga School of Law graduate here on the Senate floor—the Senator from Nevada. Gonzaga also produces great academic minds.

So for everybody from Spokane, congratulations and good luck on Saturday's big game.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I say to my colleague from the great State of Washington, I do know where Gonzaga is, and I am with you. As a graduate from the Gonzaga School of Law, we are going to the final four, and this time we are going to win. I am very excited.

Congratulations to the players, the coach, and to everyone at the school.

Mr. President, I take the floor today to urge my colleagues across the aisle to stand up for their constituents and vote against the measure on the floor, which will restrict access to safe, affordable, basic healthcare to millions of Americans across this country. This measure will allow States to discriminate against title X family planning clinics for no other reason than petty partisan politics that degrade women's access to healthcare and turn it into a Republican talking point.

These clinics provide essential family planning and health services to mil-

lions of American women, men, and families—many of whom are poor and low-income and in rural areas. This measure will cause these families to suffer by limiting their access to healthcare.

In my home State of Nevada, there are 23 clinics that risk losing funds as a result of this measure. These clinics are in Nevada's major cities and in our rural areas, like Hawthorne, Lovelock, Pahrump, Tonopah, Ely, Winnemucca, and Fallon. For many families in our rural areas, these clinics are the only healthcare facilities where they can access family planning services, as well as basic primary and preventive healthcare services.

The votes today empower States to discriminate against providers and, in turn, threaten the health and safety of the men, women, and families who rely on these clinics for basic and, at times, lifesaving services. We should be promoting access to healthcare, especially for our vulnerable communities. We should be expanding access to care, especially for Americans living in rural areas.

Republicans' actions today are an affront to American women and families. Their political agenda and shortsighted approach will do nothing but cause harm to Americans. It is time for Republicans to stop playing politics with women's health and actually put Americans' health and safety first.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, instead of focusing on bipartisan reforms to improve access to healthcare for the American people, Republicans are again pursuing divisive policies that jeopardize women's health and put politics, politicians, and the government between a woman and her doctor. This measure that we are debating this afternoon attacks a critical healthcare program known as the Title X Family Planning Program.

The Title X Family Planning Program provides basic healthcare, like cancer screenings, contraception, and HIV testing to more than 4 million women and men. This politically motivated provision that we have before us today would allow States to discriminate against trusted health providers like Planned Parenthood. In eight counties in Wisconsin, Planned Parenthood is the only health clinic that provides the full range of publicly funded contraceptive services.

I met with Laurie from Bristol, WI, who told me that as a young teacher, she went to Planned Parenthood and they discovered that she had cysts and tumors in her ovaries. The providers immediately helped her get the care she needed. She had quick surgery and was able to recover, which allowed her to eventually have a family.

Republicans are playing doctor and telling women they can't access basic primary and preventive healthcare services at the health center of their

choice. This would cut off access to care for millions of men and women, prohibiting access to high-quality, preventive services just because of the sign on the door. They would prevent women like Laurie from accessing lifesaving services when they need it the most.

We have already seen too many States enact record numbers of laws and regulations that restrict a woman's access to reproductive health services and the freedom to make her own healthcare decisions. In my home State of Wisconsin, our Republican Governor has signed a number of laws that target healthcare providers and simply have left far too many Wisconsin women out in the cold. He signed a law that forces women to undergo unnecessary and invasive medical procedures, and he has imposed unreasonable requirements on the doctors that deliver care to women. He has worked to close health clinics, including several Planned Parenthood clinics. But he hasn't stopped there. He also signed two laws that would effectively defund Wisconsin Planned Parenthood, which could leave thousands of Wisconsin residents without access to critical health services.

The threat in Wisconsin and in States across the country—and right here in Congress—is clear: Politicians across the country are playing doctor, and this is a dangerous game for women and their families. The millions of Americans who rely on title X for primary care and their trusted providers are being held hostage. They are being used as a political punching bag by congressional Republicans. Their agenda is to attack women's health.

Women's access to comprehensive healthcare—the healthcare they need and deserve—should never depend upon their ZIP Code. So I urge my colleagues to oppose this dangerous measure and to protect title X programs for all of our families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, we are here today because Republicans' discrimination against women knows no boundaries. They think a woman's right to choose is still up for discussion. It is not.

Let me be clear. A woman's right to choose is a discussion for a woman and her doctor. That is it. A healthcare provider receiving Federal funds should be judged on their ability to serve a patient. That is it.

Today, Republicans are voting on a measure that would allow States to discriminate against family planning providers simply because they do not like the populations they treat or the services they provide. It would embolden a State to restrict Federal funding for only health centers that serve primarily minority populations or patients who identify as LGBTQ, and it would allow a State to strip away Federal investments in family planning

clinics that serve women's reproductive health needs.

These are not hypothetical concerns. Women's reproductive care is under attack by extreme rightwing Republicans across this country. State politicians introduced more than 500 bills restricting access to reproductive healthcare in 2016, enacting more than 60 new abortion restrictions last year.

Let's be clear. The result of today's vote means that there will be less access to care for women and families across this country. Health centers receiving title X funding provide basic primary and preventive healthcare services, such as HIV testing and contraception, to more than 4 million women and men at nearly 4,000 healthcare centers nationwide. It is because of the work done at these centers that we are now at a 30-year low in unintended pregnancies, a historic low in teen pregnancies, and we have the lowest rate of abortions since the Supreme Court ruled that abortion was legal in 1973. We are a healthier Nation because of family planning clinics that receive title X funding.

Now, more than ever, we need to stand and raise our voice against the Republican Party's agenda of discrimination. It is about fighting for the freedom to make decisions in our personal lives without the fear of interference from our own government. It is about the access to opportunity that comes from quality, affordable healthcare and making sure that access is never restricted, no matter what gender you are. But with Donald Trump as President and both Chambers of Congress now controlled by the GOP, national Republicans are in the best position in decades to enact a radical agenda that rolls back women's rights. Today is just one step in their massive plan to take women's rights right back to the 19th century.

I know they will not back down from enacting their radical agenda, but I also know that we who want to protect women's rights will not back down from this fight. It is a historic battle. This vote is a historic vote.

I urge all Members to vote no.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I am pleased to be here with the Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the ranking member of the HELP Committee to address this important issue.

You would think that after the healthcare debacle last week, the other side would have gotten the message, which is that the American people didn't send us to Washington to take away their healthcare.

When I think about healthcare in Colorado, I think about sort of a circle that contains healthcare that people in my State are either getting or not getting, and some part of that is ObamaCare, that is for sure, but a lot

of it has nothing to do with that. They are unhappy with the way our healthcare system works. They want more access than they have. The House bill went at this in exactly the wrong direction from where they are interested in going.

I would like to work with Republicans and Democrats to solve that, but this afternoon we are here once again because the resolution before us would risk funding for vital primary care, preventive and family planning services for more than 4 million Americans across our country, especially women and those who live in rural communities of my State and other States.

Since 1970, this body has supported title X funding to expand access to affordable healthcare for low-income men and women. We did that because we understood that it wasn't just the right thing to do, we recognized that it was a good investment. Each dollar invested in publicly funded family planning programs saves the government over \$7 in Medicaid-related costs.

The other side rails against Medicaid spending. In fact, last week, they had a bill that cut it by about \$850 billion. But if they succeed on this vote today, Medicaid spending will almost certainly rise as a result of what they are trying to do.

We supported title X funding with both Republican majorities and Democratic majorities in the Senate. Now a narrow majority is trying to ram this measure through.

This isn't supported by a consensus of Americans, and you know it is not when Vice President PENCE has to drive over here from the White House to cast a tie-breaking vote. Just yesterday, the Vice President was at a White House forum on women's empowerment. It begs the question: Did he learn anything at the forum?

It is easy for Senators, apparently, to vote against healthcare for struggling Americans. I wonder sometimes whether the reason for that is that we are not affected by this vote. That is doubly true when 50 Senators—overwhelmingly men—vote to cut healthcare for millions of low-income women.

The vote today has real consequences for Colorado. If this measure passes, it will threaten to cut funding for title X health centers serving over 52,000 men, women, and teens each year. It will also risk funding for the over 20 Planned Parenthood clinics throughout Colorado that provide healthcare services to more than 86,000 men, women, and teens. Planned Parenthood is a critical part of Colorado's healthcare system, providing essential services in a quarter of the State's counties. This support is especially vital for our rural areas. Two weeks ago, I visited Alamosa and Durango, CO, where these health centers are some of the only places women can turn to for preventive care and family planning services.

We should not do this. Pediatricians are against it. Family physicians are against it. Nurses are against it. But

on the other side, we have a narrow majority voting to strip funding for vital primary and preventive care, including breast cancer screenings and HIV testing.

I would invite anyone voting against this measure, including the Vice President, to come to Alamosa and Durango and see what these health centers are doing in our communities. I invite them to come and meet the people they help, the lives they change.

I urge my colleagues to vote against this measure. It will hurt many of our fellow Americans. It will hurt women in my State and particularly working people, and it should not pass.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I hear colleagues from the other side of the aisle talk again and again about how they want patient-centered healthcare. That is the refrain—patient-centered healthcare. Make no mistake about what this resolution is all about. It turns that phrase on its head because what it says to certainly women who are patients: You are not free to go get the healthcare you want.

It seems like this never ends—another day, another effort to deny women the opportunity to have the kinds of healthcare choices and the healthcare services that they feel strongly about.

I am not going to take long; I know colleagues are in a hurry. I just want to say that the next time you hear this lofty rhetoric—particularly from the majority—about how everything they are going to do in American healthcare is going to put the patients at the center of healthcare, give people more choices, and protect the freedom that they talk about in healthcare—understand, if you vote for this resolution, you are repudiating all of those speeches. I have heard Senator MURRAY talk about it. She says it very eloquently.

The bottom line is that this resolution not only doesn't support that lofty rhetoric about patients being at the center of healthcare, this resolution deprives women of choices and access to healthcare services they want.

I hope my colleagues will join Senator MURRAY and understand the dangerous consequences of what is at stake. Oppose this resolution and save the Vice President the trip to the Hill.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want Senate Republicans who are about to take this vote—and Vice President PENCE—to be very clear on what they are about to do. As a direct result of their choices today, extreme politicians in States across the country will have greater power to take away women's choices.

I think it speaks volumes that the vote to uphold this rule—which simply says family planning centers, where women can exercise their constitutionally protected rights, should not be

discriminated against—is bipartisan. But do you know what I think is most striking about this vote? The deafening silence from the group of almost entirely male Republican Senators who are voting today to make it harder for women to get the healthcare they need. Not one spoke today to justify this vote. Where are those Republican Senators? Why did they feel so entitled not just to interfere with women's healthcare decisions but to do so without explaining themselves? If they are ashamed of their votes, which they should be, they had ample opportunity to reconsider.

I came to the floor with my Democratic colleagues weeks ago to urge Republicans not to bring this damaging legislation to the floor. We asked for just one Republican vote today to prevent this attack on women's health. And women across the country, in Republican and Democratic States, called, emailed, tweeted, and organized to say that these restrictions on women's access to healthcare have no place in our country or in the 21st century. But what have these 50 Senate Republicans done? They refused to listen, and they refused to answer for their actions.

Frankly, women deserve better. The thing is, women know it. So today, as a woman, I am angry. As a mother and a grandmother, I am furious about what attacks like this mean for our daughters and our granddaughters, especially those who are struggling and disproportionately rely on family planning centers. But as a Senator, I am more confident than ever that Republicans who fail to listen to the women of this country do so at their own peril. I have had the chance to see how much impact women have when they call and march and organize and make their voices heard.

The fact that Vice President PENCE had to come and break this tie today, that Senate Republican leaders could not twist enough arms to pass this bill on their own, is clear evidence. So is the failure of House Republicans' abysmal TrumpCare bill, which would have cut off access to critical services at Planned Parenthood.

I know without a doubt that Republican Senators who vote against women and with their extreme base today and who rely on this anti-women administration to jam this resolution through will be held accountable both by women across the country and women right here in the Senate. We will keep making our voices heard. We will fight back against these attacks on our rights and our own self-determination, and ultimately, you can be sure, we will win.

I yield the floor.

I yield back the time on this side.

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

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

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 101 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Corker	Isakson	Shelby
Cornyn	Johnson	Strange
Cotton	Kennedy	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	McCain	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—50

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

The VICE PRESIDENT. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 50. The Senate being equally divided, the Vice President votes in the affirmative, and the joint resolution, H.J. Res. 43, is passed.

The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks on Monday, April 3, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 18, S. 89, with the time until 5:30 p.m. equally divided in the usual form, and that following the use or yielding back of time, the bill be read a third time and the Senate vote on passage with no intervening action or debate. I further ask that following the vote on passage, the Senate proceed to executive session for consideration of Calendar No. 24, the nomination of Elaine Duke to be Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security. I further ask that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, with the concurrence of the Democratic leader, on Tuesday, April 4, the Senate vote on confirmation of the nomination, and that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.
The Senator from Iowa.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTION

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I rise to thank my colleagues for their support of my legislation to overturn President Obama's eleventh hour rule that revokes States' rights to determine the best eligible subgrantees for title X family planning funding. It should be the right of our States to allocate subgrants under the title X program in the way that best fits the needs of the people living there. Unfortunately, like many other rules that were issued during the Obama administration, this rule attempted to empower Federal bureaucrats in Washington and silence our States.

As we all know, States are closer to and more familiar with the healthcare providers and patients within their borders and should be able to make their own decisions about the best eligible title X subgrantees, be they hospitals, federally qualified community health centers, or other types of providers. A number of States have acted in recent years to prioritize title X subgrants to more comprehensive providers, where women can receive greater preventive and primary care than they can with providers like Planned Parenthood.

The Obama administration's rule attempted to claim that providers like Planned Parenthood can "accomplish title X programmatic objectives more effectively." This rhetoric does not match the reality. In fact, after Representative DIANE BLACK and I led more than 100 of our colleagues in pointing that out to the Obama administration, HHS acknowledged the challenge of measuring effectiveness across all types of title X recipients and subrecipients and therefore removed the word "effectively" from the final rule.

So why was this rule implemented in the first place? It is because the Obama administration wanted to do everything it could to secure Federal funding streams for Planned Parenthood before they turned over the keys to the Trump administration. With our vote today, we prevented that from happening.

But let me be clear. Although it is no secret that I do not believe Planned Parenthood—the Nation's single largest provider of abortion services—is deserving of Federal taxpayer dollars, this legislation does not prevent Planned Parenthood or any other specific entity from receiving title X funds. If States like Washington or Massachusetts want to distribute title X subgrants to Planned Parenthood, this legislation to overturn the Obama administration's rule will not prevent them from doing so, nor does overturning the rule reduce overall funding levels for the Title X Family Planning Program.

In fact, this legislation does not in any way decrease women's healthcare

funding. Rather, overturning the rule merely empowers States over a Washington-knows-best mentality and assures that States have the ability to identify the best eligible title X subgrantees. It restores local control and ensures that States aren't forced by the Federal Government to provide abortion providers like Planned Parenthood with taxpayer dollars.

I appreciate my colleagues' support of this legislation, and I look forward to President Trump signing it and scrapping the Obama administration's overreaching eleventh-hour rule.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, on January 18, 2017, two days before President Obama left office, he finalized a rule and put it in place to require States—regardless of their decisions in their State—to have to use Planned Parenthood, removing the decision making from each State.

In the past, it had been very straightforward. States were allowed the opportunity to be able to examine who was the best decision maker to be able to help and the best provider of care in their community for title X funding. For that family planning funding, when it occurs and when it goes through the process, the States made the decision, looked at the providers, found out who the most comprehensive provider was, who could provide the best healthcare, and they made that final decision.

President Obama, two days before he left office, finalized a rule to remove that right from States and to compel each State to be able to use Planned Parenthood.

States like mine and many other States said: We want to do family planning in our State. We want to have comprehensive healthcare in our State, but we do not want to provide Federal funds to the single largest provider of abortion in the country. That was a reasonable decision that our State lawmakers could make to be able to protect the lives of women in our State and to protect the lives of children for the future. That reasonable, common-sense method was removed two days before President Obama left office.

I am proud to say that the House of Representatives and the Senate today voted to strike that rule from the last two days of President Obama's term to compel States to be able to use Planned Parenthood in their States, to be able to give the option back to the States again.

I look forward to President Trump signing it. I would remind the President of this one simple thing, though. This does not strike funding away from women's care. This doesn't take funding away from any of the family planning. This doesn't even force States to not use Planned Parenthood. It is a simple statement of where we used to be: States could choose to have Planned Parenthood as a part of their

title X funding, or not. It is their choice. If some States want to do that, they may continue to do that. Other States should not be compelled to do that with taxpayer funds, though.

That is the new status quo as soon as President Trump signs it—to be able to return to a basic doctrine: States should not be compelled to have taxpayer funds used toward Planned Parenthood title X funding.

I am proud that this Senate just passed this resolution. It is a reasonable act for us to be able to do, and I look forward to the President's signature.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, when his nomination comes to the floor next week, I will vote to confirm Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. This is my first time voting on a Supreme Court nominee, and I don't take the decision lightly. It is a lifetime appointment, after all, and the Court's rulings have shaped our country's history—for good and for ill—and will continue to shape our future. But after reading Judge Gorsuch's writings, meeting with him in person, and listening to his testimony, I can say with confidence that it is not a hard call. I believe Judge Gorsuch will be a fine addition to the Supreme Court.

There is no denying Judge Gorsuch's distinctive qualifications. We all know his credentials: Columbia, Harvard law, and an Oxford doctorate to boot. He clerked for an appellate judge and two Supreme Court Justices. He had many years of experience in both private practice and in public service and, of course, over 10 years as an appellate judge. He possesses fine judicial temperament: highly erudite, highly accomplished, and highly regarded by those who know him best. It is no surprise, then, that the American Bar Association, in a unanimous vote, declared him "well qualified" for the job.

While I wouldn't outsource our responsibilities to any advocacy organization, I would note that the minority leader himself once said the ABA rating is "the gold standard by which judicial candidates are judged."

But, of course, Judge Gorsuch is not just filling any seat, but the seat once held by the late Justice Antonin Scalia. Justice Scalia was a giant of American jurisprudence. Most Justices earn their place in history by writing opinions, giving voice to their colleagues, and speaking for the Court as a whole. Justice Scalia did that many times throughout his career, of course, but he did something more. He changed the way judges—both conservative and liberal—think about the law and defend their decisions. He reminded us all that a judge's job is to apply the law—including the Constitution, our most fundamental law—as written, to the case

before him, not to rewrite it all together.

Adhering to the law, even when the judge doesn't like the result, is the greatest public service that a judge can render, because to respect the rule of law is ultimately to respect the rule of the people.

This is what Justice Scalia taught and what he inspired a whole generation of judges and lawyers to understand. As we prepare to fill his seat on the Supreme Court, let us also acknowledge that no man can fill his shoes. We honor the memory of Justice Scalia and we thank his wife, Maureen, and his whole family for sharing this great man with our country for so long.

Judge Gorsuch is a child of the Scalia generation. He has long advocated for and followed the originalist judicial craft—one rooted in the text, structure, and history of our Constitution, which is to say that he respects the rule of law and he respects the people. Whether defending the religious liberty of the Little Sisters of the Poor or the Fourth Amendment rights of a regular household, he has shown a profound respect for the Constitution. I also think he has demonstrated throughout his career a firm independence of thought. He has had his influences and his mentors, his promoters and his critics, but I believe he will be his own man—as he should be.

So I am pleased to announce my support for the next Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge Neil Gorsuch. I look forward to his confirmation next week.

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I wish to initially speak about the bipartisan Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act, but first 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. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, distance or delays should never be the reason that veterans don't get the healthcare they need, but that is exactly what is happening to veterans across the country. That is why the Veterans Choice

Program was started—so that thousands of veterans and their families can get the care they deserve when and where they need it. Instead of traveling long distances or waiting months on a list, veterans can use the Choice Program to get the healthcare they need in their own communities.

As the ranking member of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, I want to give a little perspective on what would happen to our veterans if we don't pass the bipartisan Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act.

Now, I know that the Choice Program is not funded through my subcommittee, but what we do today has an impact on the VA as a whole. If the Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act does not pass, the funding we appropriated to the VA will expire before it has all been used. It is not a small amount of funding. It is \$1 billion, and the VA does not have \$1 billion elsewhere in the budget to make up for this loss.

In other words, if we don't pass this bill, it is going to be a disaster for veterans because all of the veterans who use this program for their healthcare are going to have to go back to the VA. That means the wait times that everybody was complaining about over the last couple of years will grow longer and longer and longer, and especially in rural America, where access to care is such a challenge, it will get worse and worse.

To manage the increase in patient load, the VA will have to scramble to find funding that can take away from other VA programs, including hospital maintenance and medical equipment. That is what is going to happen if we don't pass this bill. This is an urgent matter for veterans across the country. Whether you are a participant in the VA Choice Program or you go to a traditional VA clinic or hospital, one way or another, this is going to impact you.

Now, I know the Choice Program isn't perfect, but this temporary extension, coupled with the improvements in the system contained in the bill, gives Congress the time we need to develop a long-term, comprehensive solution. And while we are working on a solution, let's not punish veterans by cutting off \$1 billion toward a program that is designed to improve services for people who have served our country.

So I hope we can come together to find a way to pass this bill. Our veterans are counting on us.

I yield the floor.

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

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

RUSSIA AND TRUMP CAMPAIGN INVESTIGATION

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, I know several Members are ready to come here and talk on a veterans issue, and they will let me know when they are ready to start. I thought there might be a good chance to get this in.

Our democracy is under attack. U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that the Russian Government interfered in the U.S. Presidential election and intervened to help Candidate Trump. Around the same time, Candidate Trump began making flattering statements about Russian President Putin and proposing pro-Russia policy changes while criticizing longstanding U.S. allies, including in Europe.

President Trump continues to defend Putin and offend Western allies. Now we have come to learn that there are unexplained ties between the President, his campaign staff, his associates, and Russia; that many close to the President had meetings and telephone calls with Russian officials during the campaign and the transition; most critically, that the FBI and the Department of Justice are investigating whether the President and his associates coordinated or conspired with the Russian Government to interfere with the Presidential election—an investigation that began last July and is likely to continue for months.

The President and his associates keep giving the American people reason for worry—inaccurate denials, evasive answers, explosive attacks they can't back up, scheming with the chair of the House Intelligence Committee on the committee's investigation of the White House. New, very disturbing information comes to light every day.

A recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll showed that two thirds of Americans believe a special prosecutor should be appointed. The American people want answers. What was the scope of the interference? Who knew what, and when? How can we protect ourselves and our allies, who are facing similar cyber attacks? What is the appropriate government response to such an attack?

I appreciate the work the Senate Intelligence Committee is doing. I believe that is the first step, but I believe we must go further. That is why I am again calling for an independent, bipartisan national commission modeled on the 9/11 Commission to fully investigate Russia's interference with our election and our election processes and to investigate the ties between the President, his family businesses, and his close associates and Russia that may threaten our national security. I am also again calling on the Department of Justice to appoint a special counsel to investigate potential criminal conduct that may jeopardize our security.

Questions about the President's ties to Russia will divide the country, undermine his Presidency, and distract Congress, unless we take these steps.

The American people are right to be concerned. The President's stance on Russia is perplexing, starting when he first denounced the role of NATO last spring, calling it "obsolete," suggesting that it would be OK if NATO broke up. Then, he publicly asked Russia to hack Hillary Clinton's emails.

Then, Mr. Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, was forced to resign because of his close political and financial ties to Ukraine's former pro-Russian President. He became the subject of a multi-agency investigation. We don't have the full story, but we do know that he failed to register as a foreign agent while he lobbied for pro-Russian Ukrainian interests in the United States. It appears that Manafort has a \$10 million contract with a Russian oligarch who is very close to Putin that would "greatly benefit the Putin Government" and that he had at least 15 offshore bank accounts in Cyprus that even Cypriot bank officials thought were suspicious. Once those bank officials began asking about money laundering activities, Manafort closed the accounts rather than answer questions.

During his campaign, Mr. Trump stated that he would "be looking at" whether to recognize Crimea as Russian and to lift sanctions. President Trump and his team apparently took little or no interest in the debate over the party platform in the Republican National Convention, except for one thing—Ukraine. They intervened with delegates to get more Russia-friendly language in the Republican Party platform. Candidate Trump's national security policy staffer J.D. Gordon told CNN: "This was the language Donald Trump himself wanted . . . and advocated for . . . back in March." Now Gordon is reportedly under investigation for his ties to Russia.

We have all heard the President compliment President Putin, calling him a strong leader. Why is the President so enamored, when Putin's actions are authoritarian, violent, and anti-democratic? Putin seeks to weaken NATO and the European Council. He annexed Crimea in violation of international law and treaties. He interfered with our national election. Putin has crushed free press in the Russian Federation, placing restriction upon restriction on the press, quashing independent news organizations, and harassing and jailing journalists. The President's outspoken admiration is inexplicable.

So we are still left with a President who has expressed policy views toward Russia that run counter to U.S. ideals and treaty obligations, as well as global norms of international affairs. While we don't know the full extent of the President's financial, personal, and political ties to Russia and Putin, we have plenty of reason to seek an impartial investigation. The President still has not released his tax returns, unlike any previous modern President. His son Donald Junior volunteered, as far as

back as 2008, that “Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets. . . . We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia.”

In 2013, Mr. Trump said on a talk show: “Well, I’ve done a lot of business with the Russians.”

Due to his history of bankruptcies, no major U.S. bank would loan to Donald Trump in recent years. So he has needed new sources of capital for his real estate projects. There is growing reason to believe that Russia—or at least wealthy Russians—have financial interests in the Trump organization. Recent reports link the President and his companies to ten wealthy former Soviet businessmen with alleged ties to criminal organizations or money laundering. The extent of corruption and criminal ties among the oligarchs of Russia are well known, and to stay wealthy oligarchs, they must stay friendly with the Putin regime.

Is the Trump organization reliant on Russian capital or loans from Russian banks? What relationships are there between Russian oligarchs that are tied to the Russian Government and the Trump organization and between those former Soviet businessmen and Trump’s properties? We need to get to the bottom of this, with a credible, deliberate, nonpartisan investigation.

Mr. Trump has surrounded himself with associates with close Russian ties—not just Mr. Manafort. Michael Flynn headed to Russia within 18 months after his retirement as the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Russian Government’s media outlet RT. Secretary John Kerry called RT a “propaganda bullhorn” for Putin. Mr. Flynn was paid for that trip by RT, a potential violation of the emoluments clause of the Constitution, and appeared regularly on RT. Flynn, of course, had to resign as National Security Advisor after 24 days in office. But the President knew of Flynn’s misrepresentations weeks before he was fired and did nothing until it became public. We now know that Russia’s payments to Flynn were generous. In 2015, Russian entities paid him \$65,000. We know he worked for pay as a foreign agent for Turkey during the campaign and during the transition, but he failed to register as an agent at the time, as required by law.

Other Trump associates and campaign staff—Roger Stone, Carter Page, and Mr. Gordon—all are reportedly under investigation for intercepted communications and financial transactions with Russia. Stone admitted at least 16 contacts with Gufficer 2.0, the Twitter handle covering for Russian intelligence that released the Democratic National Committee hacked emails.

Page, who has strong financial ties with Russia, admitted to meeting with the Russian Ambassador during the Republican Convention and traveling to Russia during the campaign.

The President’s Attorney General was forced to recuse himself from any

Department of Justice investigation into Trump and Russia because he did not disclose to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he met with the Russian Ambassador during the campaign.

Now the President’s son-in-law and senior adviser is set to testify before the Senate’s Intelligence Committee. He will talk about his contacts with the Russian ambassador, a close Putin ally who is head of a Russian-owned bank.

Where does it stop, folks? Where does it stop?

These contacts give us enough reason for pause. Combined with Mr. Trump’s positions on NATO, sanctions relief, and Russia’s human rights violations, they raise serious security questions for the United States and NATO. As I said, we need an independent prosecutor at the helm to ensure that the whole of the investigation is not compromised—one who is not subject to White House pressure and not in a position of investigating his or her boss—and a bipartisan commission along the lines of the 9/11 Commission that is independent of politics.

The chair of the House Intelligence Committee is compromised and damaged beyond repair. He has coordinated with the subjects of his committee’s investigation, and he has completely lost credibility. I compliment my Senate colleagues who are working together on an investigation. But the Senate committee does not have the resources to fully investigate this, and the ranking Democrat on the committee agrees we need an independent investigation that could go further, that could be public, and could be transparent.

A former Acting Director of the CIA called the Russian interference in our election one of the most successful covert operations in history. Former Vice President Cheney has said that what they did could be “considered an act of war.” By covert interference in a U.S. election, Russia pursued a policy to install its favorite candidate as President of the United States. Yet the President has dismissed the National Security Agency findings, accused our national security agencies of acting like Nazi Germany, and leveled fake charges at the former President.

The American people are not fooled, and they want Congress to get to the bottom of this. We in Congress have a solemn duty to the American people to do just that.

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

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

VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the bipartisan Vet-

erans Choice Program Improvement Act. I will start my remarks by saying that Chairman ISAKSON was here earlier, and he had a meeting he had to get to. Johnny has been through a tough surgery, and it is good to have Johnny back. But the fact of the matter is he supports this bill. He is an original cosponsor of this bill. The same could be said of Senator BLUMENTHAL, who also had a meeting and wanted to be here, once again. We heard from Senator SCHATZ earlier. This bill truly has bipartisan support, not only in the VA Committee but also in this body.

The reason people support this piece of legislation is because it brings much needed reforms to the Choice Program while ensuring that veterans can access care in their communities. It is a good bill.

A few years back, the Choice Program was established with the very best of intentions. In my home State of Montana, it is a fact that veterans were waiting far too long for an appointment at the VA and oftentimes had to drive over 100 miles for the appointment. The Choice Program was supposed to allow these veterans to access care closer to home. Unfortunately, it has not been working out the way it should, and veterans have been inundated with redtape and a government contractor that struggles to schedule appointments and pay providers on time. That is why we all worked together—Democrats and Republicans and even Independents—on this bill to put forth these much needed reforms.

The Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act cuts redtape so veterans can access care more quickly. In fact, I made it clear from the get-go that I would not vote to extend the Choice Program until Congress and the VA have addressed some of the biggest concerns I have been hearing from Montana veterans and community providers.

Once we get the bill passed, this program reimburses community providers more quickly for the care they provide to our veterans. It reduces out-of-pocket costs for veterans receiving care through the Choice Program. It improves the sharing of medical records between the VA and the community providers to better ensure seamless care for veterans, whether they are seeing a VA doctor or a doctor in their community. It allows the VA to access all the funding initially appropriated for this program to ensure that veterans’ access to care is not disrupted.

This bill is not going to fix everything, but it is certainly a step in the right direction. With this legislation, combined with assurances that I have received from VA Montana, VA folks within the State will be allowed to schedule appointments for Montana’s veterans directly instead of going through an inept government contract.

It is my hope that we can make the Choice Program work the way it was

intended when we first set it up, with the goal of serving those who have served our country.

I again express my appreciation for taking this bill up on the floor, this Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act, and I think it is a prime example of how this body needs to work together to solve problems—in this case, for our veterans community. We should push this bill out as soon as possible.

I yield the floor to Senator MORAN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I appreciate the remarks, as well as the working together with the Senator from Montana as we tried to make certain that a program that is so valuable to veterans across the country—in my case particularly, veterans who live in rural America, in Kansas—to make certain that veterans can attain the care they have earned and the care they deserve.

We had a scandal at the VA in which many tragic things happened, and Congress came together at that time and passed the Choice Act. What that law basically has given our veterans is, if they live more than 40 miles from a VA facility—in other words, if they live a long distance from access to care—they can, at their choice, have that care at home: hometown hospital, hometown physician, pharmacy, physical therapy. They can see a provider in their hometown.

In so many instances in Kansas—in fact, I have mentioned this before on the Senate floor. The House district I represented as a Congressman is larger than the State of Illinois, and there is no VA hospital in that congressional district. So veterans not having to travel 2, 3, 4, 5 hours to Denver or to Wichita or to Amarillo is of such value to our veterans, particularly those who have a disability or are aging. What we did in the passage of Choice was so useful to so many veterans.

The other part of that was that if you couldn't get the care you needed within 30 days at the VA, you could then attain your care at home. Again, with the backlog that was occurring at the VA, the lack of providers, this became important to another set of veterans who, because of their health condition, couldn't afford to wait that long to see a physician, to have surgery.

This is important legislation. If you are somebody who cares about veterans, you need to be in favor of this Choice Act. If you are someone who cares about particularly rural or veterans who need timely care, you especially ought to be supportive of Choice.

The challenge we have is that the Choice Act is expiring. It expires August 7, and it needs to be extended. There are dollars available in the program. Mandatory spending is available to pay for the services to a later date.

As the Senator from Montana indicated, there are a number of provisions that haven't worked very well in

Choice because of the bureaucratic nature of the program, the way the program has been established. One of those that are most important is that you have veterans on one side who need the care and choose Choice, but you also need a willing provider. The local hospital, the local physician needs to be willing to provide that care. I have never known a provider who was not honored to provide care to a veteran, but the challenge in many instances becomes whether that provider, that doctor or hospital gets reimbursed, gets paid.

This legislation has a number of reforms, but in my view, one of the most critical and most important is to make the VA the payer, to make the VA be the entity that writes out the check to pay the hospital bill, to pay the physician for the services provided.

So this is another reform that improves really on both sides. It eliminates some of the bureaucracy that a veteran goes through and the number of times a veteran may receive a notice that he or she owes money that should be paid by the Choice Program, and it also encourages—by paying them—the physician or the hospital to provide the service. These are important reforms, important changes in the Choice Act that are worthy of our support.

What is transpiring here are a couple of reforms to the Choice Program and its extension to a later date, until the money expires, so the Choice Program can continue, and Congress can now take that time to determine what we want to do with the Choice Program into the future after that point in time. I appreciate the way in which this legislation has worked.

Often I get asked whether there is any hope that Congress can work together, that Republicans and Democrats can solve problems. This is an example of where that is taking place today, by the care and concern we all have for our veterans and the good will that exists by those who serve in Congress to make sure that good things happen for our military men and women who are now veterans.

I regret that the chairman of the Veterans' Committee, the Senator from Georgia, Mr. ISAKSON, is unable to be with us, but, as the Senator from Montana indicated, he is fully supportive of this legislation. In fact, he is an original sponsor of the legislation.

I add my voice and ask my colleagues to agree to the unanimous consent resolution, that this legislation be passed. It will be another step in solving problems and caring for those who served our Nation.

Yesterday, I was at the Arlington National Cemetery—a reminder of the debt we owe to so many people. Those are veterans who are now deceased. Those are military men and women who have now died. Those who are living deserve the care and treatment that our VA can provide and the opportunities that our providers in our hometowns can assist in providing.

We want to make sure that good things continue to happen. We want to improve the quality of service, get the problems out of the Choice Program, and make sure those who are so deserving of quality care actually receive it.

I yield back to the Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I would like to thank the good Senator from Kansas for his comments and his leadership not only on the VA Committee on which we both serve but also as chairman of the Appropriations MILCON-VA Subcommittee, the subcommittee that really sees how the money is going to be utilized within the VA. I think Senator MORAN has covered just about all of it. I just want to go back and say one thing.

We are going to have a unanimous consent. I am told there will be an objection to it. That is truly unfortunate because this has been a bipartisan effort. It has cleared everyone in the Senate except one person, to my knowledge, and I think that is unfortunate.

One of the complaints I hear is that the primary payer provision of this bill is the problem. The primary payer provision of this bill requires the VA to be exactly that—the primary payer of the bills. My question would be, Why is this a bad thing? Right now veterans are being hamstrung and delayed, and the folks who provide the benefits, the providers, are not getting the dollars in a timely manner. I would just ask, if the VA is not going to be the primary payer, who is?

These folks have put it on the line for this country, and they come back in different shape than when they left, after they bore the battles of war. Some of the injuries are seen; some of the injuries are unseen. And we are not going to say “You know what. Don't worry about it. We are going to make sure you get the care, and we are going to make sure it is paid for.” It is part of the cost of war. So when we send our young men and women off to war, we ought to be thinking about this stuff. And we have a solution. We have a solution to part of the problems with the Choice Program.

If we get this bill passed, it will give us the opportunity to work together to get a long-term bill passed before the first of the year to really address the needs of our veterans so that there are wraparound services at the VA that veterans can count on.

I would just say that this is supposed to be a very deliberative body, and for the most part, it is pretty deliberative. But when you have a situation of a program that we put into effect—that Congress passed and the Senate had a big part of writing—and it is not working, we ought to fix it, and this bill fixes it in good part. We have some more to do, as I said, but this bill is a step in the right direction in cutting redtape and making it easier for veterans to find care and get care, whether it is in the VA or outside the VA. It

is also something that the Veterans Administration sorely needs to move it forward.

I just want to say that we come in here and we have good arguments and good discussions, and sometimes politics comes into the discussion. In this particular case, folks have come to the table—whether it is Senator ISAKSON or Senator MCCAIN or Senator MORAN or me or any of the others on the Veterans' Affairs Committee—and we have come up with a solution that 99 percent of the people in this body agree with, but we can't get it across the finish line. And we wonder why our popularity is in the single digits in this country.

I am just going to close by saying I want to thank everybody from both sides of the aisle who worked together to get this bill crafted and get this bill to this point. I hope that at some point in time, people will take a look at this bill for what it does and realize that there aren't bogeymen in this bill, that our veterans deserve us to work together to find solutions to move the ball forward so they can get the healthcare they were promised when they signed on the dotted line to protect this country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, it is my understanding that one of my colleagues is en route to speak and perhaps object to this motion that is to be made. I would ask my colleague from Montana if he would mind holding for a few moments until that Senator arrives.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I was going to ask for unanimous consent that S. 544, the bill we have been talking about, be discharged for immediate consideration, and then someone would have to object to that unanimous consent request—otherwise it would move forward.

I am going to do this on Monday. I hope the Senator who is truly going to object to this will have the opportunity to talk to Secretary Shulkin and Chairman ISAKSON, and he will find out that both those people are in support of this bill.

Hopefully we can come in and do a unanimous consent and get this bill passed on Monday. This is a bill that is good for America's veterans. I think it is good for our community providers, and I think it is very good for the VA. We will hold off today and take care of this after the weekend.

I would like to once again thank all the folks who worked on this bill. A

special thank-you to Senator MORAN for his statements today.

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

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

MERRICK GARLAND AND FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise today to lend my voice in support of perhaps one of the most qualified individuals ever nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court. I am referring, of course, to Chief Judge Merrick Garland.

Over 1 year ago, on March 16, 2016, a President who was twice elected by significant margins in both the popular vote and the electoral college nominated Judge Garland to fill the vacancy left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. President Obama upheld his constitutional duty by submitting a name to the Senate to fill this vacancy.

By submitting the name of Merrick Garland, he gave the Senate a man who has spent his career working to build consensus and to find principled compromises. His impeccable credentials speak for themselves: Harvard undergrad, top of his class; Harvard Law, top of his class; law clerk to Judge Friendly on the Second Circuit and Justice Brennan on the Supreme Court. He served in the Justice Department after a time in private practice.

When tragedy befell Oklahoma City in April of 1995, Merrick Garland led the investigation that brought justice to the perpetrators of that unthinkable act of terrorism. Judge Gorsuch called this work "The most important thing I have ever done in my life."

His career was far from over at that point. In 1997, Republicans and Democrats joined together to confirm Judge Garland to the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, which is often called the "second highest court in the land."

Here is what Senator ORRIN HATCH, former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and currently the President pro tempore of the Senate, said of him at the time:

Merrick B. Garland is highly qualified to sit on the DC Circuit. His intelligence and his scholarship cannot be questioned. . . . His legal experience is equally impressive. . . . Accordingly, I believe Mr. Garland is a fine nominee. I know him personally, I know of his integrity, I know of his legal ability, I know of his honesty, I know of his acumen, and he belongs on the court.

Those are not my words. Those are the words of Senator ORRIN HATCH, a good friend and colleague.

Over the past two decades on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Garland established a reputation as a thoughtful judge, a fair judge, a man of

high integrity, a judicial moderate, and a consensus builder in a day and age when we need consensus builders—not here but on the Supreme Court and other courts.

Even those who may disagree with him tend to find themselves thinking a little harder about their own views after hearing his.

During his 2005 confirmation hearing to serve as Chief Justice, John Roberts, who served with Judge Garland on the DC Circuit, stated these words: "Any time Judge Garland disagrees, you know you're in a difficult area."

Thank you, Chief Justice Roberts.

In 2013, Judge Garland was promoted to chief judge on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, the second highest court in the land—the chief judge, presiding over that court.

When President Obama nominated him to the Supreme Court over 1 year ago, Judge Garland brought with him more Federal judicial experience than any nominee in the history of the United States.

When I met with Judge Garland last year, I got to know him beyond just his resume. Ironically, he had actually performed the marriage ceremony for my former chief of staff and his bride several years ago.

I was struck by Judge Garland's humility and by his personal character, his personal traits. Even as a nominee for the Supreme Court, he continued to serve his community as a mentor to elementary school students right here in Washington, DC. Imagine that. A chief judge of the DC Circuit Court of Appeals taking time every week to mentor some kid who needs another good role model in his or her life. That is something that Judge Garland has done for about two decades.

Over 1 year later, as I stand here today, a seat on the Supreme Court—what should be, in my view, Judge Garland's seat—remains vacant. Our Republican colleagues, in an unprecedented display of what I think is obstructionism and partisanship, denied Judge Garland a hearing and a vote. Many of our Republican colleagues refused to even meet with him. He was denied both a hearing in the Judiciary Committee and a cloture vote in the full Senate.

Well, since the Senate Judiciary Committee began holding public hearings on Supreme Court nominees 101 years ago, in 1916, no Supreme Court nominee had ever been denied a hearing and a vote.

I will say that again. No Supreme Court nominee had ever been denied a hearing and a vote—well, until Judge Garland.

According to the highly respected website, SCOTUSblog, we read these words:

The historical record does not reveal any instances since at least 1900 of the president failing to nominate and/or the Senate failing to confirm a nominee in a presidential election year because of the impending election.

That is right off the blog.

Judge Garland was denied a hearing and a vote. In fact, during the 1988 Presidential election year, Justice Anthony Kennedy was confirmed by the Senate 97 to 0—not 51 to 49, not 60 to 40, but 97 to 0. But Judge Garland was denied a hearing and a vote.

Our Constitution, the one that every Member of this great deliberative body has sworn an oath to uphold, standing right over there, requires the Senate to provide its advice and consent to Supreme Court nominees.

Over the years, there have been a lot of questions as to what advice and consent entails. Judge Garland was denied a hearing and a vote. A good man—I think an extraordinary man—was treated badly, as was our Constitution.

I believe the unprecedented obstruction our Republican colleagues mounted last year against Judge Garland was a shameful chapter for the U.S. Senate. Mr. Garland, a consensus builder, one of the most qualified judges in our country, waited 293 days for a hearing and a vote that ultimately never came. I am still deeply troubled by those 293 wasted days, and I am still deeply troubled by the way Judge Garland was treated. I believe Judge Garland still deserves a hearing and still deserves a vote.

While I do not believe that two wrongs make a right, I believe this may be our only opportunity to right a wrong and erase the enormous black mark that the Senate's failure to consider Judge Garland leaves on this chapter of American history. I think it is unacceptable to put partisan politics over fidelity to our U.S. Constitution. Confirming anyone for this vacancy other than Judge Garland would be a stamp of approval for playing politics with Supreme Court nominees.

From where I sit, upholding our oath to protect the Constitution means finding agreement on moving Judge Garland's nomination forward at the same time as that of Judge Neil Gorsuch, President Trump's nominee. When President Trump lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes last year and narrowly won the electoral college, he promised to be a President for all Americans. I think a fair question is, Has he upheld that promise?

Well, let's decide—an unconstitutional Muslim ban, an unnecessary and overpriced wall on the southern border, a failed healthcare bill that would have provided less coverage for more money, a rollback of environmental protections for all of us who don't want to drink dirty water and don't want to breathe dirty air. If you ask me, the President has broken the promise to be a President for all Americans. Now I realize that others may differ and disagree, but his nomination of Judge Gorsuch represents what I believe is another broken promise.

I have heard from middle-class folks, from workers up and down my State, from special education teachers, from immigrant communities, from women who depend on access to healthcare,

and my guess is my colleagues have as well. Many of them fear that Judge Gorsuch is not on their side. Despite his impressive resume, I share those same concerns.

At this time, I believe it is appropriate to hit the pause button until an agreement can be reached that provides justice for Judge Garland while restoring credibility to the U.S. Senate. I believe that is only bolstered by the cloud that lingers over President Trump's campaign.

As FBI Director Comey testified last week, there is an ongoing investigation to determine the links between Russia and the Trump campaign and whether there was any coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia to interfere in the 2016 election. It has also been widely reported in the media that officials from the upper echelon of the Trump campaign have close ties to Vladimir Putin's interests in weakening democratic governments throughout the West. There are many Americans who believe that Judge Gorsuch has been nominated for a stolen Supreme Court seat. There are also a number of Americans who believe that he has been nominated by a man whose campaign may have coordinated with foreign adversaries on stealing a Presidential election.

Let me be clear. At the moment, no evidence has been made public to indicate that this is the case, but there are few nominations that any President will make that will have more of an impact on our Constitution and on the lives of everyday Americans than the U.S. Supreme Court. To hastily move forward with Judge Gorsuch, who is 49 years old and can serve on the Supreme Court well into the middle of this century, without first getting to the bottom of the suspicious and irregular actions of the Trump campaign officials, I believe, would be a mistake.

The American people need to know that the President's campaign was above reproach before we decide whether Judge Gorsuch merits approval for a lifetime appointment.

I will close my remarks by offering a word of caution to my colleagues. We have maintained and preserved a 60-vote threshold for Supreme Court nominees to prevent Democrats and Republicans from choosing political expediency over bipartisan consensus. If Judge Gorsuch fails to obtain 60 votes on the cloture vote next week, I think it could signal one of three things. First, that Judge Gorsuch's views are outside the judicial mainstream; second, that we still have an opportunity to rectify the injustice done to Judge Garland and to our Constitution; or third, that we still do not know the nature of the relationship between the Trump campaign and Russia—a country whose leadership has ordered an attack on our election and our democracy, as well as a whole lot of other countries around the world.

If Judge Gorsuch fails to achieve 60 votes on the first try or the next try, it

does not mean that his nomination will not move forward at some point in the future. It means we have hit the pause button. It may very well be that while we pause, another vacancy on the Court could emerge. Who knows when another vacancy might occur? But if you ask me, another vacancy might present the Senate with an opportunity to right what I believe is a historic wrong, and we should see if the other objections that have been raised about Judge Gorsuch could be addressed before we change the rules of the Senate in favor of the party in power.

In closing, I will say again that Judge Garland waited 293 days for a hearing and a vote that never came. Judge Gorsuch waited 48 days for a hearing, and we will be voting on his nomination next week. Talk about a rush to judgment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. CARPER. I would ask the Presiding Officer for 15 seconds, please.

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

Mr. CARPER. Talk about a rush to judgment. We have time. The American people are watching us, and history will judge us. Let's make sure we get this right.

Let's make sure we get this right.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, as we approach the end of another week in the Senate with a 2-week recess on the horizon, I think it is a good time to reflect on where we are on various high-profile efforts and to talk about the pathways forward.

As is generally the case when any new administration comes into office, the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate began 2017 with an ambitious agenda in order to make good on the promises we have made to the American people over the last several years. Many of the key items on the agenda fall squarely in the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee, which I chair. That being the case, my colleagues on the committee and I have been hard at work, trying to find the right solutions on things like healthcare, tax reform, and trade policy.

I don't think I am going to surprise anyone when I say it hasn't been easy. Honestly, I think that might be the biggest understatement of the year.

Things have been difficult for a number of reasons. One reason is that we are coming off of a bitter election year, one that shocked a number of our colleagues. After a hotly contested campaign, it can sometimes take a while for things to return to normal. However, I don't think that excuses the tactics and rhetoric we have seen from our friends on the other side of the aisle.

In any of these big-ticket policy efforts, whether we are talking about repealing and replacing ObamaCare, fixing the Tax Code, or updating America's trade policy, cooperation between the legislative and the executive branches is key. My Democratic colleagues know this, which, I suppose, is probably the reason they appeared to be bound and determined to prevent any meaningful cooperation from happening.

Now don't get me wrong; I don't expect my friends to change their views and back policies that they find disagreeable. However, you would think, at the very least, that they would allow the new President to get his team in place, a courtesy that has typically been extended to past Presidents, regardless of party. Yet over the last few months, we have seen a systematic effort from our Democratic colleagues to smear, attack, and undermine the vast majority of executive branch nominees. In many cases, after the baseless attacks have failed to gain traction, they have used every procedural tool at their disposal, including surprise boycotts of committee mark-ups, in order to slow down the confirmation process.

This level of obstruction with regard to nominees is unprecedented. And I think it is safe to say that it has slowed our efforts down somewhat, which, I suppose, is the exact reason our colleagues have taken this path. Still, despite these childish tactics, the teams are coming together, and we are moving forward in a number of key areas. As I said, it still hasn't been easy, but to paraphrase a number of important figures, nothing worth doing is ever easy.

For example, on healthcare, I think it is safe to say that the ongoing effort to repeal and replace ObamaCare took a hit last week, but I don't think that has weakened anyone's resolve. ObamaCare is a disaster, and one way or another, it has to go away. The American people are demanding that we take action, and I expect that the volume of those demands is only going to go up.

I commend Speaker RYAN for his efforts thus far, and I commend all my colleagues in the House and Senate for their commitment to repealing and replacing the so-called Affordable Care Act. I remain hopeful that in the near future we can find a workable path forward, and that includes my Democratic colleagues as well.

On tax reform we have some indications that the Trump administration intends to be more actively engaged in finding and developing a path forward. I have said for years that if we are going to be successful in tax reform—a goal shared by Members of both parties—it is going to take Presidential leadership and cooperation by both parties. While President Obama was generally unwilling to meaningfully engage on tax reform, President Trump and his team appear to be anxious to drive the process, and I welcome that.

As with healthcare reform, there are some differences of opinion with regard to tax reform. Still, I think there is a remarkable amount of agreement, at least among Republicans, on the major issues we need to deal with to fix our broken Tax Code.

Overall, I would say that the Republicans in the Senate, the House, and the White House agree on about 80 percent of the major tax reform issues, and a number of key and fundamental questions are answered in that 80 percent. For example, we all generally agree on the need for comprehensive reform. We agree on the need to bring down tax rates for businesses and job creators. We agree that we need a simplified rate structure on the individual side. We agree on the need to fix the international tax rules to level the playing field for American companies and encourage more investment in the United States, and we generally agree on key process issues, including the appropriate revenue baselines and the use of macroeconomic analysis in budget scoring.

Still, that 20 percent of issues where we don't necessarily agree is not insignificant. We will need to find a consensus path forward on those issues as well. One area where we have yet to reach a consensus—and the one getting the most attention—is on the proposed border adjustment tax. People have a number of opinions about this, and I have had numerous people in my office on both sides of the issue. As I said, there are a number of opinions on this proposal, and they have been more than willing to express them publicly. As for myself, I am anxious to see what it looks like once our friends in the House put it all together.

It is too early for me to express a definitive position now. So at this point, all I will say is that I have some basic questions about the proposal.

For example, who will ultimately bear the tax? To what extent will it be borne by consumers, workers, shareholders, and, of course, foreigners?

Another question: Is the proposal consistent with our international trade obligations?

Finally, since border adjustability will likely be a significant shift in business tax policy, would it require us to make adjustments to ensure that we don't unduly increase the tax burden on specific industries? If so, what adjustments would be necessary, and how would they be structured?

I look forward to receiving more details on this proposal. However, here in the Senate, we also have some work to do, and I have been actively working with the members of the Finance Committee to find various solutions to our Nation's tax problems.

At the end of the day, I don't think it will surprise anyone to hear me say that I believe we are going to need to have a robust and substantive tax reform process in the Senate. In my view, it is not realistic to think that the Senate will simply take up and pass a

House bill without our Members having a significant input on the substance of the bill. That is how the Congress is supposed to operate, and I think that is what will produce the best result in the end.

I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in the House on tax reform. I also appreciate the willingness of the new Treasury Secretary and the President's National Economic Council to lead on this effort, and I look forward to continuing to work with them as well.

I will also say this: My hope is that both parties can find a way to work together on tax reform. While we have procedural tools at our disposal to get tax reform legislation through Congress with strictly Republican votes, I personally believe that it would be better to find a bipartisan path forward. A bipartisan bill would allow us to put in place more lasting reforms and give the overall effort additional credibility.

I am sure there are some who think it is impossible for Republicans and Democrats to work together on something of this magnitude, but I have been in the Senate for a long time, and I think my record for bipartisanship speaks for itself. I believe we can and should work together, and I am willing to talk and work with anyone who is willing to set politics aside and engage in good faith on these matters.

I have been banging a drum on tax reform for 6 years now, and throughout that time, I have invited my Democratic colleagues to join in this effort. I will do so again today. Hopefully, some of our colleagues on the other side will take me up on this offer.

Finally, I want to say a few words about U.S. trade policy. Trade is another area in which President Trump has some ambitious plans and in which, up to now, progress has been hindered. Before I delve into that, let me reiterate a key point.

In 2015, Congress outlined its trade priorities with our legislation to renew the trade promotion authority, which was signed into law by President Obama. The TPA statute gives clear guidance as to what a trade agreement should look like if it is going to win Congress's approval.

President Trump was fortunate to come into office with TPA already in effect, and I am committed to working with him to enact trade agreements that meet those standards established by the TPA law. When it comes to new trade agreements or revisions to modernize existing trade agreements, that is my top priority as chairman of the Senate committee with jurisdiction over trade policy. Our trade laws are designed to give Congress a voice in both the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements.

In addition to priorities and objectives outlined under TPA, there is the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, which is intended to be the chief intermediary between Congress and, of course, the administration on trade

policy matters. In other words, in order for the two branches to effectively work together on trade, the Office of the USTR needs to be fully functional and fully staffed.

Unfortunately, up to now, some on the other side have been making unreasonable and wholly unrelated demands in relation to the confirmation of President Trump's nominee to be USTR even though he has support from Members of both parties. This is unfortunate. However, I am working with my colleagues to remove any remaining roadblocks, and I am hoping we can make progress on this very soon.

As one can see, we have quite a bit of work to do here in Congress, and I am only talking about a handful of the major issues before us. I am very concerned. There are, of course, many other priorities we need to address and matters we need to resolve. I am hoping that in the coming weeks and months, as we put more distance between us and the 2016 election, more of our colleagues on both sides will be amenable to working together to address these kinds of issues even if it means allowing President Trump to claim some successes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ACT

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise to talk about a path forward on healthcare.

Last week, Republicans in the House failed to pass the American Health Care Act—a deeply flawed policy that amounted to little more than a massive tax break for the wealthy at the expense of working people. The failure of that bill means that, as Speaker RYAN put it, the ACA is the law of the land for the foreseeable future. So today I would like to invite my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to leave repeal efforts behind and instead roll up their sleeves and work with me and other Democrats to improve the system we already have, which is the law of the land for the foreseeable future. It is time to pass commonsense reforms that build on the successes of the ACA and lower healthcare costs.

In a recent HELP Committee hearing, Chairman ALEXANDER said that he wanted to work on a bipartisan basis to stabilize the individual market. Great. Let's do that. We should reinstate and strengthen programs that help insurance companies stay in the marketplace and continue to serve even the sickest patients. We should pass a public option to make sure there is competition in every market. We should provide more tax credits to more people.

While we work on those things, there is something else we should do, something that, together with a group of my colleagues, I introduced a bill about yesterday. It is time to bring down

healthcare costs for everyone by reducing the price of prescription drugs. It is time to pass the Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act.

I think all of us would agree that no one should have to choose between affording a lifesaving drug and putting food on the table for one's family, but right now that is happening. Companies are setting prices that are beyond the reach of consumers and that are driving up costs for insurers and taxpayers.

One in five Americans says he has not filled a prescription simply because he could not afford it. Others are rationing care due to high prices. A study published just last month found that about 10 percent of cancer patients skipped their medication and about 13 percent delayed filling their prescriptions. We have all been shocked by the stories of EpiPen's prices shooting up nearly 500 percent. The price of insulin has more than doubled in the last 5 years.

Drug companies can essentially set whatever prices they want. As a result, in recent years, drug companies have secured some of the highest profit margins of any industry.

Drug prices are too high. That is why my colleagues and I are introducing comprehensive legislation to tackle prescription drug prices. We want to make sure companies cannot exploit the sick and dying to make a profit. The bill includes 17 policy changes that will improve transparency, promote affordability, spur innovation, and enhance competition. Today, I would like to highlight just three of those provisions.

First, transparency. This legislation requires drug companies to disclose how much they spend on research, manufacturing, and marketing, as well as research grants from the Federal Government, to help all of us understand why prices for lifesaving drugs are so high. It is especially galling that so many drugs that are developed with taxpayer dollars are unaffordable for so many Americans. Getting this information would help all of us hold drug companies accountable, and that can be an important step toward bringing prices down.

Second—something that President Trump called for on the campaign trail—the bill will allow Medicare to negotiate lower prices for prescription drugs. It is just common sense that the biggest buyer of pharmaceutical products in America should be able to use its negotiating clout to bring prices down.

Third, the bill would end the practice of so-called pay-for-delay. Right now, drug companies that make the expensive brand-name drugs will pay other companies that make generic alternatives to keep their products off the market. This is called pay-for-delay. It is outrageous, and it is increasingly common. This bill will stop these agreements once and for all.

There is a lot more that this bill does. It penalizes companies that price-

gouge for lifesaving medicine, and I think we can all agree on that. It puts a cap on out-of-pocket drug costs in insurance plans. It speeds up generic competition. It funds new innovation and includes a number of other provisions.

Tackling the high cost of prescription drugs is an issue many of my colleagues care deeply about. This bill reflects many of their ideas and proposals, and I am grateful for their work with me. Moreover, it is obvious that the public is ready for action on this issue. Overwhelming majorities of Americans in both parties support government action to curb out-of-control drug prices.

I am eager to hear from colleagues on both sides of the aisle and from the administration about how we can work together to pass the reforms into law. This is an area of health policy that Democrats are eager to work on, and we hope the President will stand by his promise to stand up to drug companies and reduce costs for American families. It is morally wrong that some people are denied access to lifesaving drugs because they cannot afford them, and it is something we can fix.

I am in the Senate so that I can fight for policies that improve people's lives. That is why I am here. With this bill, I am trying to do exactly that. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me in helping to bring down the cost of prescription drugs.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, for 7 years, Republicans in Congress have promised to "repeal and replace ObamaCare," but not once during those 7 years did they actually put together a piece of legislation to make good on that promise.

Not once during those 7 years did Republican leaders actually convene serious hearings and meetings with patients, hospitals, insurers, and medical groups to discuss how best to reform our healthcare system, instead preferring to just rail against the law.

Not once during those 7 years did congressional Republicans actually try to sit down with Democrats and work on a bipartisan basis to improve upon the law.

But here is what they did do: They did everything possible to gum up the works, with many Republican Governors even refusing to expand Medicaid, denying millions of their constituents access to healthcare.

They went on TV, did interviews, and held campaign rallies about how all of

the challenges facing our healthcare system, challenges that we faced even before we passed the ACA, was the fault of ObamaCare and made empty promises about “repeal and replace.”

Congressional Republicans voted over 60 times to repeal the Affordable Care Act when they knew President Obama was in office and he would veto repeal—60 times.

Now, with Republicans controlling the House, the Senate, the White House, you know what they are doing? Nothing—they cancelled their vote last Friday to repeal the law.

Why? As evidenced last week, they are incapable of developing a proposal that garners the support of their own Republican Caucus. They are incapable of bringing a piece of legislation to the House Floor for a vote, despite having a large Republican majority in the House.

Now, after 17 legislative days of trying to ram through a bill that would have thrown at least 24 million people off their health insurance, reduced protections for 178 million people who have employer-based coverage, increased costs for seniors and rural communities, and given a huge tax break to drug companies and the wealthiest Americans, Republicans are giving up.

Time to move on, they say; time to tackle tax reform, they say.

Well, I, along with the majority of Americans who have benefited from this law, am relieved.

The Affordable Care Act is not perfect—no law is.

It made sure 20 million more Americans could get health insurance, including 1 million Illinoisans. As a result, our uninsured rate is at its lowest level in our Nation's history.

Young people are staying on their parents' plans till age 26, and seniors are seeing big savings on their prescription drugs.

Women can no longer be charged more than men for the same coverage, and people with preexisting conditions can no longer be discriminated against.

Annual and lifetime caps on benefits are a thing of the past, and people now have access to maternity and newborn care, as well as mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Now that Republicans have acknowledged that the Affordable Care Act is, as Speaker RYAN stated, “the law of the land . . . for the foreseeable future,” it is time to start building off of it.

Like Medicare and Social Security before it, it is time to make some bipartisan modifications that can help improve the law.

We need to increase insurer competition because, in too many of our communities, there are not enough options.

We need to address individual market premium increases because, for too many of our constituents, an affordable health plan is still out of reach.

I, along with many of my Democratic colleagues, have put forth ideas to deal with some of these issues.

I support the creation of a “public plan,” which would both increase competition in areas that are lacking and drive down premiums since, as Medicare has demonstrated time and again, the Federal Government can be more efficient than private for-profit companies.

I support legislation to bring down the high cost of prescription drugs, which are driving up premiums for families nationwide.

BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois now pays more for prescription drugs than they do on inpatient hospital costs, and they readily admit that drug costs are contributing to premium hikes.

We need to allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices. We need to end “pay for delay” agreements and get cheaper drugs on the market quicker. We need to prohibit direct-to-consumer advertising. We need more transparency into how drug prices are set, and we need penalties on drug companies that gouge the American public.

I also support enforcing portions of the law that Republicans have sabotaged and undermined since its inception. We need to allow the “risk corridor” program to operate unimpeded. We need to expand Medicaid in all States, especially since we know that premiums are highest and competition lowest in nonexpansion States, and we need to enforce the law—which is why the very first order of business going forward must be for President Trump to rescind the Executive order he issued on January 20.

The President's order directed the heads of all Federal agencies responsible for implementing and enforcing the Affordable Care Act to stand down, to not implement the law, to not enforce the law.

Now that the page has hopefully been turned on the ugly “repeal” chapter of this saga, it is time for the President and his administration to faithfully implement, enforce, and help improve this law.

I am calling on the President and congressional Republicans: Now is the time to stop undermining the law that is enjoying record support from Americans.

Now is not time to throw sand in the law's eyes, put a spoke in its wheel, and then turn around, gloat, and blame Democrats when it does not function properly.

The Affordable Care Act while championed by Democrats and President Obama, included over 100 Republican amendments and, for better or worse, borrowed heavily from Republican ideas for the marketplace.

Let's end these partisan games.

This law—the good and the shortcomings—is on all of us to improve.

Democrats have ideas, but we cannot do it alone. Remember, the Republican Party controls the House, the Senate, and the White House.

They are in charge. If improvements are going to be made, Republicans are going to have to get serious.

Now that the half-baked repeal effort has collapsed, my hope is that Republicans will finally be willing to sit down and work with Democrats. I know I am ready to pull up a chair.

RUSSIA AND TRUMP CAMPAIGN INVESTIGATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week in testimony to the House Intelligence Committee, FBI Director Comey confirmed what many of us have been urging for months: the need for an independent commission to look into the Russian act of cyber war on our election and any possible collusion with members of the Trump campaign.

Comey confirmed that the FBI was “investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government, and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russian efforts.”

He continued that FBI agents would pursue the investigation “no matter how long that takes.”

This is incredible. I am not surprised, but it is incredible. Our Nation's top law enforcement agency is investigating possible links between those involved in President Trump's campaign and a foreign adversary known to have conducted an aggressive intelligence operation to help him get elected, and all the while, this President continues to deny any such attack, praise the dictator who launched the attack, and pursue policies that mirror those of the attacker, including the weakening of the Western security alliance.

Yet what has been the priority of the majority party amid this mounting and serious breach, one we already knew about 5 months ago?

Has it been to set up an independent commission to look into this unprecedented threat to our Nation and democracy? No.

Has it been to work with the White House to disclose all information in an open and transparent manner to clear up any concerns or suspicions? No, in fact the opposite—we still haven't even seen the President's tax returns to get answers on Russian money in his businesses.

Has it been to pass sanctions on Russia for its attack on our Nation? No.

Has it been to pass meaningful cyber security legislation, legislation blocked by the majority in the last Congress to make sure our next elections in less than 2 years are secure from attack? No.

So what has been the priority instead? Well, last week, the majority voted to make it easier to kill baby bears and their mothers in their dens. The majority also reversed internet privacy protections for consumers. A few weeks ago, the majority voted to reverse a law to help mitigate corruption in some of the world's most impoverished nations.

Of course, the majority failed to advance TrumpCare, which would have

stripped 24 million Americans of healthcare, a cruel bill that would have disproportionately hurt those who voted for President Trump.

This is a dereliction of our responsibility here in the Congress. Not one of these issues is more important than getting to the bottom of possible collusion with the Russians or of the possibility that some in the White House have been compromised by a foreign government.

I want to praise the few on the majority side who have spoken out on the need for an investigation, including Senator GRAHAM and Senator MCCAIN. They noted early on the need for an independent investigation.

Today a majority of Americans also want an independent commission. I am again calling for the same. We need an independent commission, one led by American statesmen or women of unquestioned reputation, say Sandra Day O'Connor or Colin Powell.

We did this after the attack of September 11, and this attack and its unanswered questions demand nothing less again today.

JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last week I spoke about the importance of the rule of law in Guatemala and praised the work of Attorney General Thelma Aldana and the commissioner of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, Ivan Velasquez. These two individuals have helped to create hope among the Guatemalan people in the possibility of justice in a country where the justice system has too often been used to perpetuate corruption, impunity, and inequality.

The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, has been strongly supported by the United States. I commended President Morales when, shortly after taking office last January, he extended CICIG's mandate. He has affirmed that he supports CICIG's mandate through September 2019, for which, again, I commend him.

Last week, I expressed a concern that had been conveyed to me by several individuals that President Morales might recommend against renewal of Mr. Velasquez as commissioner beyond September 2017, when Mr. Velasquez's current term expires. In response, according to press reports, President Morales denied this and said he supports Mr. Velasquez for as long as Mr. Velasquez does the job he is supposed to do.

Ivan Velasquez is a respected former judge from Colombia who has carried out his responsibilities as the commissioner of CICIG with professionalism. He and Attorney General Aldana have collaborated on sensitive, complex cases, which until recently would never have been prosecuted in Guatemala, given its history of impunity. It is important that their collaboration continue for as long as possible.

I welcome President Morales's public statement of support for CICIG and for Mr. Velasquez, particularly at a time when the U.S. Congress is again being asked to provide hundreds of millions of dollars to support the Alliance for Prosperity Plan. That plan, which is in its early stages, has the potential to make progress in combating the poverty, lack of opportunity, inequality, violence, and impunity that are among the key contributors to migration from Central America to the United States. These are deeply rooted problems that the Central American countries and the United States have a strong interest in working together to address.

For the Alliance for Prosperity Plan to succeed, each of the Central American governments needs to take steps that their predecessors were unwilling or unable to take. Those steps include ensuring that senior government officials and their advisers are people of integrity; redefining the antagonistic relationship between government and civil society, to one of mutual respect for each other's legitimate role; fully supporting efforts to combat corruption by CICIG and by the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras—El Salvador should also recognize the important role these entities are playing and support the establishment of a similar commission to combat corruption and impunity in that country—increasing the budget of the Office of the Attorney General, so they have the necessary personnel, training, equipment, and protection to carry out their responsibilities throughout the country, especially in areas where they have never had the resources to operate; supporting the independence of the judiciary, including the selection of judges based on their qualifications and the principle of equal access to justice; and building transparent and accountable institutions of democracy that can withstand attempts to subvert the rights of the people, including demilitarizing law enforcement and building professional, civilian police forces.

It is the responsibility of the Central American governments to take these steps and, by doing so, create the conditions for building more prosperous, equitable, and just societies. If they do that and they meet the other conditions in U.S. law, the United States should support them.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTIONS

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, today I wish to express my disappointment in today's vote on H.J. Res. 67 and my strong opposition to H.J. Res. 66. These resolutions overturn rules issued by the Department of Labor that are essential to providing increased access to retirement savings programs at the city and State levels.

Among all working families in America ages 32 to 61, the median family in

America had only \$5,000 saved in 2013. This indicates to me that we are clearly facing a retirement savings crisis.

In California, 7.5 million workers don't have access to a retirement savings plan through their jobs, including 3.4 million women. Of those without a workplace retirement savings plan, almost 5 million are individuals of Color, and over 3.5 million are Latino.

The good news is that, when a person has access to a retirement savings program through their workplace, they are 15 times more likely to save for retirement.

In California, legislators have been working for more than 4 years to create the Secure Choice program as a way of addressing the retirement crisis we face. This program allows workers to easily save for retirement through a deduction made directly from their paycheck.

Those who need access to a workplace retirement program the most, individuals with lower incomes, are far less likely to have that access. These are the people who stand to gain the most from the Secure Choice program and lose the most by Congress halting its progress.

Let me share some examples of the people who would be impacted. Most eligible employees work for small businesses that might not be able to offer retirement savings plans on their own, and nearly half of eligible workers work in the retail, hospitality, healthcare, and manufacturing industries.

This program supports lower- and middle-class workers by providing access to the tools they need to control their financial future. The average wage of workers eligible for this program is \$35,000, and 80 percent of eligible workers earn less than \$50,000.

We are facing a time of deep income inequality and must stand up for programs that support the middle class, like Secure Choice. Nationwide, the bottom 90 percent of households have seen their income drop compared to what it was in 1970. Meanwhile, the top 1 percent has seen their household income triple.

As workers struggle to make ends meet, it is appalling to me that Congress would actively take away a key resource for financial planning.

Californians want to ensure that all employees have access to a retirement savings program. The Department of Labor's State rule clears the way for California to set up programs like Secure Choice by clarifying employers' obligations to the accounts.

This rule would also help small businesses compete for qualified workers who expect and deserve access to a workplace retirement savings program. Small Business California supports the Department of Labor's rule paving the way for these programs and opposes this resolution.

Finally, in California, our State chapter of the Chamber of Commerce specifically asked for an opinion from

the Department of Labor on employer obligations. Once the Department of Labor's rule was issued, CalChamber no longer opposed the California bill.

In fact, the legislation that passed in California requires the State board to report a finalized rule from the Department of Labor. Overturning the Department of Labor's rule completely ignores the effort and care taken in California to craft a program that works for both employees and employers.

Nationally, almost half of working-age households do not have retirement savings accounts, and 55 million people don't have access to a workplace retirement plan. This is shocking.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, the median retirement account savings for families ages 56 to 61 was only \$17,000 in 2013. This is only slightly higher than the 2016 poverty threshold for a household of two people aged 65 and older. It is inconceivable that a family could afford to finance their retirement with only \$17,000 in savings.

Supporting retirement savings is not a partisan issue. In fact a bipartisan group of State treasurers oppose this resolution, as does the National Conference of State Legislatures.

We are facing a retirement savings crisis in our country, and the Department of Labor's rule is a simple, commonsense guideline that make it easier for individuals to save for retirement.

While today's vote is a disappointing development for city programs, I will keep fighting to support California's Secure Choice program. I strongly urge my colleagues to stand up for American workers and support their access to retirement savings programs by opposing H.J. Res. 66, should it come up for a vote on the Senate floor.

Thank you.

DISCHARGE PETITION—S.J. RES. 19

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, hereby direct that the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S.J. Res. 19, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to prepaid accounts under the Electronic Fund Transfer Act and the Truth in Lending Act.

David Perdue, Mike Crapo, Rob Portman, Steve Daines, Lamar Alexander, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, Mitch McConnell, Roger Wicker, Ted Cruz, Patrick Toomey, Ron Johnson, Mike Lee, Shelley Moore Capito, John Hoeven, James Lankford, Thom Tillis, John Kennedy, James M. Inhofe, John Boozman, John Thune, Michael B. Enzi, Johnny Isakson, James E. Risch, Tom Cotton, Thad Cochran, Jeff Flake, Luther Strange, Richard Shelby, Pat Roberts, John Barrasso.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO GARY PETERSEN

• Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to a dear friend, honorable servicemember, and dedicated public servant. On March 3, Gary Petersen retired from over a half-century career of private and public service supporting scientific achievement and advocacy for the people of my home State of Washington. Gary has worked tirelessly to support the Hanford cleanup and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, PNNL, and has undoubtedly bolstered our Nation's security during the 52 years that he has lived and worked in the Tri-Cities.

Gary and I have collaborated closely many times over the years on many projects. Most recently, he played a key role in organizing the energy workforce roundtable held at PNNL with Department of Energy Secretary Moniz in August of last year. Gary has been a steadfast advocate for cleaning up the Hanford site, funding for the world-class research and development at PNNL, and for the continued growth of the Volpentest HAMMER Training Center at the Hanford site. I am confident that Washington State, and especially the Tri-Cities, would not be as well positioned to tackle our Nation's future energy challenges if not for over 50 years of Gary Petersen's tireless work.

Originally from Omak, a small city located in Okanogan County, Gary joined the Army and was stationed in the Tri-Cities in January 1960. After a duty station transfer to Korea, Gary returned and graduated with a communications degree from Washington State University. Shortly after graduation, Gary started with Battelle, a company that had a contract for a research and development lab located at Hanford. That lab provided crucial services during the Cold War and is now known as PNNL. Gary went on to work for Westinghouse on the Fast Flux Test Facility, the Washington Public Power Supply System, and spent time with the International Nuclear Safety Program, a cooperative nuclear energy safety effort between the U.S. and Soviet Union. After retiring from Battelle in 2002, Gary served on the Tri-City Development Council, TRIDEC, an organization dedicated to improving the economic health of the Tri-Cities area.

During his 14 years at TRIDEC, Gary has been a relentless supporter for DOE's missions at Hanford and PNNL and a champion for the larger Tri-City community and our State by ensuring important projects received needed Federal resources. Gary is the type of constituent every member hopes to have in their communities back home—a very involved citizen. He has been a strong advocate for the issues that matter to the people of Washington while also understanding the importance of communicating with his

political representatives. My relationship with Gary has been invaluable, and he has been instrumental in many of my proudest career accomplishments.

Gary shares my vision for why establishing the Manhattan Project National Historical Park was so important. We worked together for many years to champion and ultimately see the creation of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. The legislation I authored preserved the central landmark of the Hanford site and the park, the B Reactor, the first full-scale plutonium production nuclear reactor ever built and a tremendous technological achievement for its time. The park also includes the Bruggemann Agricultural Warehouse, the White Bluffs Bank, the historic Hanford High School, and the Hanford Irrigation District's Allard Pump House. Visitors from 70 countries have already visited the B Reactor, demonstrating the uniqueness of the park and the curiosity people have about this chapter of American and world history. We all owe Gary a debt of gratitude for the establishment of this park.

Today the Tri-Cities is home to a vibrant agricultural industry, some of the best healthcare available, two colleges that are training workers to meet the varied needs of the region's businesses, increasing wine tourism, and a newly expanded airport. Gary has touched all of these projects and many more.

I am incredibly proud to have worked with Gary and to call him a friend. Gary, thank you for all of your years of advocacy for the Tri-Cities. I join Washingtonians in thanking him for his longstanding service and wish him and his wife, Margaret, all the best in the future.●

TRIBUTE TO JENNY GENDER

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, this week, I have the distinct honor of recognizing Jenny Gender of Jefferson County for her selfless commitment to others in her local community. Jenny is a wonderful example of a local leader who is always willing to take on additional responsibility and devote her time and talent to others.

Jenny graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in sociology. At her graduation in Missoula, one of the soldiers in the honor guard escorting the national flag caught her attention. With that chance encounter as the spark, the two were married about a year later. The young couple settled near Helena, in Montana City, where today they are raising their four children. In Helena, Jenny became very active in the Mothers of Preschoolers, also known as MOPS, by serving initially as the director of hospitality, and then after a period of rapid growth, she graciously took on additional duties as the president of a newly formed MOPS group. Jenny served in this capacity for nearly 8 years.

A few years ago, Jenny passed on her MOPS leadership baton and began serving as the chairperson for the education program in her church. As chairperson, Jenny spurred a program to have educational activities available during parent-teacher conferences in order to help parents attend the conferences. Jenny also volunteers each week at the local pregnancy resource center and coordinates the center's annual banquet. Not only does Jenny excel at serving her community, she has done so even while her husband, Noah, a Montana Army National Guard pilot, was gone for nearly a year conducting missions in southwest Asia.

Montana is a State with many unsung heroes, and people like Jenny are the community glue that make Montana a great place to raise a family. For her efforts to serve, educate, and inspire those around her, Montana is sincerely thankful. Thank you, Jenny.●

REMEMBERING COLONEL EDWIN DON STRICKFADEN

● Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, my colleague Senator MIKE CRAPO joins me today in honoring the life of Colonel Edwin Don Strickfaden, who dedicated 35 years to protecting the citizens of Idaho through his service in Idaho law enforcement.

Colonel Strickfaden led the Idaho State Police, ISP, with distinction, serving as director when two Idaho law enforcement agencies were combined to form one ISP and leading the force to accomplish many law enforcement successes furthering the security of our communities. Current Idaho State Police director Colonel Ralph Powell recognized Colonel Strickfaden as a "champion for all law enforcement throughout the state," and a "charismatic leader" who "worked tirelessly to keep us safe." Colonel Strickfaden—Ed to most of us—joined Idaho law enforcement in 1967 after serving 4 years in the U.S. Air Force. A native Idahoan, Ed was born on August 3, 1945, to Don and Ruth Strickfaden in Nez Perce, ID, and served many communities throughout Idaho before retiring in 2002 making a home with his wife, Barbara, in Salmon, ID. Barbara has worked for my Gubernatorial and U.S. Senate offices, which has given us more opportunities to interact with this remarkable Idahoan.

Colonel Strickfaden was known for his thoughtful, reasoned, and inspiring leadership. Although this example of his bravery and devotion to helping others was already highlighted in a 2003 CONGRESSIONAL RECORD statement, it is worthy of repeating as it is emblematic of how he served. Colonel Strickfaden was honored by then-Governor Cecil Andrus for diving into the icy December waters of the Clearwater River to rescue a woman from a submerged vehicle. His sense of duty and clear empathy for the people he served was an outstanding example to many.

Colonel Strickfaden made an extraordinary difference in the lives of Ida-

hoans he served and the many who knew him. We thank him for his outstanding service as we join his family, including Barbara and their beloved children, grandchildren, and great-grandchild and many friends in mourning his passing and honoring his loving legacy.●

TRIBUTE TO HOT SHOTS INC.

● Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, known for its diverse natural resources and awe-inspiring landscapes, Idaho is a place of countless possibilities, where citizens with determination and ambition can lay the foundation for their own success. I am particularly proud of my home State's entrepreneurs who continue to pioneer new enterprises that bring our communities together and inspire a creative spirit in Idahoans across the State. These traits are well represented in this month's Small Business of the Month. As chairman of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I am pleased to honor Hot Shots Inc. delivery service as the Senate Small Business of the Month for March 2017.

Founded by Lance and Mary Curtis, Hot Shots Inc. is a family-owned and operated small business headquartered in Boise, ID. The innovative vision of the company is driven by a management team with over 50 years of combined experience in courier services. Hot Shots Inc. has provided delivery services in the Boise area since 1998. Their offerings are distinct in that they are capable of delivering anything from small parcels to large freight throughout the Treasure Valley, Sun Valley, Magic Valley, and Twin Falls, all with a same-day guarantee. Over the years, this company has earned and maintained a high level of trust in the Boise area, as is evident through their special delivery service which allows them to access a number of secure locations such as corporate, banking, medical, government, and military sites. Part of what makes Hot Shots Inc. a successful enterprise is its use of modern technology, specifically its utilization of an online ordering system, a GPS package tracking system, and an email notification system. The company has adapted with technological advances, making all of these changes to support mobile transactions. All of these advances help instill confidence in every customer that his or her package, parcel, or shipment will arrive on time. This commitment to customer service has helped the company excel in its field and allowed Hot Shots Inc. to enter new markets such as warehousing.

Hot Shots Inc. has been a pillar of the community since they first opened their doors. This family-run business has displayed its commitment to the Boise community in a variety of ways, whether by delivering diapers for the Idaho Diaper Bank or through their support of the Idaho Foodbank Backpack Program, among other commu-

nity service activities. I would like to extend my sincerest congratulations to Lance and Mary Curtis and the employees of Hot Shots Inc. for being chosen as the March 2017 Small Business of the Month. You make our great State proud, and I look forward to watching your continued growth and success.●

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PURCHASE OF ALASKA

● Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, today, March 30, marks that 150th anniversary of the date when President Andrew Johnson signed the treaty with Russia for the purchase of Alaska. It is a big day for my State, and for the past few months, I have been diving into the archives and doing some research about the treaty and about the first few years of challenges following the signing. As you can imagine, building a State out of a frontier, particularly one so far away from the rest of the country and in such an extreme climate, was challenging, to say the least. It demanded, and still does, a certain kind of person with a certain kind of toughness, vision, and a determination to work for the good of all. Let me give you an example of what it has required.

Some members of the first territorial legislature in 1913—46 years after the purchase—who lived in far flung places faced a challenge. Specifically how to get to Juneau to begin to hash out creating the rules of a new territory.

Of course, there were no commercial airlines in those days—no snow machines, so four members from Nome—lawyers, miners, and businessmen—hitched up their dog teams, headed to Valdez, and took a steamship to Juneau. It took them nearly 2 months to get there. When they did arrive, the first order of business was this: granting women the right to vote, 7 years before Congress ratified the 19th Amendment.

That is the heritage of every one in Alaska, and that is the same spirit, of traveling far against the odds, to do what is right, that still animates my great State. It animates people who haven't even been to Alaska. My State is more than a place with set geographic boundaries. My State is also an idea, a dream; it goes beyond borders and represents so much about America that we hold dear: beauty, freedom, self-sufficiency. It has been this way even before Alaska became a territory—when a group of people, led by former Secretary of State William Seward, pushed the country to buy Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million. As has been proven, that was a good deal.

Every week, I have been coming down to recognize an Alaskan of the Week, a special person who gives their time, energy, and talents to making our State the best in the country.

Today I want to speak about someone who I will call an honorary Alaskan. Today I would like to name Senator Charles Sumner our posthumous Alaskan of the Week. Senator Sumner

never set foot in my State, but he knew Alaska well. We are a State because of him, and others, including Secretary of State William Seward, who had vision and tenacity.

Senator Sumner was born on January 6, 1811, in Boston, MA. He was a lawyer, a professor, and then a politician. He was a man of purpose, principle, and many, many words and opinions. In fact, he was nearly caned to death while working in the Senate Chambers, by one of his colleagues—a congressman from the South—for expressing his opinions on the horrors of slavery. It was a deplorable act, and it cast a pall of shame over this body for years. Senator Sumner never really recovered, but after a long convalescence, he set his sights on the Alaska Purchase.

He was skeptical, at first, until Secretary of State Seward got his ear, and he immersed himself into the accounts of the promise of this new territory, which turned him into an ardent supporter. On April, 8, 1867, Senator Sumner, using only notecards, gave a 3-hour speech on the Senate floor about our State.

He spoke of Alaska's abundant resources. He saw the Pacific as the ocean of the future and argued that Alaska is the key to that future. He spoke of the treasures—the gold in our land, the veins of coal, our huge mineral deposits, and the treasures below the Arctic Ocean. He talked about the “multitudes of fish,” the thousands of acres of timber, and the opening of new trade routes.

He and others saw in Alaska the “Eden of the North”—a future which would entail up to 1 million self-sufficient Americans supported by the resources of the land. Owning Alaska would give us greater control of the next “great theater of action” in the Arctic and Asia-Pacific, for both national security and economic reason.

In the new territory of Alaska, “Commerce will find new arms; the country new defenders, the national flag new hands to bear it aloft,” Senator Sumner argued. A “boundless and glorious future,” awaits, he and other supporters argued.

Senator Sumner ended his epic 1867 speech by arguing that the whole territory, not just the peninsula, should be given the name by the people who lived here. “It should be indigenous, original, coming from the soil,” he said. “Alaska,” he concluded, “the great land.”

The day after Sumner's Senate speech, the once-skeptical U.S. Senate approved the purchase by a vote of 37 to 2. One hundred and fifty years later, Alaska has made good on that early promise. We have contributed enormous resources to our country. We are vital to our country's national defense, our national pride, and our economic growth. We still have the vision of Secretary of State Seward and Senator Sumner driving us toward a brighter future. Thanks to Senator Sumner and to the people of Massachusetts who

gave us such a brave leader—our honorary Alaskan of the Week.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 9:35 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1430. An act to prohibit the Environmental Protection Agency from proposing, finalizing, or disseminating regulations or assessments based upon science that is not transparent or reproducible.

ENROLLED JOINT RESOLUTION SIGNED

The message further announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled joint resolution:

S.J. Res. 34. Joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Federal Communications Commission relating to “Protecting the Privacy of Customers of Broadband and Other Telecommunications Services”.

The enrolled joint resolution was subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

At 1:00 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1431. An act to amend the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act of 1978 to provide for Scientific Advisory Board member qualifications, public participation, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

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

H.R. 1430. An act to prohibit the Environmental Protection Agency from proposing, finalizing, or disseminating regulations or assessments based upon science that is not transparent or reproducible; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

H.R. 1431. An act to amend the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act of 1978 to provide for Scientific Advisory Board member qualifications, public participation, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

MEASURES DISCHARGED

The following joint resolution was discharged by petition, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 802(c), and placed on the calendar:

S.J. Res. 19. Joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to prepaid accounts under the Electronic Fund Transfer Act and the Truth in Lending Act.

ENROLLED JOINT RESOLUTION PRESENTED

The Secretary of the Senate reported that on today, March 30, 2017, she had

presented to the President of the United States the following enrolled joint resolution:

S.J. Res. 34. Joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Federal Communications Commission relating to “Protecting the Privacy of Customers of Broadband and Other Telecommunications Services”.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. THUNE, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, without amendment:

S. 110. A bill to require the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to establish a constituent-driven program to provide a digital information platform capable of efficiently integrating coastal data with decision-support tools, training, and best practices and to support collection of priority coastal geospatial data to inform and improve local, State, regional, and Federal capacities to manage the coastal region, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 115-14).

S. 129. A bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 115-15).

S. 168. A bill to amend and enhance certain maritime programs of the Department of Transportation (Rept. No. 115-16).

By Mr. ISAKSON, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

Special Report entitled “Legislative and Oversight Activities During the 114th Congress by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs” (Rept. No. 115-17).

By Mr. THUNE, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation:

Special Report entitled “Report on the Legislative Activities of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation During the 114th Congress” (Rept. No. 115-18).

By Mr. GRASSLEY, from the Committee on the Judiciary:

Special Report entitled “Report on the Activities of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary During the 114th Congress” (Rept. No. 115-19).

By Mr. SHELBY, from the Committee on Rules and Administration:

Special Report entitled “Review of Legislative Activity During the 114th Congress” (Rept. No. 115-20).

By Mr. THUNE, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 141. A bill to improve understanding and forecasting of space weather events, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 115-21).

By Mr. CORKER, from the Committee on Foreign Relations:

Special Report entitled “Legislative Activities Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress” (Rept. No. 115-22).

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mr. ROBERTS for the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

*Sonny Perdue, of Georgia, to be Secretary of Agriculture.

By Mr. ALEXANDER for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

*R. Alexander Acosta, of Florida, to be Secretary of Labor.

*Nomination was reported with recommendation that it be confirmed subject to the nominee's commitment to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

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

By Mr. HATCH:

S. 775. A bill to streamline the R-1 religious worker visa petition process; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. WYDEN:

S. 776. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for the taxation and regulation of marijuana products, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. WYDEN (for himself, Mr. PAUL, Mr. BENNET, and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 777. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow deductions and credits relating to expenditures in connection with marijuana sales conducted in compliance with State law; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. KLOBUCHAR (for herself, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. MANCHIN, and Mr. KING):

S. 778. A bill to require the use of prescription drug monitoring programs and to facilitate information sharing among States; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. REED (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Ms. HEITKAMP, and Mr. LEAHY):

S. 779. A bill to enhance civil penalties under the Federal securities laws, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. WYDEN:

S. 780. A bill to amend the Controlled Substances Act to reduce the gap between Federal and State marijuana policy, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. CASSIDY (for himself, Mr. KING, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. 781. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to limit the liability of health care professionals who volunteer to provide health care services in response to a disaster; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. HELLER, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 782. A bill to reauthorize the National Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Ms. BALDWIN (for herself and Ms. MURKOWSKI):

S. 783. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to distribute maternity care health professionals to health professional shortage areas identified as in need of maternity care health services; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. ISAKSON (for himself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. MORAN, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. HELLER, Mr. CASSIDY, Mr. ROUNDS, Mr. TILLIS, Mr. SULLIVAN, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. BROWN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. HIRONO, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. 784. A bill to provide for an increase, effective December 1, 2017, in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. SULLIVAN (for himself and Ms. MURKOWSKI):

S. 785. A bill to amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to provide for equitable allotment of land to Alaska Native veterans; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mrs. SHAHEEN:

S. 786. A bill to establish a grant program relating to the prevention of student and student athlete opioid misuse; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. GARDNER (for himself and Mr. PETERS):

S. 787. A bill to require the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation to test the effect of including telehealth services in Medicare health care delivery reform models; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MCCAIN:

S. 788. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an independent review of the deaths of certain veterans by suicide, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. CRUZ (for himself, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. COTTON, and Mr. BOOZMAN):

S. 789. A bill to exempt from the Lacey Act and the Lacey Act Amendments of 1981 certain water transfers between any of the States of Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. HATCH (for himself and Mr. BENNET):

S. 790. A bill to amend the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 to encourage innovation, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. PETERS (for himself and Mr. RISCH):

S. 791. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to expand intellectual property education and training for small businesses, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Mr. TILLIS (for himself, Mr. KING, Mr. THUNE, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. ROUNDS, Mr. CORNYN, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. BLUNT):

S. 792. A bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to establish an H-2B temporary non-agricultural work visa program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. BOOKER (for himself, Mrs. CAPITO, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. PETERS, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. WICKER, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. PORTMAN, and Mr. SCHATZ):

S. 793. A bill to prohibit sale of shark fins, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. ISAKSON (for himself, Mr. CARPER, Mr. BOOZMAN, and Ms. STABENOW):

S. 794. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act in order to improve the process whereby Medicare administrative contractors issue local coverage determinations under the Medicare program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. BENNET (for himself and Mr. HATCH):

S. 795. A bill to amend the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 regarding dual or concurrent enrollment and

early college high schools; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. WARNER (for himself, Mr. THUNE, and Mr. KING):

S. 796. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the exclusion for employer-provided education assistance to employer payments of student loans; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. BROWN (for himself and Mr. HELLER):

S. 797. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make permanent the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance matching grant program; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. CASSIDY (for himself, Mr. BROWN, and Mr. TILLIS):

S. 798. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program to apply to individuals pursuing programs of education while on active duty, to recipients of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry scholarship, and to programs of education pursued on half-time basis or less, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. WARNER (for himself and Mr. RUBIO):

S. 799. A bill to simplify and improve the Federal student loan program through income-contingent repayment to provide stronger protections for borrowers, encourage responsible borrowing, and save money for taxpayers; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. CANTWELL (for herself, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. DURBIN):

S. 800. A bill to protect taxpayers from liability associated with the reclamation of surface coal mining operations, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. DONNELLY (for himself, Ms. HEITKAMP, Mr. TESTER, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S.J. Res. 39. A joint resolution proposing a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution of the United States; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

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

By Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. BENNET, Mr. BOOKER, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Ms. HARRIS, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. UDALL, and Ms. WARREN):

S. Res. 104. A resolution honoring the accomplishments and legacy of Cesar Estrada Chavez; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. WYDEN (for himself and Mr. MERKLEY):

S. Res. 105. A resolution recognizing 2017 as the 100th anniversary of the creation of the 41st Division; to the Committee on Armed Services.

By Mr. WICKER (for himself and Mr. CARDIN):

S. Res. 106. A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate to support the territorial integrity of Georgia; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mrs. CAPITO (for herself and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. Res. 107. A resolution congratulating the rifle team of West Virginia University on winning the 2017 National Collegiate Athletic Association Rifle Championship; considered and agreed to.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 96

At the request of Ms. KLOBUCHAR, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mrs. MCCASKILL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 96, a bill to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to ensure the integrity of voice communications and to prevent unjust or unreasonable discrimination among areas of the United States in the delivery of such communications.

S. 129

At the request of Mr. NELSON, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 129, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

S. 130

At the request of Ms. BALDWIN, the name of the Senator from Maine (Mr. KING) was added as a cosponsor of S. 130, a bill to require enforcement against misbranded milk alternatives.

S. 200

At the request of Mr. MARKEY, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 200, a bill to prohibit the conduct of a first-use nuclear strike absent a declaration of war by Congress.

S. 253

At the request of Mr. CARDIN, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 253, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to repeal the Medicare outpatient rehabilitation therapy caps.

S. 382

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 382, a bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a voluntary registry to collect data on cancer incidence among firefighters.

S. 407

At the request of Mr. CRAPO, the names of the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) were added as cosponsors of S. 407, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permanently extend the railroad track maintenance credit.

S. 431

At the request of Mr. THUNE, the name of the Senator from Iowa (Mr. GRASSLEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 431, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to expand the use of telehealth for individuals with stroke.

S. 464

At the request of Mr. MARKEY, the names of the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY) and the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) were added as cosponsors of S. 464, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for a permanent Independence at Home medical practice program under the Medicare program.

S. 512

At the request of Mr. BARRASSO, the name of the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 512, a bill to modernize the regulation of nuclear energy.

S. 693

At the request of Ms. BALDWIN, the names of the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) and the Senator from Maine (Mr. KING) were added as cosponsors of S. 693, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to increase the number of permanent faculty in palliative care at accredited allopathic and osteopathic medical schools, nursing schools, social work schools, and other programs, including physician assistant education programs, to promote education and research in palliative care and hospice, and to support the development of faculty careers in academic palliative medicine.

S. 720

At the request of Mr. PORTMAN, the names of the Senator from Utah (Mr. HATCH), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. PERDUE), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) were added as cosponsors of S. 720, a bill to amend the Export Administration Act of 1979 to include in the prohibitions on boycotts against allies of the United States boycotts fostered by international governmental organizations against Israel and to direct the Export-Import Bank of the United States to oppose boycotts against Israel, and for other purposes.

S. 722

At the request of Mr. CORKER, the name of the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 722, a bill to impose sanctions with respect to Iran in relation to Iran's ballistic missile program, support for acts of international terrorism, and violations of human rights, and for other purposes.

S. 733

At the request of Ms. MURKOWSKI, the names of the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) and the Senator from Alabama (Mr. STRANGE) were added as cosponsors of S. 733, a bill to protect and enhance opportunities for recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting, and for other purposes.

S.J. RES. 2

At the request of Mr. CRUZ, the name of the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL) was added as a cosponsor of S.J. Res. 2, a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States relative to limiting the number of terms that a Member of Congress may serve.

S. RES. 92

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULIVAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 92, a resolution expressing concern over the disappearance of David Sneddon, and for other purposes.

S. RES. 100

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the name of the Senator from Virginia (Mr.

KAINE) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 100, a resolution condemning illegal Russian aggression in Ukraine on the three year anniversary of the annexation of Crimea.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. REED (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Ms. HEITKAMP, and Mr. LEAHY):

S. 779. A bill to enhance civil penalties under the Federal securities laws, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, the Stronger Enforcement of Civil Penalties Act, which I reintroduce today with Senator GRASSLEY, Senator HEITKAMP, and Senator LEAHY, will enhance the ability of securities regulators to protect investors and demand greater accountability from market players. Even after the financial crisis that crippled the economy, we continue to see calculated wrongdoing by some on Wall Street, and without the consequence of meaningful penalties to serve as an effective deterrent, I fear this disturbing culture of misconduct will persist.

Today, the amount of penalties the Securities and Exchange Commission, or SEC can fine an institution or individual is limited by statute. During hearings I held in 2011 in the Securities, Insurance, and Investment Banking Subcommittee, I learned how this limitation significantly interferes with the SEC's ability to perform its enforcement duties. At that time, the agency had been criticized by a Federal judge for not obtaining a larger settlement against Citigroup, a major player in the financial crisis that settled with the SEC in an amount that was a fraction of the cost the bank had inflicted on investors. The SEC explained that the reason for the low settlement amount was a statutory prohibition against levying a larger penalty. Indeed, then SEC Chairman Mary L. Schapiro in 2011 also explained that "the Commission's statutory authority to obtain civil monetary penalties with appropriate deterrent effect is limited in many circumstances."

The bipartisan bill Senator GRASSLEY and I are reintroducing finally updates the SEC's civil penalties statute. This bill strives to make potential and current offenders think twice before engaging in misconduct by increasing the maximum civil monetary penalties permitted by statute, directly linking the size of the maximum penalties to the amount of losses suffered by victims of a violation and substantially raising the financial stakes for repeat offenders of our Nation's securities laws.

Specifically, our bill would give the SEC more options to tailor penalties to the specific circumstances of a given violation. In addition to raising the per violation caps for severe, or "tier

three," violations to \$1 million per offense for individuals and \$10 million per offense for entities, the legislation would also give the SEC additional options to obtain greater penalties based on the ill-gotten gains of the violator or on the financial harm to investors.

Our bill also addresses the disturbing trend of repeat offenders on Wall Street through two provisions. The first would allow the SEC to triple the penalty cap applicable to recidivists who have been held either criminally or civilly liable for securities fraud within the previous 5 years. The second would allow the SEC to seek a civil penalty against those that violate existing Federal court or SEC orders, an approach that would be more efficient, effective, and flexible than the current civil contempt remedy. Both of these changes would substantially improve the ability of the SEC's enforcement program to ratchet up penalties for recidivists.

Slightly more than half of all U.S. households are invested in the stock market. They deserve a strong cop on the beat that has the tools it needs to go after fraudsters and pursue the difficult cases arising from our increasingly complex financial markets. The Stronger Enforcement of Civil Penalties Act will give the SEC more tools to demand meaningful accountability from Wall Street, which in turn will increase transparency and confidence in our financial system. I urge our colleagues to support this important bipartisan legislation to enhance the SEC's ability to protect investors and to deter and crack down on fraud.

By Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. HELLER, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 782. A bill to reauthorize the National Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

S. 782

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Providing Resources, Officers, and Technology To Eradicate Cyber Threats to Our Children Act of 2017" or the "PROTECT Our Children Act of 2017".

SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF THE NATIONAL INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN TASK FORCE PROGRAM.

Title I of the PROTECT Our Children Act of 2008 (42 U.S.C. 17601 et seq.) is amended—

(1) in section 105(h) (42 U.S.C. 17615(h)), by striking "2016" and inserting "2022"; and

(2) in section 107(a)(10) (42 U.S.C. 17617(a)(10)), by striking "fiscal year 2018" and inserting "each of fiscal years 2018 through 2022".

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 104—HONORING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LEGACY OF CÉSAR ESTRADA CHÁVEZ

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. BENNET, Mr. BOOKER, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Ms. HARRIS, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MERKLEY, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. UDALL, and Ms. WARREN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 104

Whereas César Estrada Chávez was born on March 31, 1927, near Yuma, Arizona;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez spent his early years on a family farm;

Whereas, at the age of 10, César Estrada Chávez joined the thousands of migrant farm workers laboring in fields and vineyards throughout the Southwest after a bank foreclosure resulted in the loss of the family farm;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez, after attending more than 30 elementary and middle schools and achieving an eighth grade education, left school to work full-time as a farm worker to help support his family;

Whereas, at the age of 17, César Estrada Chávez entered the United States Navy and served the United States with distinction for 2 years;

Whereas, in 1948, César Estrada Chávez returned from military service to marry Helen Fabela, whom he had met while working in the vineyards of central California;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez and Helen Fabela had 8 children;

Whereas, as early as 1949, César Estrada Chávez was committed to organizing farm workers to campaign for safe and fair working conditions, reasonable wages, livable housing, and the outlawing of child labor;

Whereas, in 1952, César Estrada Chávez joined the Community Service Organization, a prominent Latino civil rights group, and worked with the organization to coordinate voter registration drives and conduct campaigns against discrimination in east Los Angeles;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez served as the national director of the Community Service Organization;

Whereas, in 1962, César Estrada Chávez left the Community Service Organization to found the National Farm Workers Association, which eventually became the United Farm Workers of America;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez was a strong believer in the principles of non-violence practiced by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez effectively used peaceful tactics, including fasting for 25 days in 1968, 25 days in 1972, and 38 days in 1988, to call attention to the terrible working and living conditions of farm workers in the United States;

Whereas, under the leadership of César Estrada Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America organized thousands of migrant farm workers to fight for fair wages, health care coverage, pension benefits, livable housing, and respect;

Whereas, through his commitment to non-violence, César Estrada Chávez brought dignity and respect to the organized farm workers and became an inspiration to and a resource for individuals engaged in human rights struggles throughout the world;

Whereas the influence of César Estrada Chávez extends far beyond agriculture and provides inspiration for individuals working to better human rights, empower workers, and advance the American Dream, which includes all inhabitants of the United States;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez died on April 23, 1993, at the age of 66 in San Luis, Arizona, only miles from his birthplace;

Whereas more than 50,000 individuals attended the funeral services of César Estrada Chávez in Delano, California;

Whereas César Estrada Chávez was laid to rest at the headquarters of the United Farm Workers of America, known as "Nuestra Señora de La Paz", located in the Tehachapi Mountains in Keene, California;

Whereas, since the death of César Estrada Chávez, schools, parks, streets, libraries, and other public facilities, as well as awards and scholarships, have been named in his honor;

Whereas 10 States and dozens of communities across the United States honor the life and legacy of César Estrada Chávez each year on March 31;

Whereas, during his lifetime, César Estrada Chávez was a recipient of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Prize;

Whereas, on August 8, 1994, César Estrada Chávez was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom;

Whereas President Barack Obama honored the life of service of César Estrada Chávez by proclaiming March 31, 2012, to be "César Chávez Day";

Whereas, on October 8, 2012, President Barack Obama authorized the Secretary of the Interior to establish a César Estrada Chávez National Monument in Keene, California; and

Whereas the United States should continue the efforts of César Estrada Chávez to ensure equality, justice, and dignity for all people of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes the accomplishments and example of a great hero of the United States, César Estrada Chávez;

(2) pledges to promote the legacy of César Estrada Chávez; and

(3) encourages the people of the United States to commemorate the legacy of César Estrada Chávez and to always remember his great rallying cry, "¡Sí, se puede!", which is Spanish for "Yes, we can!".

SENATE RESOLUTION 105—RECOGNIZING 2017 AS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CREATION OF THE 41ST DIVISION

Mr. WYDEN (for himself and Mr. MERKLEY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Armed Services:

S. RES. 105

Whereas the War Department issued General Order No. 95 on July 18, 1917, which formally established the 41st Division within the Army;

Whereas the 41st Division was organized on September 18, 1917, at Camp Greene in North Carolina;

Whereas the 41st Division was originally comprised of National Guard citizen-soldiers from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming and also had members from Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, New Mexico, and the District of Columbia;

Whereas, during World War I, the 41st Division deployed to the Western Front, providing valuable support both as a training and replacement division;

Whereas the 41st Division demobilized at Camp Dix in New Jersey on February 22,

1919, following the armistice of November 1918;

Whereas the 41st Division was reorganized and Federally recognized on January 3, 1930, with the headquarters of the 41st Division located at Portland, Oregon;

Whereas the 41st Division participated in a set of training exercises in 1937 where Oregon soldiers forded the Nisqually River in western Washington in a daring night crossing;

Whereas, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the 41st Division set up defensive positions along the coastline of the United States from the Canadian border to Camp Clatsop in Oregon;

Whereas the 41st Division was reorganized as the 41st Infantry Division on February 17, 1942, and, by the following May, was one of the first divisions of the Armed Forces to deploy overseas to Australia for jungle and amphibious warfare training;

Whereas the 41st Infantry Division participated in the campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines, enduring some of the most vicious jungle warfare of any allied force during the war;

Whereas the bloodiest engagement of the 41st Infantry Division occurred on the island of Biak against more than 10,000 determined Japanese troops;

Whereas members of the 41st Infantry Division had been known as “Sunsetters” after their unit’s setting sun insignia but earned a second nickname, “the Jungleers”, in recognition of their experience and expertise in jungle warfare following the service of the unit in Biak and across the Pacific Theater;

Whereas the 41st Division was inactivated on December 31, 1945, on the island of Honshu in Japan;

Whereas, in 1968, the Oregonian element of the 41st Infantry Division was reorganized and redesignated as the 41st Infantry Brigade within the Oregon National Guard, transferring the colors and honors of its division predecessor;

Whereas elements of the 41st Infantry Brigade—

(1) deployed to—

(A) Saudi Arabia in 1999 as part of Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia;

(B) the Sinai Peninsula in 2001 in support of the Multinational Force and Observers and Operation Enduring Freedom;

(C) Iraq in 2003 and 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom; and

(D) Afghanistan in 2006 in support of Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix; and

(2) were activated in 2005 to help provide disaster relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita in Louisiana and Texas, respectively;

Whereas the 41st Infantry Brigade was reorganized and redesignated as the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team on September 1, 2008;

Whereas the entire 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team deployed to Iraq in 2009, marking the first full deployment for the unit since World War II, to provide base and convoy security in support of Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Iraqi Freedom;

Whereas elements of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team deployed to Afghanistan in 2014 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, and the Resolute Support mission led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;

Whereas the citizen-soldiers of the 41st Division, the 41st Infantry Division, and the 41st Infantry Brigade—

(1) came from a diverse set of backgrounds;

(2) were employed in a wide range of civilian professions;

(3) brought their civilian experience to bear in fulfilling their military duties;

(4) served the United States selflessly; and

(5) fought with bravery and honor across many generations; and

Whereas the citizen-soldiers of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team continue to uphold this tradition, protecting Oregon and serving the United States both at home and abroad through their courage and dedication: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes—

(A) 2017 as the 100th anniversary of the formation of the 41st Division; and

(B) the century of service to the United States by the 41st Division;

(2) expresses gratitude to the many Oregonians and others who served in the 41st Division, the 41st Infantry Division, the 41st Infantry Brigade, and the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team;

(3) honors the memory of the members of the 41st Division, the 41st Infantry Division, the 41st Infantry Brigade, and the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team who have fallen in the line of duty; and

(4) respectfully requests that the Secretary of the Senate transmit an enrolled copy of this resolution to—

(A) General Michael E. Stencel, the Adjutant General of Oregon; and

(B) Lieutenant Colonel Eric Riley, commander of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

SENATE RESOLUTION 106—EX-PRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE TO SUPPORT THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF GEORGIA

Mr. WICKER (for himself and Mr. CARDIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 106

Whereas principle IV of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 states, “The participating States will respect the territorial integrity of each of the participating States. Accordingly, they will refrain from any action inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations against the territorial integrity, political independence or the unity of any participating State, and in particular from any such action constituting a threat or use of force. . . and participating States will likewise refrain from making each other’s territory the object of military occupation.”;

Whereas the Charter of the United Nations states, “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”;

Whereas, since 1993, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia have been reaffirmed by the international community in all United Nations Security Council resolutions on Georgia;

Whereas the Government of Georgia has pursued a peaceful resolution of the conflict with Russia over Georgia’s territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;

Whereas the recognition by the Government of the Russian Federation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia on August 26, 2008, was in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and contradicting principles of Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Charter of the United Nations, and the August 12, 2008, Ceasefire Agreement;

Whereas the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed on January 9, 2009, underscores that “support for

each other’s sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders constitutes the foundation of our bilateral relations.”;

Whereas, according to the Government of Georgia’s “State Strategy on Occupied Territories”, the Government of Georgia has committed itself to a policy of peaceful engagement, the protection of economic and human rights, freedom of movement, and the preservation of cultural heritage, language, and identity for the people of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;

Whereas the August 2008 war between the Russian Federation and Georgia resulted in civilian and military casualties, the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, and large numbers of internally displaced persons;

Whereas the annual United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the “Status of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia” recognizes that the right of return of all internally displaced persons and refugees and their descendants, regardless of ethnicity, as well as their property rights, remains unfulfilled;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation is building barbed wire fences and installing, so-called “border signs” and other artificial barriers along the occupation line and depriving the people residing within the occupied regions and in the adjacent areas of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including, the freedom of movement, family life, education in their native language, and other civil and economic rights;

Whereas the August 12, 2008, Ceasefire Agreement, agreed to by the Governments of the Russian Federation and Georgia—

(1) provides that all troops of the Russian Federation shall be withdrawn to pre-war positions;

(2) provides that free access shall be granted to organizations providing humanitarian assistance in regions affected by the violence in August 2008; and

(3) launched the Geneva International Discussions between Georgia and the Russian Federation;

Whereas, on November 23, 2010, President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili declared before the European Parliament that “Georgia will never use force to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty”;

Whereas, on March 7, 2013, the bipartisan Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on Basic Directions of Georgia’s Foreign Policy confirmed “Georgia’s commitment for the non-use of force, pledged by the President of Georgia in his address to the international community from the European Parliament in Strasbourg on November 23, 2010”;

Whereas, on June 27, 2014, in the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union, Georgia reaffirmed its commitment “to restore its territorial integrity in pursuit of a peaceful and lasting conflict resolution, of pursuing the full implementation of” the August 12, 2008, ceasefire agreement;

Whereas, despite the unilateral legally binding commitment to the non-use of force pledged by the Government of Georgia, the Government of the Russian Federation still refuses to reciprocate with its own legally binding non-use of force pledge;

Whereas the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) is still denied access to the occupied regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, despite the fact that its mandate covers the whole territory of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation continues to enhance its military

bases illegally stationed in occupied regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia without the consent of the Government of Georgia or a mandate from the United Nations or other multilateral organizations;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation continues the process of aggression carried out against Georgia since the early 1990s and occupation of Georgia's territories following the August 2008 Russia-Georgia War;

Whereas the March 5, 2017, closure of two crossing points on the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with Abkhazia in the villages of Nabakevi and Otobaia violated fundamental rights to freedom of movement, privacy, and family life, as well as access to education and health care for the local population, contravening commitments to work towards enhanced security and improved living conditions for the conflict-affected population;

Whereas President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin has ordered his government to conclude an agreement to effectively incorporate the military of Georgia's South Ossetia region into the Russian armed forces' command structure, thereby impeding the peace process;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation's policy vis-à-vis Georgia and the alarming developments in the region illustrate that the Government of the Russian Federation does not accept the independent choice of sovereign states and strives for the restoration of zones of influence in the region, including through the use of force, occupation, factual annexation, and other aggressive acts; and

Whereas the United States applied the doctrine of non-recognition in 1940 to the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and every Presidential administration of the United States honored this doctrine until independence was restored to those countries in 1991: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) supports the policy, popularly known as the "Stimson Doctrine", of the United States to not recognize territorial changes effected by force, and affirms that this policy should continue to guide the foreign policy of the United States;

(2) condemns the military intervention and occupation of Georgia by the Russian Federation and its continuous illegal activities along the occupation line in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;

(3) calls upon the Government of the Russian Federation to withdraw its recognition of Georgia's territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as independent countries, to refrain from acts and policies that undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, and to take steps to fulfill all the terms and conditions of the August 12, 2008, Ceasefire Agreement between Georgia and the Russian Federation;

(4) stresses the necessity of progress on core issues within the Geneva International Discussions, including a legally binding pledge from the Government of the Russian Federation on the non-use of force, the establishment of international security arrangements in the occupied regions of Georgia, and the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the places of their origin;

(5) urges the United States Government to declare unequivocally that the United States will not under any circumstances recognize the de jure or de facto sovereignty of the Russian Federation over any part of Georgia, its airspace, or its territorial waters, including Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;

(6) urges the President to deepen cooperation with the Government of Georgia in all areas of the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, including Georgia's advancement towards Euro-Atlantic integration;

(7) urges the President to place emphasis on enhancing Georgia's security through joint military training and providing self-defensive capabilities in order to enhance Georgia's independent statehood and national sovereignty; and

(8) affirms that a free, united, democratic, and sovereign Georgia is in the long-term interest of the United States as it promotes peace and stability in the region.

SENATE RESOLUTION 107—CONGRATULATING THE RIFLE TEAM OF WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY ON WINNING THE 2017 NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION RIFLE CHAMPIONSHIP

Mrs. CAPITO (for herself and Mr. MANCHIN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 107

Whereas, in 2017, the West Virginia University Mountaineers rifle team (referred to in this preamble as the "Mountaineers") completed an undefeated regular season with a record of 12 wins and no losses and won the Great America Rifle Conference championship for the eighth consecutive year;

Whereas, on March 11, 2017, the Mountaineers won the National Collegiate Athletic Association (referred to in this preamble as the "NCAA") Rifle Championship;

Whereas the 2017 NCAA Rifle Championship is the fifth consecutive title for the Mountaineers;

Whereas the Mountaineers have now won 19 national championships, securing team NCAA titles in 1983, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017;

Whereas the Mountaineers have won more national championships than any other rifle program in the United States;

Whereas the Mountaineers shot a championship-record 4723 aggregate score at the 2017 NCAA Rifle Championship;

Whereas freshman Milica Babic won the 2017 NCAA air rifle championship;

Whereas freshman Morgan Phillips won the NCAA smallbore title and earned the Top Performer Award of the NCAA Rifle Championship;

Whereas the Mountaineers swept the NCAA individual titles in 2017, the fifth time that shooters from the Mountaineers have swept the individual championships; and

Whereas Head Coach Jon Hammond and all members of the Mountaineers, including Jack Anderson, Will Anti, Milica Babic, Noah Barker, Elizabeth Gratz, Jean-Pierre Lucas, Morgan Phillips, and Ginny Thrasher, completed a record performance to claim the 2017 national title: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate congratulates the West Virginia University rifle team on winning the 2017 National Collegiate Athletic Association Rifle Championship.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I have 7 requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority leaders.

Pursuant to Rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today's session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on March 30, 2017, in the President's room, S-216 in the Capitol, in order to vote on the nomination of George "Sonny" Perdue, of Georgia, to be Secretary of Agriculture.

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The Committee on Armed Services is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 30, 2017, at 9:30 a.m., in open session to consider the nomination of Honorable Heather A. Wilson to be Secretary of the Air Force.

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 30, 2017, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in Room 366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, DC.

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate in order to hold a hearing on Thursday, March 30, 2017, beginning at 2:30 p.m. in Room 366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, DC.

COMMITTEES ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 30, 2017 at 10 a.m., to hold a hearing entitled *The Road Ahead: U.S. Interests, Values, and the American People*.

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is authorized to meet in executive session during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 30, in between votes in S-216, to consider the following: Nomination of Alexander Acosta to serve as Secretary of Labor.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the 115th Congress of the U.S. Senate on Thursday, March 30, 2017 from 10 a.m. for Panel I, and from 2 p.m. for Panel II, in room SD-106 of the Senate Dirksen Office Building to hold open hearings entitled *Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns*.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Melissa Rubenstein, a fellow in my office, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of this Congress.

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

CONGRATULATING THE RIFLE
TEAM OF WEST VIRGINIA UNI-
VERSITY ON WINNING THE 2017
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATH-
LETIC ASSOCIATION RIFLE
CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 107, submitted earlier today.

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

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 107) congratulating the rifle team of West Virginia University on winning the 2017 National Collegiate Athletic Association Rifle Championship.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 107) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.
(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

ORDERS FOR MONDAY, APRIL 3,
2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it

adjourn until 3 p.m. on Monday, April 3; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed.

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

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY,
APRIL 3, 2017, AT 3 P.M.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:17 p.m., adjourned until Monday, April 3, 2017, at 3 p.m.