United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2017 No. 51

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Lord God of Heaven and Earth, today teach our lawmakers to do things Your way, embracing Your precepts and walking in Your path. Make them peaceful and powerful instruments for goodness in our Nation and world. Remind them that the narrow and difficult road leads to life and few find it, but You honor those who honor You.

As our Senators receive guidance from You and follow Your leading, replace anxiety with calm, confusion with clarity, and despair with hope. Give them attentive hearts and open minds as they seek to find in the diversity of ideas what is best for our Nation and world. May peace become the hallmark of their work.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

TERROR ATTACK IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to start by taking a moment to offer sincere condolences to our friends in the United Kingdom who lost loved ones in yesterday's horrific terror attack. Our prayers are with those who were severely injured, as well, and we wish them a swift and full recovery.

This act of terror occurred on the 1-year anniversary of the devastating attack in Brussels, and as Prime Minister May pointed out, the location of the attack seems to be no coincidence. ''The terrorist chose to strike at the heart of the [the UK's] capital city,'' Prime Minister May said yesterday, ''where people of all nationalities, religions and cultures come together to celebrate the values of liberty, democracy and freedom of speech.''

I know I speak on behalf of my colleagues when I say that our thoughts are also with those who were in Parliament at the time of the attack, serving their country much in the same way that we do in this Chamber every day.

Of course, I want to also acknowledge the law enforcement personnel and first responders who courageously put their lives on the line for their fellow citizens. We know that the capable security services of the British, working in cooperation with our own, will continue to investigate whether this was a radicalized individual actor or a terrorist connected to an ISIL external operation.

Our friends face difficult days ahead as they begin to heal from this senseless act, but as they do so, we want them to know that the United States stands with them as a friend, as a cherished ally and as a united partner against terror.

CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW ACT RESOLUTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on the business before the Senate today, recently a Washington Post article noted that Congress has undertaken the ''most ambitious regulatory rollback since Reagan.'' Already, we passed 10 resolutions under the Congressional Review Act to end Obama administration regulations that slow economic growth, threaten jobs, and hold our country back. As one study estimates, our action to overturn these regulations could save Americans nearly $4 billion and more than 4 million hours of paperwork.

This week, we have continued our regulatory relief efforts, and today we will have an opportunity to send another to the President's desk. This resolution would overturn a costly and confusing Federal communications rule. The regulation in question makes the internet an uneven playing field, increases complexity, discourages competition, innovation, and infrastructure investment. President Obama's own legal mentor has expressed serious doubts about the rule's constitutionality under the First Amendment.

Senator FLAKE has long been a leader on tackling this issue. Last year he voiced his worries about the regulations in a letter to the FCC and held a hearing regarding the legality of such regulations. Now he has sponsored a CRA resolution that will allow us to overturn the regulations and protect consumers. As Senator FLAKE has pointed out:

The FCC's midnight regulation does nothing to protect consumer privacy. It is unnecessary, confusing and adds yet another innovation-stifling regulation to the internet.

That is why he proposed this CRA resolution, which he has explained ''empowers consumers to make informed choices on if and how their data can be shared.''

I thank my friend from Arizona for taking on this important issue and putting forth legislation to address it. I look forward to the Senate passing it soon.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this week Supreme Court nominee Judge

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

Neil Gorsuch came before the Senate Judiciary Committee for his confirmation hearing. Senators from both sides had the opportunity to ask him questions. Both they and the American people were able to learn more about Judge Gorsuch, about the type of jurist he has been and will continue to be, about his character and temperament, and about his aptitude to serve on the Supreme Court.

His answers reflected what we have all come to find about the judge over the past several weeks. He has sterling credentials and a reputation as a fair and impartial jurist. He is also known to be a gifted writer, who is smart, kind, humble, and independent.

As I mentioned yesterday, his impressive testimony has caught the attention of publications, news outlets, and commentators from across the country and across the political spectrum. In a panel discussion just yesterday, an MSNBC commentator noted Judge Gorsuch's ''masterful performance''—one that he called a ''tour de force.''

Another panelist and NBC correspondent had a complimentary view of the nominee, as well, noting that ''in terms of character, in terms of professionalism, [and in terms of] integrity, there wasn't, I would argue, anything, or hardly anything there to criticize Gorsuch on.''

The Wall Street Journal noted that Gorsuch ''stressed his independence'' throughout the hearing. The Detroit news echoed these observations and has urged the Senate to confirm him. It editorialized that ''[a]fter two days of often hostile hearings, Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch is proving himself an even-tempered, deeply knowledgeable nominee who should be confirmed by the Senate.''

The paper also noted that Judge Gorsuch is ''[eminently] qualified'' and that he ''is coming across in the hearings as the very image of a thoughtful jurist. He displayed an impressive depth of knowledge, and admirable patience. And he's carefully followed past practice of judicial nominees in refusing to say how he'd rule on specific issues.''

His independence is really without question at this point. The American Bar Association, which awarded Judge Gorsuch its highest rating of unanimously ''well qualified,'' recently submitted testimony to the Judiciary Committee. Here is what the Bar Association had to say about Judge Gorsuch's independence:

Our evaluation process provided an excellent opportunity to gain a glimpse at whether Judge Gorsuch is a judge who ascribes to the concept of an independent judiciary. Based on the writings, interviews, and analyses we scrutinized to reach our rating, we discerned that Judge Gorsuch believes strongly in the independence of the judicial branch of government, and we predict that he will be a strong but respectful voice in protecting it.

The ABA went on:

As one interviewee noted with alacrity, ''Judge Gorsuch has 'grit,' which he gets from being a multi-generation Westerner.'' Another stated, ''He is dedicated to the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers and to the independence of the judiciary.'' Yet another observed, ''In addition to his outstanding academic credentials and brilliant mind, Judge Gorsuch's demeanor and written opinions during his tenure on the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals demonstrate that he believes unwaveringly in the rule of law and judicial independence. In my opinion, he is exceptionally well qualified to serve as a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.'' We agree.

I certainly agree with that. This is from the American Bar Association, an organization that the Democratic leader and former Democratic chairman of the Judiciary Committee have deemed the gold standard for evaluating nominees. In addition, the assistant Democratic leader acknowledged yesterday that Judge Gorsuch is ''very gifted'' and ''has a great background and service as judge.''

But despite the Judge's outstanding performance, his exceptional background, and the extensive support he has received from people of all political leanings, we know that some Senate Democrats will continue trying to come up with any reason to delay the confirmation process. It is not the first time we have seen our friends across the aisle engage in obstructionist tactics. In fact, we just saw a historic level of obstruction when it came to confirming the President's Cabinet.

We know that our colleagues are under a great deal of pressure from the far left. We know some of these groups are calling for them to ''resist.'' We know that even more than 4 months after the election, some on the far left simply refuse to accept the outcome of last year's election.

Well, it is past time to move on from that mindset and return to the serious business of governing. One way we can do so is by confirming Judge Gorsuch as the next Supreme Court Justice without delay. He is a proven jurist. He is an outstanding intellect. He has earned the respect and admiration of so many—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans alike. He is also unquestionably independent.

Today we will hear even more praise for Judge Gorsuch as witnesses come before the Judiciary Committee. I urge my colleagues to show him the fair consideration he deserves and, ultimately, to come together in supporting his nomination in the days ahead.

REPEALING AND REPLACING OBAMACARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today marks the seventh anniversary of ObamaCare becoming law. In the years since, millions of Americans lost their plans and their doctors. They saw the cost of their premiums and deductibles soar. They watched their choices disappear as insurers were forced out of the marketplace. Former President Bill Clinton called ObamaCare the ''craziest thing in the world.'' He was right. It was a direct attack on the middle class. These failed policies are affecting real people every day. Americans expected the law to deliver on its promises, but instead they have paid more and received less. ObamaCare has been a flawed system from the start. Over the past 7 years, things have gotten progressively worse.

Our Nation cannot continue on this trajectory as ObamaCare continues to unravel at every level, leaving Americans to pick up the pieces. On this seventh anniversary of ObamaCare's enactment, Americans deserve a better way forward. Thankfully, we finally have a Congress and a President who are committed to delivering much needed reform.

The legislation currently before the House will help bring relief. It will repeal and replace ObamaCare, which is exactly what we promised the American people we would do. Instead of forcing Americans to buy something they may not want, like ObamaCare does, this bill gives Americans the freedom to choose what type of coverage is right for them.

I look forward to the House passing that bill soon, and we look forward to taking it up in the Senate, where there will be a robust amendment process. Then, I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues to pass it. It is important, however, to remember that this bill is only one part of a three-pronged strategy to bring relief. The administration is already working to fix the damage 7 years of ObamaCare has done to the health markets across the country, and we will continue to consider further legislation in Congress to bring more competition and reform.

It is time to move on from 7 years of ObamaCare's broken promises and unyielding attacks on the middle class. The status quo is not an option. So let's work together to get this done.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S.J. Res. 34, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 34) 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). If no one yields time, time will be charged equally.

The Senator from Maryland.

END RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS PROFILING ACT

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about a bill that I have introduced. I have introduced it in prior Congresses. But I think it is particularly important in this Congress. It is the End Racial and Religious Profiling Act of 2017. I am proud to have many of my colleagues as cosponsors of this legislation, including Senators BALDWIN, BLUMENTHAL, BOOKER, BROWN, CANTWELL, COONS, DUCKWORTH, DURBIN, FEINSTEIN, FRANKEN, GILLIBRAND, HARRIS, HEINRICH, HIRONO, KAINE, MARKEY, MENENDEZ, MERKLEY, MURPHY, MURRAY, SANDERS, STABENOW, UDALL, VAN HOLLEN, WYDEN, and WARREN.

In the House of Representatives, the bill's principal sponsor is Congressman CONYERS. It is needed now more than ever before. I say that for many reasons, one of which is that we have seen a large increase in hate crimes in our community. Yesterday I was on the phone with a father from Harford County, MD, whose son was the victim of a hate episode related to that person's religion and ethnic background.

We have seen in our community a large increase in hate crimes against the Jewish community. There have been a lot of bomb threats that have been called into Jewish schools and to the Jewish Community Centers. We have seen physical attacks and the desecration of cemeteries. So the minority community feels threatened.

That has been escalating as a result of the actions of our President and his Executive orders. The Executive orders—he has issued two now that are dealing with the immigrant community—do raise the temperature in our community and the concern in our community that people are being threatened because of their religion, threatened because of their ethnic background, threatened because of their status as part of an immigrant community.

All of that has added to the concerns in America today. The legislation that I have introduced would make it illegal for discriminatory policing—for police to use as an indicator for their actions a person's race, religion, or ethnic background.

Discriminatory policing is against our values. Quite frankly, it is not what we stand for as a nation. We don't target people because of their religion. I will always remember that shortly after the Trayvon episode, I met with community activists in Baltimore. Many told me examples of how they were with their parents when the police stopped them randomly, for no reason at all, but solely because of the person's race and how communities felt threatened as a result of it.

It is not what we stand for as a nation. It turns communities against police, rather than working with the police. It is a waste of resources. It does not work. It can be deadly as we have seen in too many communities in our Nation. In my own city of Baltimore, we had the episode concerning Freddie Gray, who died in police custody.

I went to Sandtown, where Freddie Gray came from, shortly after that episode and met with the community, and I heard comparable stories about how good community activists felt like they were betraying their community if they worked with the local police, because they said the system was just stacked against their community and their race.

So let me, if I might, quote from the Department of Justice report on the Freddie Gray case. Our congressional delegation asked for a pattern or practice investigation. In part of that investigation, they came out with this finding:

> There is overwhelming statistical evidence of racial disparities in Baltimore Police Department's (BPD's) stops, searches, and arrests. . . . BPD officers subject African-Americans to a disproportionate number of pedestrian and vehicles stops on Baltimore streets and search African-Americans disproportionately during these stops. . . . The policing practices that cause the racial disparities in BPD's stops, searches, and arrests, along with evidence suggesting intentional discrimination against African-Americans, undermine the community trust that is central to effective policing. . . . Indeed, we heard from many community members who were reluctant to engage with the officers because of their belief that the Department treats African-Americans unfairly. . . . These concerns were acknowledged by BPD leadership and officers, who explained that lack of trust—particularly in many of Baltimore's African-American communities—inhibit officers' efforts to build relationships that are a key component of effective policing. . . .

I say that because racial profiling—discriminatory profiling—is ineffective and is counterproductive. It actually makes communities less safe. I have the honor of being the Special Representative for Anti-Semitism, Racism and Intolerance in the OSCE, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

In that capacity, I have identified four major areas of concern within the 57 countries that represent the OSCE, including the United States. Those priorities are discriminatory actions against the Muslim community, the rise of anti-Semitism, the concerns of discrimination against the immigrant community, and also the concerns on discriminatory policing.

Discriminatory policing is very much engaged in our concerns about the rise of anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance. Now, I want to make it clear: The overwhelming majority of people in law enforcement are good people. They are professionals. They are trying to do their job. They are against racial profiling. But we need to protect the professionalism within the police departments and establish a national policy against racial profiling.

My legislation is supported by over 1,150 organizations. Let me just, if I might, mention a couple of those, by quoting their leaders. Wade Henderson, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, who supports this legislation said:

> Discriminatory profiling is wrong, fosters distrust between law enforcement and the communities they serve and puts public safety at risk. Racial profiling infringes on civil liberties and squanders resources that should be used instead to catch criminal perpetrators. We urge his colleagues to join Senator Cardin and stand for effective law enforcement by supporting [this legislation].

Jennifer Bellamy, the ACLU legislative counsel, who also supports this legislation, said:

> For centuries, discriminatory profiling practices have harmed communities of color. It is not enough to be 'against' racism and racial profiling, we need national leaders to end discriminatory practices. We know that profiling of any kind is ineffective and diverts law enforcement's time, money, and energy away from actual threats. The time is now to end racial profiling once and for all.

Then, lastly, Hilary Shelton, the director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and the senior vice president for policy and advocacy said:

> This important legislation takes concrete steps to put an end to the insidious practice of profiling individuals by federal, state and local levels based on physical attributes or an individual's religion. It is difficult for our faith in the American criminal justice system not to be challenged when we cannot walk down the street, drive down an interstate, go through an airport, or even enter into our own homes without being stopped merely because of the color of our skin, who we are perceived to be, or what we choose to wear.

I could mention many of the other groups and many other quotes. This legislation is pretty straightforward. It establishes a national uniform standard against discriminatory profiling at all levels of law enforcement—State, local Federal.

For example, it tells us that we can't use as descriptors a person's race. We can do so when we are using it to describe a particular crime, but not as a predictor of future crimes. Let me close by quoting from Ron Davis, the former police chief of East Palo Alto, CA, where he said:

> [T]here exists no national, standardized definition for racial profiling that prohibits all uses of race, national origin, and religion, except when describing a person. Consequently, many state and local policies define racial profiling as using race as the ''sole'' basis for a stop or any police action. This definition is misleading in that it suggests using race as a factor for anything other than a description is justified, which it is not. Simply put, race is a descriptor not a predictor. To use race along with other salient descriptors when describing someone who just committed a crime is appropriate.

That is what this legislation does. It establishes a national definition. It prohibits it in any form of policing in our country. It provides for training. It provides Federal grants for best practices. It requires the Attorney General

to issue reports. It is legislation that is needed in our country.

Former Attorney General Eric Holder adopted it at the national level, and he said:

> In this Nation, security and liberty are—at their best—partners, not enemies, in ensuring safety and opportunity for all. . . . In this Nation, the document that sets forth the supreme law of the land—the Constitution—is meant to empower, not exclude. . . . Racial profiling is wrong. It can leave a lasting scar on communities and individuals. And it is, quite simply, bad policing—whatever city, whatever state.

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees ''equal protection of the laws'' to all Americans. Racial and discriminatory profiling is abhorrent to those principles, and it should be ended once and for all.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak as in morning business.

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

TRUMPCARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to start by addressing the news last night that Republican leaders have decided to try to make their awful TrumpCare legislation even worse. TrumpCare wasn't enough of a giveaway to insurance companies, and it didn't do enough harm to women, seniors, and people with preexisting conditions, so Republican leaders decided to double down in efforts to appeal to their extreme conservative base.

They are now claiming that they can take away essential health benefits like maternity care, mental health care, and preexisting conditions through the reconciliation process, but here are the facts: Republican leaders know, just as Democrats do, that measures to take away these critically important protections cannot survive the reconciliation process and could never get 60 votes in the Senate. They are simply trying to sell conservatives a bill of goods today in the rush to jam this through, but the more they scramble, the more harmful this bill gets for patients and families and the worse it will be for any House Republican who will be held accountable for their votes on it.

As we all know, today marks 7 years since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law. While some here in Congress may view this as an ideal opportunity to ram through a reckless, harmful repeal of the law, I, for one, think about today a little differently.

I remember 7 years ago, standing with a young constituent of mine from Seattle, Marci Owens, as we watched President Obama sign the Affordable Care Act into law. I had met Marci when she was about 11 years old, in the midst of some of the most heated moments of the healthcare reform debate, and to this day, I will never forget the story she told me about her mom, who all of a sudden had become sick, was forced to miss work, and because of that, she lost her job and lost her health insurance. Ultimately, because she wasn't even able to see a doctor or get any care, she died as a result of her illness.

I took that story with me, along with countless other stories of families unable to access care, pay for medication, or see a doctor. I used them as motivation as my colleagues and I worked tirelessly to pass the Affordable Care Act.

Just last month, I was proud to have Marci, who is now 18, attend President Trump's joint address to Congress as my guest. Today, Marci is still sharing her story and advocating for affordable healthcare, as well as transgender rights. She, along with millions of others across the country, is once again standing up, speaking out, and making it clear that we cannot go backward.

I come to the Senate floor to share some of the stories of families in my home State of Washington who are worried, who are afraid, and whose lives will be at risk if President Trump and Republicans take us down this dangerous path to repeal, people whose voices need to be heard more than ever.

I want to make it very clear why we are here and what is at stake. The House Republican TrumpCare bill would have a profoundly negative impact on the lives and the well-being and the financial security of people across the country, people who are truly terrified about the uncertain path forward. Yet, for having such a profound impact, Republicans are seemingly doing everything they can to limit public discussion on TrumpCare. This bill was rushed through four House committees without a single public hearing, no testimony, no expert view. House Republicans voted the bill out of two of these committees without a CBO score, without knowing how many people would be impacted.

In the Senate this week, every Senate Democrat on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee called on the chairman to allow for a hearing to talk about this bill, but he refused. He ignored the request, and he held a hearing on other health policy instead. That the Health Committee—the Health Committee—has not been allowed to hold a single hearing to talk about and debate TrumpCare is appalling and shameful.

Not to be outdone, of course, the majority leader, instead of committing to give all Senators time to review and evaluate the bill, has now said the bill will go straight to the floor for a vote as soon as next week, prompting even Members of his own party to come out against this plan.

In all, these efforts are unprecedented. They are wrong, and they speak volumes about the kind of bill they are trying to ram through, because we now know many of the facts of the bill.

This bill will kick 24 million people off their coverage. It will cause premiums to skyrocket. Seniors will pay more for their care. It will put at risk those who are struggling with mental illness and substance use disorders, including opioid addiction. It would end Medicaid as we know it.

Predictively, it attacks women's constitutionally protected healthcare and rights. It defunds Planned Parenthood and puts insurance companies back in charge of other critical parts of women's healthcare, including maternity care, cancer screenings, and contraception. This bill undermines women's access to healthcare and women's ability to make their own healthcare decisions in virtually every way a piece of legislation could.

I oppose this bill in the strongest terms. I am going to be doing everything I can to fight back against it, and I know Senate Democrats will as well.

Families across the country are looking to us, and they have nowhere else to turn. Like many of my colleagues, I have constituents coming up to me constantly when I am at home, asking me what is going to happen if TrumpCare becomes law. They are bravely sharing deeply personal stories about their health, their families, and their fears—something they should not have to do. They deserve to be heard.

Erin Zerba from my home State of Washington deserves to be heard. She has been a teacher for 19 years and teaches in two rural school districts, but because of her part-time standing in both districts, she is ineligible for insurance. If it weren't for the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, she would have no options.

As Erin puts it, she is ''terrified'' to learn that Medicaid would be gutted under TrumpCare. She has multiple disabilities, including autism and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. She has had repeated surgeries following a difficult pregnancy. The medication she has to take every day is very expensive. There is no generic form. She is one of those millions of people.

I have to say that we are going to fight back in every way we can because the TrumpCare bill that is being rushed through the House with giveaways being given to Senators for their votes is not the way we take care of people in this country. I am deeply worried about the process of this bill.

I see the Democratic leader on the floor, and I know how important it is for him to speak. I just want to say, as the ranking member on the Health Committee, it is appalling to me that we have had no hearings, no expert witnesses, no markup. We have not seen this bill, and it is being rushed through. It will impact every single American and deserves the time of day, not some created chaos and deadline timeline that was created simply to fulfill a campaign promise and not to do the right thing for the American people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

THANKING THE SENIOR SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, I would like to thank the senior Senator from the State of Washington, the ranking member of the Health Committee, for her outstanding work on this issue. She knows this issue better than just about anybody in this Chamber. She is passionate and also fact-driven about her views and has had great influence on this Chamber.

I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will review what she said. To rush through a bill for a campaign promise—a bill that is fraught with problems and difficulty, many of which will probably not come to light until after the bill comes to the floor—is the wrong thing to do. I thank the senior Senator from the State of Washington.

TERROR ATTACK IN LONDON

Mr. President, first, I want to just say a few words. My heartfelt condolences go to the families of the victims in London.

Terrorism strikes everywhere. It was so close to the symbol of Great Britain—Parliament, Big Ben, a place we have all seen in pictures and some of us have had the opportunity to see in person. It reminds us that the scourge of terrorism needs to be eradicated in any way we can. I am committed to that, and I know the 100 Members of this Senate body are as well.

Our hearts go out to those who were lost.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. President, now I will move on to the subject I wish to speak about at length this morning, and that is Judge Gorsuch.

I have had the opportunity these past 3 days to watch Judge Neil Gorsuch in the Judiciary Committee and to review his credentials and record on the Tenth Circuit and before that.

I would particularly like to recognize the outstanding work done by every Democratic member of the Judiciary Committee. They were outstanding in questioning Judge Gorsuch despite his lack of candor and desire to answer. I would like to particularly call out our exceptional ranking member, Senator FEINSTEIN, who has done a wonderful job leading that committee.

I have thought long and hard about his nomination and what it means for the future of the Supreme Court and for the future of our country. What is at stake is considerable. The decisions we make here in the Senate over the next few weeks about Judge Gorsuch, as on any Supreme Court nominee, will echo through the lifetime tenure of that judge, through a generation of Americans.

Discussions of the Supreme Court can get wonky and technical, with invocations of precedent and canons of interpretation. What is at stake, however, is not at all abstract; it is real and it is concrete for Americans, whose lives, health, happiness, and freedoms are on the line at the Supreme Court. Closely divided decisions recently have meant the difference between the ability to marry the person you love or not, the ability to have your right to vote protected or not, the ability to make personal choices about your own healthcare or not. The Supreme Court matters a great deal. It matters for workers who want to protect both their lives and their jobs, for employees who need to be able to seek redress for discrimination, and for parents who want their kids to get a fair shake in the education system.

It is with all this in mind that I have come to a decision about the current nominee. After careful deliberation, I have concluded that I cannot support Judge Neil Gorsuch's nomination to the Supreme Court. His nomination will face a cloture vote. He will have to earn 60 votes for confirmation. My vote will be no, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

To my Republican friends who think that if Judge Gorsuch fails to reach 60 votes, we ought to change the rules, I say: If this nominee cannot earn 60 votes—a bar met by each of President Obama's nominees and George Bush's last two nominees—the answer isn't to change the rules, it is to change the nominee.

This morning, I would like to lay out the reasons I will be voting no on this nomination.

First, Judge Gorsuch was unable to sufficiently convince me that he would be an independent check on a President who has shown almost no restraint from Executive overreach.

Second, he was unable to convince me that he would be a mainstream Justice who could rule free from the biases of politics and ideology. His career and judicial record suggest not a neutral legal mind but someone with a deep-seated conservative ideology. He was groomed by the Federalist Society and has not shown 1 inch of difference between his views and theirs.

Finally, he is someone who almost instinctively favors the powerful over the weak, corporations over working Americans. There could not be a worse time for someone with those instincts.

Judge Gorsuch's opportunity to disabuse us of all these objections was in the hearing process, but he declined to answer question after question after question with any substance. Absent a real description of judicial philosophy, all we have to judge the judge on is his record.

First, I want to address the first issue I raised, that of judicial independence. It is so clear that at this moment in our history, our democracy requires a judge who is willing to rule against this President. This administration seems to have little regard for the rule of law and is likely to test the Constitution in ways it hasn't been challenged in decades. It is absolutely the case that this Supreme Court will be tried in ways that few courts have been tested since the earliest days of the Republic when constitutional questions abounded.

The President himself has attacked individual judges and the credibility of the judiciary at large. The President has attacked a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit and said if they didn't decide with him, they would be responsible for the next terrorist act. I have never heard any President in my lifetime or read about any President in previous history who dared do that. We are in uncharted territory with this President and with judicial independence. It requires a strong independent backbone. Judge Gorsuch has shown none. Senators on the Judiciary Committee rightly asked Judge Gorsuch direct questions about this issue. I did so myself in my meeting with the judge. While the judge repeatedly asserted his independence, he could not point to anything in his record to guarantee it. Judge Gorsuch offered the Judiciary myriad platitudes on this point. ''No man is above the law,'' he said. He said he was ''disheartened'' by the President's attacks on the judiciary. The President, for his sake, said that Judge Gorsuch didn't mean him, and everyone left it at that.

If Judge Gorsuch had an ounce of courage, had shown a scintilla of an ability to be independent, he would have said: No, Mr. President. No, President Trump, I did mean you. Instead, he just tells us in general that he is demoralized, disheartened. Telling us is not the same as showing us. He is asking us to take him at his word, but his record suggests that he has long been someone who has advocated extreme deference to assertions of broad Presidential power.

That leads me to my second point; that Judge Gorsuch was unable to convince me that he would be a neutral judge, free of ideology and bias. The hearings this week were an opportunity for Judge Gorsuch to explain his record, to tell us how he thinks and how his judicial philosophy does not fundamentally advantage the powerful. Instead, we got banalities and platitudes. We didn't get any real answers to any real questions about what he thinks about the law and why. He refused to answer general questions on dark money in politics, LGBTQ rights, the constitutionality of the Muslim ban. I couldn't believe it, when I asked him: Is a law that bans Muslims, a law that just said all Muslims are banned from the U.S. unconstitutional, he couldn't even answer that. He refused to say whether he agreed with Supreme Court decisions in seminal cases like Brown v. Board, Roe v. Wade, Griswold v. Connecticut, despite the fact that his predecessors, Justices Roberts and Alito, said they agreed with those cases.

He refused to answer questions about the emoluments clause, a section of the

Constitution that prohibits foreign corruption of U.S. officials. Instead of an umpire calling balls and strikes in baseball, what we really saw was a well-trained expert in dodgeball.

My friend, the ranking member of the committee, said it best. ''What worries me,'' she told the nominee, ''is that you have been very much able to avoid any specificity like no one I have ever seen before.''

Let me repeat. There is no legal standard, rule, or even logic for failing to answer questions that don't involve immediate and specific cases that are or could come before the Court. It is evasion, just evasion, plain and simple, and it belies a deeper truth about this nominee.

If anyone doubts that Judge Gorsuch doesn't have strong views, that thinks he would be a neutral judge calling balls and strikes as Judge Roberts once put it, just look at the way he was chosen. He was supported and pushed forward by the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society, and groomed by billionaire conservatives like Mr. Anschutz. President Trump simply picked someone from off their list.

President Trump sought the advice and consent from the Federalist Society instead of from the U.S. Senate. Does anyone think the Federalist Society would choose someone who just called balls and strikes? Does anyone think they would put on their list a neutral, moderate judge when they haven't ever supported anyone but judicial conservatives, almost all hard-right judicial conservatives in their history? The Federalist Society has been dedicated for a generation to influence the courts to favor corporations and special interests. If anyone doubts that Judge Gorsuch could be an activist judge with views eschewing the interests of average people, look at how he was selected—by a group that is not neutral, a group that has been dedicated to changing the judiciary and placing activist, hard-right judges on the bench. Now that he is nominated, look at how much money, dark, secret, undisclosed money—it is a good bet from the very corporations Judge Gorsuch has been defending his whole career. If he were so neutral, would they be spending this money? I doubt it.

Anyone groomed by the Federalist Society will not call balls and strikes. Their views are best foretold by the ideology of the people who groomed them. To say Judge Gorsuch has no ideology whatsoever is absurd. He just will not admit it to the American people. To say he is just neutral in his views is belied by his history since his college days and by his own judicial record. He even tried to deny it. In the hearings, Judge Gorsuch repeated the hollow assertion that judges don't have parties or politics. He said there are no Democratic judges or Republican judges, but if that were true, we wouldn't be here, would we? If that were true, if the Senate were merely evaluating a nominee based on his or her qualifications, Merrick Garland would be seated on the Supreme Court right now. Merrick Garland is not a Justice. We all know why. We all know my friends across the aisle held the Supreme Court seat open for over 1 year in hopes that they would have the opportunity to install someone handpicked by the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society to advance the goal of Big Money interests entrenching their power in the Court.

They don't even mind that this nomination is moving forward under a cloud of an FBI investigation of the President's campaign. The Republicans held a Supreme Court seat open for a year under a Democratic President who was under no investigation but now are rushing to fill the seat for a President whose campaign is under investigation. It is unseemly and wrong to be moving so fast on a lifetime appointment in such circumstances.

Finally, Judge Gorsuch came into this hearing with a record that raises deep concerns about whether he would consider fairly the plight of the average citizen before the interests of powerful special interests. I examined his record. I saw a judge who repeatedly decided with insurance companies that wanted to deny disability benefits to employees. I saw a judge who, in unemployment discrimination, sided with employers the great majority of the time. I saw a judge who, on the issue of money and politics, seems to be in the same company as Justices Thomas and Scalia, willing to restrict the most commonsense contribution limits.

In the hearings, Judge Gorsuch did nothing to explain his philosophy, did nothing to assuage those concerns. We will just have to go by his record, a record that shows time and time again his rulings favor the already powerful over ordinary Americans.

Judge Gorsuch ruled against a teacher, Grace Hwang, who, having been through two bouts of cancer, was advised by her doctors not to return to the college campus during a flu epidemic lest she put her life at risk. She was fired for taking sick leave. Judge Gorsuch, true to form, voted to uphold that dismissal. Her daughter Katherine told us last week:

> This decision to protect her health cost my mom her job. When Judge Gorsuch issued his ruling, he didn't think about the impact that this had on our family. The law calls for ''reasonable accommodation for those who are disabled.''

Judge Gorsuch ignored the human cost.

Judge Gorsuch ruled against a truck-driver, Alfonse Maddin, who had to make a similar choice between his employer and his life. I met with him. He told me a harrowing story of being stuck in the cab of a tractor-trailer with frozen brakes, no heat, temperatures outside dipping to 27 below zero. He had a choice, leave the trailer with broken brakes and drive the cab to safety or stay in the trailer and freeze to death. He radioed his company to explain his predicament. They told him that the cargo was the most important thing; he couldn't leave it. Rather than risk the lives of other motorists on a freezing highway by driving a trailer with frozen brakes, Mr. Maddin struggled to unhitch his trailer and drive his cab to safety—returning later for it once he was not at risk of dying from the cold. For that, his company fired him. He sued. Seven judges heard this case as it went through appeal. Only one, Judge Gorsuch, in dissent, ruled against him. Judge Gorsuch used an exceptionally technical and illogical reading of the statute to reach the absurd conclusion that Mr. Maddin was obligated to risk his life to protect his cargo.

Mr. Maddin said that Judge Gorsuch's nomination to the Supreme Court gives him ''pause for concern'' because he ''demonstrated a willingness to artfully diminish the humane element that encompassed the issue.''

Judge Gorsuch also ruled against a parent of a severely autistic child, Luke, who sought what the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act guarantees him—the right to an education that met his needs. Jeff Perkins, Luke's father, is testifying before the Judiciary Committee today. Their story is powerful. Judge Gorsuch ruled that Luke was not entitled to attend a specialized school because he was able to make more than de minimis progress in the normal educational system.

Just yesterday, the Supreme Court unanimously—including Justice Alito and so many others who are so conservative—rejected Judge Gorsuch's interpretation of the IDEA. The Court held that ''when all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing 'merely more than a de minimis progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all.''' That puts Judge Gorsuch's interpretation of the IDEA law to the right of even Justice Thomas—a very difficult feat.

Whom we put on the bench, their basic judgment, matters. While I do not think that the personal views and experiences should bear on the decisions of day-to-day cases, there is a reason we don't program computers to decide cases. We do not want judges with ice water in their veins. What we want and need are judges who understand the litigants before them and bring a modicum—at least a modicum—of human judgment into the courtroom. You can call this trait empathy or mercy. I think it falls in the category of common sense. It is common sense that necessarily comes from each person's own, unique life experience. Even Judge Gorsuch acknowledged this when he told the committee ''I am not an algorithm.'' Yet he wouldn't tell us how, as a human—a nonalgorithm—he would uniquely approach a case.

When it comes to the application of the law, that empathy, that mercy,

that ''humane element'' of common sense—as Alphonse Maddin, the truck-driver, put it—is the most important judicial trait of them all because ultimately the law is abstract, but the people and situations are real. The task of the judge is to apply those abstract legal doctrines to very humane and sometimes very messy situations. It is a hard thing to do to bring fairness and justice to a world that is too short on both.

I am reminded of the words spoken by Portia, the great lawyer in ''The Merchant of Venice,'' who spoke of the blessings and necessity of mercy in applying the law.

He said:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The thron-ed monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself.

Judge Gorsuch told us he is not God, and that is true, but his humanity does not excuse him from the attribute of mercy. Instead, his humanity should require it.

Alphonse Maddin sought the mercy of the law. The Hwang family sought the mercy of the law. Luke, the autistic child whose school was failing him, sought the mercy of the law. The man who had the power to see plain sense in their cases, who could rule in their favor and right the wrongs that had been done to them as other judges had done in each of those cases—Judge Neil Gorsuch—said no.

I am voting no on Gorsuch for Alphonse Maddin and workers across the country, for the Hwang family and others who do not want to choose between their health and providing for their children, and for the Perkins family, who loves their children just as they are and wants for them no fewer than the opportunities afforded to every other child in America.

The American people deserve someone who sees average litigants as more than incidental consequences of precedent, when that precedent produces an absurd result, whose view of the law is not so cold and so arid so as to wring out every last drop of humanity and common sense. It requires only the bare minimum of judicial decency to rule the right way in the cases I have mentioned, and Judge Gorsuch did not.

That is all the evidence my colleagues should need to vote no, and I urge them and will urge them in the days ahead to do so.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, today, we are truly in a historic fight, a fight to protect one of the most treasured and revered American values—our right to privacy. Make no mistake, our privacy has never been more in danger, and the American public knows it.

The American public knows its privacy is in danger when a smart TV can listen to its most intimate living room conversations—your conversations with your children, with your parents, with your spouse.

The American public knows its privacy is in danger when it seems that every day there is a hack on the databases of one of our country's largest companies—Yahoo!, Target, Home Depot, JPMorgan Chase.

The American public knows its privacy is in danger when the Russian surveillance machine—firing on all cylinders—hacks the U.S. election, threatening to undermine our sacred democratic system.

The American public knows its privacy is in danger when both Chambers of Congress hold countless hearings, launch investigations, and receive briefings on the rapidly growing cybersecurity threat to our Nation and the impact both on our national security and to the public.

The American public wants us to do more to protect its privacy. The American public wants us to do more to protect its sensitive information. Yet what do the Republicans in Congress want to do today on the Senate floor? They want to make it easier for Americans' sensitive information to be used, shared, and sold without their permission.

Today, the Republicans are seeking a vote on a Congressional Review Act resolution that would allow Comcast, Verizon, Charter, AT&T, and other broadband companies to take control away from consumers and relentlessly collect and sell their sensitive information without the consent of that family.

That is sensitive information about your health, about your finances, even about your children. They want to track your location and draw a map of where you shop, where you work, where you eat, where your children go to school, and then sell that information to data brokers or anyone else who wants to make a profit off of you.

They want to document how many times you search online for heart disease, breast cancer, opioid addiction treatments, or AIDS treatment, and then sell that information to your insurance company. They want to know what games your teenagers play or shows they watch so they can then target ads to your family—and all of this done without your consent.

What the Republicans are bringing to the floor today is going to basically change the definition of ''ISP''—internet service provider—to ''information sold for profit.'' It will stand for ''invading subscriber privacy.''

President Trump, himself, is outraged about fake violations of his own privacy, but we should all be alarmed by this very real violation of privacy that will occur today if the Senate decides to roll back these important consumer protections.

Here on the Senate floor, the Republicans are fighting to make it easier for your broadband provider to use and sell that same type of information—remarkably detailed and sensitive dossiers of information about you, your kids, your parents, your grandparents—320 million Americans.

The Republicans are trying to rescind the Federal Communications Commission's broadband privacy rules, which simply require your cable, wireless, or telephone company provider to obtain consumer consent before using or sharing subscribers' personal information; promote transparency by disclosing what they collect about internet and wireless users; and adopt data security protections and notify consumers if a breach occurs.

That is it. That is what this whole debate is all about—whether consumers, not the broadband providers, have control over their sensitive information.

The big broadband companies and their Republican allies say we need a light touch regulatory framework to protect Americans' broadband privacy—a light touch approach, like with the Federal Trade Commission, which does not prescribe actual privacy rules. The Federal Trade Commission only enforces the privacy policies companies create for themselves, and then they bring an enforcement action if a company violates its own very low standards, but if Comcast's or AT&T's or Verizon's policy is that you have no privacy, there is nothing for anyone to enforce. It would be impossible for the internet service provider to violate its own nonexistent or very low privacy protections.

Let's be clear here. When the broadband behemoths say ''light touch,'' they mean ''hands off.'' They mean hands off their ability to monetize captive consumers' sensitive information.

Let's be clear. When the big broadband barons and their Republican allies are firing their opening salvo in the war on net neutrality, they want broadband privacy protections to be the first victim.

When Republicans say we need to harmonize regulations, they really mean self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ultimate dream of the Republicans, who are beholden to those special interests. They really want to allow broadband companies to write their own privacy rules.

Is this really what the American public wants—a harmonized, light-touch approach to protecting their sensitive information from their broadband providers? Does the American public really want us to allow our broadband companies to ignore reasonable data security practices, making consumers' sensitive information more vulnerable to breaches and unauthorized access?

This resolution does just that. The internet service providers even oppose

following reasonable data security practices.

We should know better. The American public wants us to strengthen our privacy protections, not weaken them. The American people do not want their sensitive information collected, used, and sold by any third party, whether that be your broadband provider or a hacker.

At its core, this debate is about our values—our values as a people, our values as a society. While technology has certainly changed, our core values have not changed as a country. For generations, we have valued the right to choose whom we let into our homes, whom we communicate with, whom we share our most sensitive secrets with, but now the Republicans and the broadband industry are telling us that we must forgo those rights just because our homes are connected to the internet and our phones are connected to the internet.

With many Americans across the country having only a couple of broadband providers, at most, to choose from, they will not have the option of changing service providers if their privacy protections are not transparent or robust. And throughout it all, while the internet service providers monetize your personal information, the monthly bill will continue to show up for the service that is siphoning off your sensitive information.

My colleagues, we know the attack on the free and open internet is coming. Net neutrality is on the chopping block, and this is the first step in ensuring that the few and the powerful control the internet. We must stop this today, so I urge my colleagues to join with me.

The fundamental principle here is that every person should have the knowledge that information is being gathered about their families when they use the internet; second, that they have notice from the company that that information is going to be resold to a third party, to someone else, not to the broadband company; and third, that you have the right to say no, that you do not want that information about your family member to be resold.

When we were all younger and the salesman came to the front door and knocked, your mother told you to tell the salesman that they could not come into the house because the privacy of your family did not warrant allowing a stranger into your home. The broadband companies now say: Well, we are in your home, and we are wired in every room, and we now have the right to take all of the information of your family and sell it. What sites do your children go on? What sites do you go on to look for help for the disease that someone in your family might have?

Now the broadband companies say they are coming right through the front door. They are going into every room in your house. The American people have the right to say what they have always said: No, you cannot take those secrets of our family. You cannot take how we use that information.

So this vote that we are about to take in the next couple of hours on the Senate floor goes right to the heart of who we are.

We now hear more about the Russians, and we hear more about companies whose information has been hacked. Then the Republicans are crying their crocodile tears about the compromise of privacy of people in our country, and then they come to the floor and take all of the information online in the family and allow it to be sold as a product. That is just fundamentally wrong. It goes contrary to the values of our country.

I urge very strongly a ''no'' vote from the Members of the Senate. Just remember: This is the privacy vote of all time on the Senate floor—of all time—because there has never been anything like the internet going into our homes. No one should be allowed to take all of that information and just sell it without getting their permission.

Mr. President, I urge a ''no'' vote on this resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before he leaves the floor, I just want to commend my colleague from Massachusetts for an excellent presentation. He has really outlined A to Z with respect to what this issue is all about. I commend him, and I also commend the ranking member of the committee, Senator NELSON, our colleague from Florida, for his excellent job.

Before he leaves the floor, picking up on the remarks of our colleague from Massachusetts, I am particularly struck by the fact that I have always thought that it is a classic conservative principle to empower the individual—to empower the individual to make fundamental choices about what would be important to them and their family and their wallets and all of the activities that are central to the life of a working class family.

What we have been touching on—very eloquently by my colleague from Massachusetts—is we are going to be voting in a little bit to strip rights from individuals, to retreat from that classic conservative principle of empowering individuals and families to make decisions.

I think, for all of the reasons that my colleague from Massachusetts has talked about and that Senator NELSON has been talking about, this idea of stripping from individuals the right to make these fundamental decisions and allowing the gatekeepers of the internet to collect, share, and profit from personal information of consumers without their consent is an extraordinary mistake for our country at this time.

I serve on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. I think, for many people, these issues have, in effect, converged with respect to privacy policy as it relates to the private marketplace, which is what this ill-advised proposal that we are going to vote on today is all about.

We are constantly offered up ideas that suggest that you really are faced with what amounts to a flawed set of choices. In the intelligence area, we are consistently told: Well, you just have to give up a little bit of liberty to have security. And the reality is that liberty and security are not mutually exclusive. Smart policies give us both. They give us security and liberty. Unfortunately, around here, we are coming up with policies, like weakening strong encryption, that are reducing both—reducing security and reducing liberty. I think what we are dealing with here on this ill-advised resolution in the Senate, with respect to the FCC rule, is yet another set of false choices—that you can either have internet access or privacy. They are not mutually exclusive. Just as we can have security and liberty, we can have internet access and privacy for all of the reasons that my friend from Massachusetts has been outlining.

Now, the FCC acted on the responsibility given to them by the Congress to protect browsing history—arguably the most intimate, personal information imaginable. Browsing history makes what the Senate did in the past with metadata look like small potatoes. Browsing history is really a picture into your personal life. I have appreciated the support of my colleagues for making sure that in the intelligence field, without court oversight, you couldn't get access to people's browsing history.

The Congress, in effect, told the Federal Communications Commission to protect browsing history, favorite applications, and even locations of American broadband users, and the FCC acted on it. Before that time, there were no rules in place outlining how an internet service provider—those are the ISPs that we always hear Senators talking about—may use, share, or even sell their customers' private information. So, just as the FCC has done for wireline phone customers, the FCC said it was going to keep up with the evolution of telecommunications networks by ensuring privacy protections would apply to broadband internet use. This struck a lot of us as just common sense. Again, building on the conservative principle of empowering the individual, the judgment was that by creating what are called ''opt-in'' consent agreements, where the consumer makes an affirmative decision about what they want—it is not what government wants, it is not what big companies want, it is what the consumer wants. The judgment was that by creating this opt-in consent agreement, the consumer would get a clear understanding of what the broadband provider knows about them from, for example, their computer or from their smartphone.

The big internet service providers are in a unique position to see where information flows over the networks and can see more of Americans' data than probably anybody else in what we might call the internet ecosystem. The websites we visit, what we look for, what time we are online—all of this, even our location—would be considered highly personal and highly sensitive information.

The responsibility of the internet service provider is to protect consumer privacy. It is compounded by the fact that the majority of broadband consumers have only one option for fast internet service to their home. There is only one company offering them service. So it seems to me what we are talking about—what Senator MARKEY has outlined—really looks like bad news for folks in rural areas where they are only going to have one provider, and, frankly, I think in a lot of metropolitan areas, particularly where there are modest-income individuals.

Without these protections in place, most consumers are left with the choice of giving up their browsing history for an internet service provider to sell to the highest bidder or to have no internet at all. So think about what that means for, say, an older person.

By the way, under what is being considered in the other body on healthcare, people between 50 and 64 aren't going to have a lot of extra money laying around. Those are people who are going to get clobbered—clobbered—by the healthcare bill that is being considered in the House today.

What is being considered in the House today—talking about the wallets of people between 50 and 64—would allow the insurance companies to charge people who are pre-Medicare five times as much as younger people. So they are already going to be paying thousands of dollars more out-of-pocket. Now, given what may happen in this body, we would have consumers left with the choice of giving up their browsing history for an internet service provider to sell to the highest bidder or have no internet at all. So we are socking it to them in terms of their healthcare premiums, and then we are socking it to them in terms of essential communications as well.

I just think this is unacceptable and certainly contrary to the whole notion of classic conservatism, empowering the individual. And it is certainly taking away these rights from folks in rural America—most of my towns in Oregon have populations of under 10,000 people. This proposal that is being discussed here is going to strip consumers of basic rights that are practically a requirement for economic success in the 21st century.

I am going to close by picking up on another point that I think Senator MARKEY said very well, and I believe I heard Senator NELSON, our ranking member, touch on as well. It looks to me like a subject that should not be in controversy: basic transparency and accountability for the individual, and individual empowerment. It shouldn't be controversial. It shouldn't be a contentious matter. My colleague and I served in the other body for a number of years, and we built coalitions of people all across the political spectrum around the principles we are advocating today. Providing transparency and empowering the individual shouldn't be a contentious issue.

Under these regulations, internet service providers can still collect and use their subscribers' information. The rules simply ensure that internet service providers receive consent—receive permission from an empowered consumer—that it is OK to reuse or sell their information, and the companies would provide the consumers an explanation of how their data is collected and where it is shared. These rules are about transparency, plain and simple. Customers, especially those, as I have indicated, who are captive to one internet service provider, deserve to know how their internet service provider is using their data.

The broadband privacy rules are not some kind of attack on monetizing consumer data, but simply a recognition of the importance of consumer consent.

I will close by saying that more and more in this area, the American people are getting presented false choices. They are being told, as I see on the Intelligence Committee, that you have to give up some of your liberty to have your security. Those are false choices. They are not mutually exclusive. Everyone in America, everyone paying attention to this debate ought to know that they have a right to both. Don't ever, ever let a politician tell you that you have to give up some of your liberty to have your security. You have a right to vote, and it is our job, colleagues on both sides of the aisle, to come up with policies that do both.

Today, we ought to make sure that people aren't presented with another false choice—that to have Internet access you have to give up your privacy rights. You can have both, and the Federal Communications Commission has sought to come up with a sensible policy to do that.

So I join my colleagues, particularly my friend from Massachusetts, who knows so much about this field, and our terrific ranking minority member, Senator NELSON, in urging colleagues to oppose a harmful resolution that, in my view, turns class conservatism on its head and strips consumers of their rights in a truly ill-advised manner.

I yield the floor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I oppose the resolution to repeal the Federal Communications Commission's rule to protect consumers from having their data sold by internet service providers, or ISPs, without their permission.

Passing this resolution of disapproval would represent yet another victory for big business and a defeat for hard-working Americans who use the internet to do their job, connect with friends, or read the news.

The internet started as a system to facilitate communication among academic and military networks. In 1995, less than 1 percent of the world used it. Today more than 87 percent of Americans and more than 40 percent of the world's population use the internet.

Today the internet has become nearly indispensable. Increasingly, our toasters, refrigerators, and cars can connect to the internet, but legislation has been slow to keep up with technology. Every website we visit and every link we click leaves an unintended trail that tells a story about our lives. ISPs can collect information about our location, children, sensitive information, family status, financial information, Social Security numbers, web browsing history, and even the content of communications. ISPs sell this highly sensitive and highly personal data to the highest bidder without any consent or knowledge.

Recognizing that telecommunications companies have little incentive to tell consumers what they are doing with their personal data, the FCC promulgated a rule to make sure that consumers can protect their privacy though transparency, choice, and data security. The rule's name explains its purpose: ''Protecting the Privacy of Customers of Broadband and Other Telecommunications Services.'' The FCC rule would not stop companies from selling consumers' information, but the rule would require ISPs to get consumers' consent before using, disclosing, or allowing others to access this information.

As former FCC Chairman Wheeler said, ''It's the consumers' information. How it is used should be the consumers' choice.''

With this resolution, Congressional Republicans are telling 9 out of 10 Americans that they should not be able to decide how private corporations collect, disclose, and sell their personal data. This resolution puts the special interests of data users above those of consumers. I oppose the resolution.

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

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

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, what is the parliamentary situation? Are we in morning business?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is considering S.J. Res. 34.

CALLING FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL PROSECUTOR

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have been privileged to serve in this body for more than 42 years, and I thank my native State of Vermont for that.

When I joined the Senate, our country was still crawling out of an intractable war—a war which came to an end with a vote in the Senate Armed Services Committee in April of 1975. Since then, I have seen our country slide into new wars. I have seen scandals that have consumed this town and our Nation. I have seen horrific terrorist attacks that have shaken our country to its core, from Oklahoma City to 9/11, and others. All of these events, in different ways, have tested our country. But I have never seen a threat to our democratic institutions like I see today.

There is still much we do not know about Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election, but what we do know is deeply disturbing. Last night, reports indicated that there is evidence that certain Trump officials coordinated the release of hacked documents with Russian officials. And on Monday the FBI Director confirmed that the FBI has been investigating possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia since July of last year.

Already, the Intelligence Community has made public its conclusion that Russian President Putin waged a multifaceted influence campaign to delegitimize Secretary Clinton and help Donald Trump win the Presidency. Worse, he intended to undermine public faith in our democratic process. What is even worse is that this interference did not end on November 8, election day. It is ongoing. That—whether you are a Republican or a Democrat—should concern every American.

According to the Intelligence Community, President Putin will continue using cyber-attacks and propaganda campaigns to undermine our future elections. This is nothing less than an attack on our democracy. It should outrage all Americans, no matter what their political affiliation, and we need to know all the facts.

Frankly, my experience here tells me we need a thorough, independent investigation. We need to send a clear message to President Putin that America, our country—the country that the Presiding Officer and I revere—will not tolerate future efforts to manipulate our most sacred democratic process, our elections.

All of us here know that President Trump is not going to lead such an investigation. He is not going to deliver this message. The President, unfortunately, spent much of the 2016 campaign supportive of President Putin. Then-Candidate Trump refused to call on Russia to stop meddling in our election, saying: ''I'm not going to tell Putin what to do.'' He even encouraged Russian hacking on live television, pleading: ''Russia, if you're listening, I hope you'll be able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing.'' It is unprecedented. No candidate, in my memory, of either party has ever called on another country to interfere in our elections that way.

This was occurring as the President was claiming to have had no role in weakening the Republican Party's official position on Russia's incursion into Ukraine. Of course, we have now learned that this was false, and his campaign played a central role in softening his party's stance on Russia.

I do not know why the President is so enthralled with President Vladimir Putin, a man who has shown such disregard for personal rights, even as he has made himself one of the wealthiest people in the world. It may be simply because Russia is heavily invested in the Trump brand. Years before the President denied having any financial relationships with the Russians, his son admitted that Russians own a disproportionate share of Trump assets, saying: ''We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia.'' Now, just how invested Moscow is in Trump is not known. The President broke with precedent of both Republicans and Democrats and did not release his tax returns. But I imagine there would be quite a sigh of relief if the only secret in the President's full tax returns were that he did not pay his share of taxes and paid far less than the average American.

The President, though, is not the only one in his administration incapable of telling the truth when it comes to Russia. His Attorney General provided testimony that was not true before the Senate Judiciary Committee in response to questions from me and Senator FRANKEN about Russian contacts, and we know his first National Security Advisor, Michael Flynn, resigned after lying to Vice President PENCE about his conversations with the Russian Ambassador.

President Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, also resigned after questions were raised about his extensive activities in Russia and Ukraine. Of course, now it has been reported that Mr. Manafort earned $10 million per year for secret work on behalf of Putin.

Another former adviser, Roger Stone, had early warning of the release of hacked documents. He has admitted to having conversations with ''Guccifer 2.0,'' the Russian-connected hacker responsible for the cyber-attack on the Democratic National Committee.

They say that where there is smoke there is fire. There is so much smoke here that it is getting hard to breathe. The President unfortunately continues to make matters worse. This week alone, he continued his untruth about President Obama personally ordering a wiretap of Trump Tower, something everybody knows is not true. I think members of his own administration's inner circle are embarrassed every time he persists in this.

On Monday, the President ramped up his own influence campaign to undermine the integrity of this investigation, tweeting ''fake news'' as the Director of the FBI prepared to testify under oath in the House of Representatives.

Now, I have no reason to doubt the integrity of the FBI's investigation thus far, but I have every reason to believe it is eventually going to be at risk. That is why we need somebody independent—independent of the Congress, independent of the administration. We need an independent special prosecutor to lead this investigation and to ultimately decide whether there is sufficient evidence to prosecute. A special prosecutor would not report to the Attorney General, who himself is a witness to this investigation. And a special prosecutor, unlike the Attorney General or even the FBI Director, cannot be fired by the President.

I have thought long and hard about this. I went on my experience here with administrations beginning with President Gerald Ford straight through to today. It takes a lot of thought to call for a special prosecutor, but this is one where we need it, where the American people have to have somebody they can trust outside Republicans, Democrats, and the Congress, and certainly outside the administration.

Our Nation is at a precipice. We can either confront what happened in our election and get to the bottom of it with an independent investigation and make sure it never happens again. Or we can just pretend this is another Washington scandal and allow it to be filtered through a familiar partisan lens. That would be a terrible mistake. In all my years here, I have never seen a time when another country—one that has shown its animosity toward us—has tried to interfere in our elections. If Russia can get away with interfering with our elections, what else can they interfere with in our democratic Nation? They do not share the ideals we do. They do not allow free elections. They do not allow freedom of expression. They do not allow their people to speak out. Why would anyone think that they would have America's interests at heart?

Today we have a counterintelligence investigation into the campaign of a sitting President. There is evidence that this campaign colluded with a foreign adversary to impact our Presidential election. This is not normal. We must not treat it as such. I would feel this way no matter who had won the election—no matter if they were Democrat or Republican, because it goes beyond one party.

President Putin's goal last year was to undermine our democratic institutions—to corrode American's trust and faith in government, something that has sustained us through two World Wars, through a Civil War, through all the other problems this Nation has faced. That trust should sustain us long after every one of us in this body are gone.

This is a responsibility that we as Senators have to our great Nation: not to think of ourselves for the moment, but to think where this Nation is 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, and 100 years from now. We must do that. We owe that to the American people. Republicans and Democrats alike, we owe it

to the American people. We take an oath to uphold our Constitution.

We come here, all of us—and I have great respect for every Senator here in both parties—we come here hoping to do the best for our Nation. Our Nation is in peril. All of us would stand together if we had an adversary attack us. All of us would stand together if somebody declared war on us. We have done that in the past. We did that after Pearl Harbor. We did that other times in our Nation's history. Well, because this is done quietly behind the scenes, it is a great attack on us.

As I said, President Putin's goal last year was to undermine our democratic institutions—to corrode Americans' trust and faith in our government, no matter who is President. If we do not get to the bottom of Russian interference, he will no doubt be successful. And if anybody doubts it, if he is successful, he will try it again.

That is why we should stand united and call for a truly independent investigation. The American people deserve nothing less. We can sit here and talk about this bill and that bill, but it is so rare that we have something overriding. This is overriding. Let's have an independent investigation. This Senator is willing to accept that whichever way it goes.

I see our distinguished majority leader on the floor.

I will yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12:15 p.m. today there be 10 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form, remaining on S.J. Res. 34; further, that following the use or yielding back of that time, the joint resolution be read a third time and the Senate vote on the resolution with no intervening action or debate; finally, notwithstanding rule XXII, following disposition of the joint resolution, the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 20, David Friedman to be Ambassador to Israel.

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

If no one yields time, the time will be charged equally.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask unanimous consent that the time be charged equally.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The 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, the rules that the Federal Communications Commission recently promulgated—and when I say ''recently,'' it was October, only months ago—expanded the concept of privacy and consumer protection as applied to broadband. Now we are on the verge of rescinding those rules through S.J. Res. 34.

This resolution is a direct attack on consumer rights, on privacy, on rules that afford basic protection against intrusive and illegal interference with consumers' use of social media sites, websites, that often they take for granted. Many Americans simply don't stop to think about how broadband providers, as the carriers of all internet traffic, are also able to collect and use consumer data, to put together a detailed picture of who they are, what they do, where and when they buy things, where they go, what they like to do—all of it an array of data that people assume is private, all of it freely available to those internet providers.

Even when data is encrypted, our broadband providers can piece together significant amounts of information about us—including private information, medical conditions, financial problems—based on online activity. It is a mine that can be used—more valuable than a gold mine—because that information can be sold and bought and used again so that privacy becomes a completely evanescent and illusory feature of our lives.

Consumers wanting to switch broadband providers are often hit with hefty termination fees, and they have to experience a lapse in Internet service at home—something that most simply don't have the luxury to do or endure in today's connected society where internet is accessible. They have no meaningful choice about how to safeguard broadband privacy. They have one choice if they want speeds above 25 megabits per second. That is why I applauded those rules when they were promulgated by the FCC back in October, finalizing broadband privacy protections. I applauded them because signing up for the internet should not mean you sign away your rights to privacy.

Just as telephone networks must obtain consumer approval before selling customer information, broadband providers ought to be required to obtain consumers' affirmative consent before selling their sensitive browsing or app usage data to advertisers. The FCC rules that this resolution would decimate, utterly destroy, essentially seek to protect that privacy interest. The only way the FCC's broadband privacy rules protect consumers is through an affirmative opt-in consent. That is the only real protection that works.

These rules also prohibit pay-for-privacy schemes that would require consumers to waive their privacy protections as a precondition to receiving service. They establish data security and breach notification standards for broadband providers.

They also have important national security implications. Just last week, the Department of Justice indicted four individuals, including Russian spies, for hacking into Yahoo! systems in 2014 and obtaining access to at least 500 million Yahoo! accounts. According to the indictment, these Russian intelligence officers spied on U.S. Government officials and private sector employees of financial companies. One defendant also exploited the data for financial gain.

Without clear rules of the road, broadband subscribers will have no certainty or choice about how their private information can be used, no protection against abuse, and no assurance that security standards will be bolstered against that kind of attack that the Russians and their spies launched.

The FTC doesn't have jurisdiction over the security and privacy practices of broadband, cable, and wireless carriers. If the Ninth Circuit's recent decision in FTC v. AT&T is upheld, adopting a ''status-based'' instead of ''activity-based'' interpretation of the FTC's common carrier exemption, the FTC's jurisdiction and ability to impose privacy and security obligations would be even further curtailed.

Critics also say that the FCC's broadband privacy rules would unfairly create a separate regulatory regime for ''edge providers,'' websites such as Google or Facebook. If that is their real concern, why haven't they focused their efforts on ensuring that the FTC has meaningful rulemaking authority so that it can implement privacy and data security rules over such websites?

In closing, I have long supported giving the FTC authority to adopt its own rules governing the privacy and security of websites. Giving the FTC authority to adopt new rules would help ensure our privacy, keep our privacy safe no matter where we go on the internet or how we connect. However, I don't see any of our colleagues, in supporting this resolution, rushing to accomplish these goals.

We should all remember that consumers need control over their own information and how it is used. This resolution would subvert and sabotage that control.

All too often, Americans take for granted privacy until it is lost. Once it is lost, rarely can it be recovered. Once that information becomes public, privacy is irreparably damaged.

Today's vote, if it succeeds, will deprive Americans of important baseline privacy standards that they expect and demand the government to provide. Few Americans are aware of this vote today. Many will be aware of its consequences. It will do extraordinary damage to privacy, if it is approved.

I urge my colleagues to reject it and to help preserve American privacy.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PATIENT PROTECTION AND AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Ms. HARRIS. Mr. President, I rise to celebrate the anniversary of one of the most significant legislative achievements in American history, the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as ObamaCare.

I rise in strong opposition to the American Health Care Act, a callous and carelessly written bill that would roll back progress and strip health insurance from millions of Americans.

I rise on behalf of people like Chrystal from my home State of California. You see, I know Chrystal. She works in my dentist's office. In early 2011, just after I was elected attorney general of California, I went in for a checkup. It had been a while since I had seen her. Chrystal asked me how I had been, and I asked her how she had been, and then she shared with me great news. She was pregnant.

As a dental hygienist, she was working for a few different dentists and wasn't on the payroll of any of them as a full-time employee. This was before the ACA was in place, so Chrystal was on private insurance with only basic coverage, just enough to cover her annual exams.

When Chrystal found out she was pregnant, she went to her insurance company to apply for prenatal coverage. She was denied. When I asked her why, she told me that they said she had a preexisting condition. So you can imagine I asked her: Are you OK? What is wrong? What is the preexisting condition?

She told me she was pregnant.

When she applied to another healthcare company for insurance, again, she was denied. Why? Preexisting condition. What was it? She was pregnant.

So this young woman was forced to go into her sixth month of pregnancy before she received a sonogram. Instead, thankfully, there was a free clinic in San Francisco, so she could get her prenatal care.

Thank God she had a strong and beautiful baby boy. His name is Jackson. They are both doing well today.

Thank God that situation is no longer the reality for millions of Americans.

I share Chrystal's story to remind us what America's healthcare system looked like only a few years ago.

We should not forget that before the ACA, 48 million Americans lacked health insurance. That is more people than the entire country of Canada.

Before the ACA, when these people got sick, they had three choices: Go without treatment, go to the emergency room, or go broke.

Before the ACA, 129 million people—almost one out of every two Americans—could be denied insurance coverage because of preexisting conditions. And the minute you got sick, your insurer could dig up some flimsy reason to drop your coverage. You could be denied coverage for chemotherapy or insulin if you had cancer or diabetes. You could be denied prenatal coverage if you were pregnant, like Chrystal. You could even be denied health coverage if you were a victim of domestic violence.

Before the ACA, healthcare costs were crushing low-income and middle-class Americans. Premiums—which, of course, are those monthly bills that we all pay for our insurance—were going up and up. Sky-high medical bills were the No. 1 reason Americans went broke, causing them to sell their homes, their cars, and even pawn their jewelry to pay off their debts.

One of the worst things about facing the healthcare system without coverage before the ACA was that it left you feeling utterly alone. Most Americans know what I am talking about: that knot in your stomach when you know there is something wrong with your health or the health of your child or your parent, but you are not sure what it is, whether it can be fixed or whether your insurance will cover it, and the frustration, the anger as you try to make sense of the fine print and codes on the medical bill that has so many zeros.

How many of us have walked into an emergency room with a loved one and felt time just stop? Maybe it was with your child who was running a fever or having trouble breathing. Maybe your partner is being rushed in with a possible heart attack. All you will know is that something is wrong. All you know is that you are overwhelmed and scared, and you know that you should not also have to fight on the phone with an insurance company or wonder if a doctor will even see you at all. That is how millions and millions of Americans experienced our healthcare system.

It was not right or fair. So the ACA set out to make things better, and 7 years ago today, President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law. It finally extended good, affordable health insurance to Americans like Chrystal all across the Nation. Vice President Biden was absolutely right when, at the time, he said that it was a ''big''—and then I will not quote the next word; let's call it blanking—''deal.''

It is a shame that people have been playing politics with this law and with America's health. The former Speaker of the House said that the ACA would be ''Armageddon.'' A Republican Presidential candidate who now sits in the Cabinet called the ACA—and these are his actual words—''the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery.''

Earlier this month, the President of the United States tweeted that the ACA is ''a complete and total disaster.'' Well, I say: Tell that to the people of California because when a State wants to make the ACA work, it works—whether that is California or Kentucky, and real people living real lives know it.

For example, I recently heard from Myra from Sherman Oaks, CA, who was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. She wrote:

> Before ObamaCare, my husband and I lived under constant stress due to our lack of good health insurance.

But, because of the ACA, Myra told me:

> We had a Silver Blue Shield plan that covered . . . well over a million dollars in bills to date. I am happy to report I am now well, but without insurance, I was facing a death sentence. Without the ACA, we would certainly have had to sell our home to pay my bills and try to figure out how to make ends meet.

She wrote that it covered well over a million dollars. That is what the ACA does.

Here is how Cindy of from Oakley, CA, has experienced real life. She wrote:

> My daughter was diagnosed with an eating disorder at 13 years old and I can directly thank the excellent care received at Kaiser Northern California for her good health today at age 17. Without the ACA and the mental health parity it helps provide . . . I would not have had treatment options available to me.

Again, coverage for mental health treatment—that is what the ACA does.

Honoree, a single mom from Samoa, CA, living with a spinal cord injury that has kept her from working for 3½ years, wrote to me and said:

> I wanted to let you know that I love ObamaCare! My healthcare has steadily improved since the ACA was enacted. . . . I can't tell you how AMAZING it felt to get my teeth cleaned and cared for after waiting more than a decade.
>
> I walked around for weeks saying, ''thanks, ObamaCare!'' whenever I sensed how good my teeth felt.
>
> I would be saddened to see the ACA get scrapped. It's made a huge difference in our lives. Actually, I'd be more than saddened, I'd be very scared.

Again, this is testimony about the ACA, in this case about dental coverage and improved healthcare. That is what the ACA does.

I will state that I believe there is a huge disconnect between the over-the-top criticism of the ACA and the law's actual impact. There is a disconnect between the politics and how people are actually living and thriving under the ACA. In fact, in a recent poll, one in three Americans didn't even realize that the ACA and ObamaCare were actually the same thing, and they are. So, everybody, let's be clear about this. The Affordable Care Act is ObamaCare, and ObamaCare is the Affordable Care Act.

We all know, of course, that there are ways to improve the ACA, but ending it is not the answer. The truth is that the ACA has largely done what it was supposed to do—expand, protect, and reduce—expand coverage, protect consumers, and reduce the pace of rising healthcare costs. Thanks to the ACA and Medicaid expansion, 20 million

more Americans have health insurance. That is the population of the entire State of New York. Thanks to the ACA, premiums are going up at the slowest rate in half a century. Thanks to the ACA, doctors are innovating and providing better preventive care, from keeping people out of the hospital to delivering healthier babies. Thanks to the ACA, insurers cannot set lifetime limits on your care, meaning your insurance company won't tell you in the middle of a cancer treatment that they have paid all they ever will. Thanks to the ACA, millions of underserved Americans in rural towns and in cities and everywhere in between have access to care for the first time. Thanks to the ACA, young people can stay on their parents' insurance until they are 26. Thanks to the ACA, 55 million women have insurance that works—mammograms, checkups, and birth control with no copays. When you pick up your prescription at the pharmacy and see that the bill is zero dollars, well, that is the ACA. And thanks to the ACA, you can't be discriminated against if you have a preexisting condition, including that preexisting condition called being a woman.

Of course, navigating the healthcare system is still daunting, but things are better. There are now some rules of the road to keep insurance companies from taking advantage of you during some of life's most vulnerable moments. Because of the ACA, because of ObamaCare, you can sleep a little easier at night and know that your care will be there when you need it.

Let's fast-forward to today. Today, we mark the seventh anniversary of this historic life-changing law. But all that it covers and protects could also be ripped away, and that is because of the American Health Care Act, the Republican healthcare plan on the House side. That is what it will do—rip it all away.

They have done their best to mislead folks about their plan. They have criticized objective news reports, and they even questioned the Congressional Budget Office—which, as we know, is, by the way, a nonpartisan, independent office which crunched the numbers and found that this new plan would cause millions of Americans to lose insurance coverage.

Before we leap on to this new bill, let's all ask some key questions. Let's all take a good look at what this plan really would and would not do.

First, will this bill provide insurance for everybody, as President Trump promised? Well, the answer is no. In fact, the independent Congressional Budget Office says that under the GOP plan, 24 million Americans will lose their health insurance by the end of the decade. That is equal to the population of 15 States combined.

Who are these people? These are middle-class families, our Nation's teachers, veterans, truckdrivers, nurses, and farmers. These families include those who struggle with opioid addiction, have a child that needs support for autism, or have an aging parent who needs a nursing home. This bill threatens them all.

Let's ask: Will the plan help the folks who need care most? The answer is no. The House Republican plan's flat tax credits are based only on age, with no consideration of income level. So what that means is that a 40-year-old cashier making $10,000 gets the exact same amount as the 40-year-old banker making $74,000 a year. It doesn't matter whether you live in downtown Manhattan or the Cleveland suburbs or rural Alaska.

Let's ask: Will monthly costs go down for low-income and middle-class families who are stretched horribly thin right now? The answer is no. According to that same independent analysis, the Republican plan will immediately increase American families' premiums by 15 to 20 percent, with higher deductibles and out-of-pocket costs after that. In the next decade, a person in their fifties could see their insurance costs go up 850 percent. Their insurance costs can go up 850 percent.

Let's ask: What about our seniors—will their monthly costs go down? Sadly, the answer is no. The Republican plan lets insurers charge seniors five times as much as other Americans, meaning that high cholesterol your doctor diagnosed could cost you $3,200 more a month.

Let's ask: Will all women still have access to affordable family planning? The answer is no. This new bill will give Americans choice in healthcare, but the women of America will not have choice. The bill denies women tax credits if they get a plan that covers abortions. It prohibits Planned Parenthood from providing care for millions on Medicaid. Some 2.5 million patients choose Planned Parenthood every year, including roughly 1 million in California. They should be able to see the provider they choose and trust.

Let's ask: Will this new plan protect Medicaid, as President Trump promised? Well, the answer is no. Medicaid covers many people whose jobs don't offer healthcare, and it also pays for half of all the births in this Nation. It supports people with disabilities and children with special needs. Most people don't realize that Medicaid is the primary payer for treatment of opioid addiction and substance abuse. But this new plan being offered by House Republicans would roll back Medicaid coverage and cut nearly $1 trillion in Medicaid benefits over the next decade.

Let's ask: Does the plan put American families ahead of insurance companies? The answer, tragically, is no. Under this plan, if you lose your job and it takes more than 2 months to find another, you will be charged a 30-percent penalty on top of the monthly costs you are already paying. That money goes right into the insurance company's pockets.

So, by now, you are probably wondering: Who exactly does this bill help? Well, here is your answer. It gives millionaires a $50,000 average tax cut every year. It gives the top 0.1 percent in this country a $195,000 tax cut every year. It gives insurance companies a $145 billion tax break over the next decade. The President and the Speaker want you to believe that this plan is good for American families, but under their bill, the only thing that gets healthier are the insurance companies' bottom line.

As far as California is concerned, this bill would devastate our families. Here are the facts, and, frankly, here is the fight. Over 5 million Californians have received insurance through the Affordable Care Act. I say they are worth fighting for.

Since the ACA went into effect, California's uninsured population has been cut almost in half, from 17 percent to about 7 percent. I say they are worth fighting for.

Medi-Cal went from covering 8.5 million Americans to 13.5 million today. One in two children are covered under Medicaid. I say they are worth fighting for.

The community clinics and health centers that so many Californians rely on would be cut back or closed. I say they are worth fighting for.

A UC Berkeley study estimates that repealing the ACA would cost California up to 200,000 jobs, everyone from home healthcare aides and janitors to workers in retail, restaurants, and accounting. I say they are worth fighting for.

I rise today to emphasize that it is really important that we understand the everyday consequences of this bill. We are talking about real people. If you are a farmer in the Central Valley on Medicaid, you can lose that coverage. If you are a Los Angeles senior with diabetes, you may no longer be able to afford coverage on the individual market. If you are a family in Shasta County with a child dealing with a prescription drug addiction, substance abuse treatment likely will not be covered. If you are a couple in Humboldt County with an ailing parent, your request for home health services could be denied. These are the kinds of Californians and the kinds of Americans who this plan would hurt.

When these folks wake up at 3 a.m. worrying about an ache or pain or their next chemo appointment, when they wake up with that concern and that thought at 3 a.m., I promise you, they are not thinking about that through the lens of being a Republican or a Democrat. They think about themselves as fathers, mothers, parents, daughters and sons, and grandparents. They worry about their health needs and how their health needs will affect not only themselves but their loved ones. These concerns are not about politics. These are universal concerns, and we have all been there.

It is because all of us share these concerns and because all of us would be badly harmed by this new plan that

this bill is opposed by the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, and the AARP. They are the most respected medical and patient advocacy groups in this country, and they know what is at stake.

Ultimately, I believe this bill is not just about medicine or math; I believe this is about morals. The plan that the House is voting on today is a values statement, and it is not a good one. As our former President said about the ACA, this is more than just about healthcare; it is about the character of our country, and it is about whether or not we look out for one another.

I think we need to take a good, hard look in the mirror and ask: Who are we as a country? Are we a country that cuts the deficit by cutting care for our most vulnerable?

Let's look in the mirror and ask: Are we a country that gives tax breaks to insurers while giving higher medical bills to patients?

Are we a country that tells seniors and cancer patients and women ''You are on your own''?

Are we a country that sees healthcare as a privilege for a few or a right for all?

I believe that is what we have to decide.

The ACA is not perfect. It can be strengthened, and I am willing to work with anyone who will work in good faith to do that, but it is time to stop playing politics with public health.

Our government has three main functions: public safety, public education, and public health. We shouldn't be turning these responsibilities into partisan issues. Instead, we should be figuring out how to improve the lives of all Americans, whether we are Democrats, Republicans, or Independents.

People are counting on us, people like one of my constituents in Kern County—a woman who is suffering from lung disease, who said:

> We are not asking for much . . . decent healthcare. . . . Don't take it away. . . . Make it better.

I say to my colleagues: Do not take away American people's healthcare. Let's make it better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Under the previous order, there will now be 10 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form, prior to a vote on S.J. Res. 34.

The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, speaking of the vote that we will be having in just a few minutes, for the last several weeks, this Chamber has worked very hard to undo harmful rules and regulations that had been put forward by the Obama administration, at the last moment, as he was headed out the door. These are rules that hurt job creators and stifle economic growth.

The FCC privacy rules are just another example of burdensome rules that hurt more than they help and serve as another example of the government's picking winners and losers. They unnecessarily target internet service providers and, ultimately, make our internet ecosystem less efficient by adding more redtape.

The bottom line is that the FCC privacy rules are bad regulations that need to be repealed.

I should also note that this Congressional Review Act vote will not change the entire online privacy protections that consumers currently enjoy, and it will not change statutory privacy protections under the Communications Act. It will repeal something that was done unilaterally by President Obama and his administration, as I said, following the ending of his term, as they were headed out the door.

I thank the junior Senator from Arizona, Senator FLAKE, for his work on this CRA and moving it forward.

I urge all of my colleagues to support this resolution of disapproval.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, today, we will vote on a resolution that will take away privacy protections from the American people. By voting for this resolution, Congress is ignoring the fact that people want more protections online, not fewer.

In 2016, Pew did a study to determine the state of privacy in the United States, and the center found ''Americans express a consistent lack of confidence about the security of everyday communication channels and the organizations that control them.''

Pew found that this is especially true when it comes to the internet. People no longer trust organizations—public or private—to protect the data they collect.

Today, we are going to make that worse. That is because broadband providers know our complete browsing history. Think about that for a second. They know everything we do online, everything we search for on a daily basis. Think about how personal that information is, how it paints a picture of who we are. It is totally reasonable for broadband providers to have to ask customers for their consent before they take that information—our browsing history, what we do online—and sell it to a third party.

That will no longer be the case after the Republicans vote for this bill and it is enacted into law. Broadband providers will be able to take your browsing history and sell it without your permission. The FCC spent months on this rule, and by using the CRA to get rid of it, Congress is taking away the FCC's authority to do anything like it ever again. That will mean there is no Federal agency—not the FTC, not the FCC—that will even have jurisdiction over the issue of privacy for broadband providers.

What is the solution here? We should work with the private sector, the FCC, and the FTC to find a comprehensive solution together.

At a time when data collection and use is increasing exponentially, Republicans should not be rolling back protections for consumers. This is yet another repeal without replace.

Fifty-five years ago this month, President Kennedy gave a seminal speech about consumer rights. He spoke about the march of technology—how it had outpaced old laws and regulations and how fast that progress had occurred. That progress is only getting faster. The next massive technological change will be the ''internet of things,'' in which we will have tens of billions of devices connected to each other and interacting with us whether we like it or not.

As technology marches on, what stays the same is the bedrock principle that President Kennedy outlined, which is that consumers have a right to be safe, a right to be informed, a right to choose, and a right to be heard. Those rights are in jeopardy. The FCC took a small but important step, but the Republicans are walking it back.

Let me be clear. This is the single biggest step backward in online privacy in many years. I urge a ''no'' vote.

I ask unanimous consent all time be yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, all time is yielded back.

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

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

Under the previous order, the joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

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

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 94 Leg.]

YEAS—50

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

Sullivan	Tillis	Wicker
Thune	Toomey	Young

NAYS—48

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
Coons	Leahy	Tester
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Udall
Donnelly	Markey	Van Hollen
Duckworth	McCaskill	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Feinstein	Merkley	Whitehouse
Franken	Murphy	Wyden

NOT VOTING—2

Isakson	Paul

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 34) was passed, as follows:

S.J. RES. 34

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Congress disapproves the rule submitted by the Federal Communications Commission relating to ''Protecting the Privacy of Customers of Broadband and Other Telecommunications Services'' (81 Fed. Reg. 87274 (December 2, 2016)), and such rule shall have no force or effect.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of David Friedman, of New York, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Israel.

Mitch McConnell, Steve Daines, John Cornyn, Tom Cotton, Bob Corker, John Boozman, John Hoeven, James Lankford, Roger F. Wicker, John Barrasso, Lamar Alexander, Orrin G. Hatch, David Perdue, James M. Inhofe, Mike Rounds, Bill Cassidy, Thom Tillis.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of David Friedman, of New York, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Israel shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 95 Leg.]

YEAS—52

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
Corker	Kennedy	Strange
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Manchin	Tillis
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NAYS—46

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

NOT VOTING—2

Isakson	Paul

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 46.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David Friedman, of New York, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Israel.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I would like to talk about U.S. support for Israel. It used to be that U.S. support for Israel was bipartisan. One of the most deeply disappointing realities in Washington today is that this support is becoming characterized as increasingly partisan. That is because—what happened was Republicans came out against one of President Obama's signature foreign policy achievements, the Iran nuclear deal.

That opposition came in the face of consensus among national security experts across the political spectrum, both here and in Israel, that this deal was good for the security of Israel. Ultimately, what happened is, it politicized our foreign policy in the Middle East to the point that what would have otherwise been a bipartisan vote for a bipartisan consensus Ambassador to the country of Israel from the United States, will now be confirmed along mostly party lines.

People will look at this confirmation and say: U.S. support for Israel now exists largely on a partisan basis. Let's be clear. It does not. I support every penny that goes to Israel. I think it is critical that the country maintains its qualitative military edge in the region, and I take a backseat to no one in my personal or professional passion for the United States-Israel relationship.

That is why I cannot support Mr. Friedman's nomination to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. He has radical views. He has made outrageous and offensive statements on a wide range of issues.

Here is a sampling of his past comments. Mr. Friedman has said that the State Department is anti-Semitic. He has said that President Obama is an anti-Semite. He has said that the two-state solution solves a ''nonexistent problem.'' Mr. Friedman has called for Israeli citizens who are Arabs to be stripped of their civil rights. He has lobbed one of the worst words in Jewish history at large parts of the American Jewish community, calling them ''kapos,'' which is a term for the Jews who worked for the Nazis in concentration camps. These are more than just provocative statements by Mr. Friedman; they are lies.

For decades, the United States has stood firm as an honest broker of peace. We have said to both sides that they can trust us to help end this conflict, and that is based on the principle that the United States is passionate about peace in Israel but dispassionate about how we get there. Mr. Friedman is not objective about how we get there. On the contrary, he is very passionately for settlements, and he is very passionately against the two-state solution, which means he is basically against decades of bipartisan U.S. foreign policy.

Just a few months ago, the organization he led advertised that they have a new program that will train students to ''successfully delegitimize the notion of a two-state solution.'' This group is actively working to take the two-state solution off the table.

I understand that the Senate is not fully aligned on U.S. foreign policy when it comes to Israel. I understand we have our disagreements. We may disagree on whether a two-state solution is best, on where our Embassy should be located, and on how to approach the peace process, but there are some things we ought to be able to agree upon: that our Ambassador to Israel should not be more involved in Israel's politics than our own, that our Ambassador to Israel should not be so provocative that they wouldn't even be welcome at the negotiating table, and that our Ambassador should not be the kind of person who uses language to fuel violence, hate, and instability. That means we should be able to agree that our Ambassador to Israel cannot be Mr. Friedman.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting no to support U.S.-Israel relations and reject Mr. Friedman's confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, the Middle East poses some of the most difficult diplomatic challenges faced by our Nation. The region is troubled, unstable, sometimes dangerous. Conflicts span over centuries. Peace throughout the region seems distant and far away. And the problematic powers, like Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Russia, promote their own interests in the area, sometimes violently, and those interests are often contrary to ours.

The United States is deeply involved throughout the region. Israel is America's staunchest ally in the Middle East and one of our closest friends on the world stage. The United States has had and will continue to have a special relationship with Israel, and our country will continue to protect and aid Israel to help secure her survival.

I am a strong supporter of Israel. I believe that a qualitative military edge is necessary for the safety of Israel, and I have always voted to support military aid. I have also been a strong supporter of the two-state solution. A peaceful resolution between Israel and the Palestinian people would help heal the source of many of the insecurities facing Israel, but peace has eluded Israel and the Palestinians for decades. Mutual distrust runs deep. Tensions are high between Israel and many of its neighbors.

For all these reasons, the ambassadorship to Israel is one of the State Department's most important diplomatic posts and one of the most sensitive. Since Israel became a nation, the post has been held by 18 of some of our most experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable diplomats. The vast majority were career Foreign Service officers. Many served in both Republican and Democratic administrations. All had significant international and government experience prior to their appointment.

The Ambassador to Israel must be able to thread the needle between Israel and its neighbors. He or she needs to have the confidence, respect, and trust of powers throughout the region. He or she must be seen as an honest broker and have the temperament and finesse to defuse conflict while able to stand one's ground and have the capacity to find common interests and common ground.

However, with David Friedman, the President has put forth a nominee who has no diplomatic experience whatsoever, no government or international experience, who is known for his offensive statements toward Jewish groups and others with whom he disagrees, and who has repeatedly expressed extreme policy views—views antagonistic to any realistic peace process with the Palestinians. Mr. Friedman is not a seasoned diplomat; he is the President's bankruptcy lawyer. President Trump and Mr. Friedman clearly have a lot of experience with bankruptcy, but it is hard to think of a pair of personalities less suited to diplomacy in a volatile region.

Mr. Friedman has vocally opposed a two-state solution—a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for peace in the region since President Ronald Reagan. He not only supports but has generously funded Israeli settlements—settlements long considered as an obstacle to peace by the United States and deemed illegal by much of the international community.

Mr. Friedman's intemperate remarks have been widely reported. He lashed out that liberal Jews ''suffer a cognitive disconnect in identifying good and evil.'' He said that the State Department has ''[a] hundred-year history of anti-Semitism'' and that President Obama is ''an anti-Semite.'' Most horrific, he said:

> J-Street supporters . . . are far worse than kapos—Jews who turned in their fellow Jews in the Nazi death camps. . . . They are just smug advocates of Israel's destruction delivered from the comfort of their secure American sofas—it's hard to imagine anyone worse.

Five former U.S. Ambassadors to Israel, serving under both Democratic and Republican administrations, called Mr. Friedman ''unqualified'' to assume the role of chief diplomat to Israel.

Twenty-nine Holocaust scholars objected to his ''kapo'' remarks. The historical record shows, they said, ''that kapos were Jews whom the Nazis forced, at the pain of death, to serve them in the concentration and extermination camps. . . . These Jews faced terrible dilemmas, but ultimately were made into unwilling tools of Nazi brutality. . . . To brand one's political opponents, members of one's own community, as kapos, merely for engaging in legitimate debate, is historically indefensible and is a deeply disturbing example of the abuse of the Holocaust and its victims for present political gain.''

A group of Holocaust survivors called his use of ''kapo''—and I quote a group of Holocaust survivors—''slanderous, insulting, irresponsible, cynical and immensely damaging to our people.''

More than 600 rabbis wrote that his remarks were ''the very antithesis of the diplomatic behavior Americans expect from their ambassadors.''

While Mr. Friedman apologized during his confirmation hearing for his abusive language, I don't believe it erases his past behavior and suddenly qualifies him for the job.

This post should be earned over time, through actions and words that demonstrate without question that the nominee has the right judgment, temperament, and skills. Mr. Friedman has not come close to demonstrating that. We should not risk confirming him to this important post. We have seen how distracting and destructive hotheadedness is at the seat of power.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. Friedman also walked back his positions on a two-state solution and Israeli settlements, which prompted the committee chair to wryly ask him why he even wants the Ambassador position if he has to ''recant every single strong belief you've had.''

I am a strong supporter of Israel. I want to see the State of Israel prosperous and secure forever into the future. I believe in the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, to chart their own course and their destiny. I want to see peace between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and her neighbors. That is what the vast majority of Americans want. The United States has a strong national interest in securing this peace. The last thing we need is another active military conflict in the Middle East, which could draw in U.S. forces. That is why over 40 years U.S. policy has held that the only realistic path to peace is through a two-state solution. The Palestinians are entitled to a homeland. A two-state solution is the only viable path forward for Israel.

As Secretary Kerry said, ''If the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or democratic. It cannot be both.''

Given Mr. Friedman's past staunch support for a one-state solution and expansion of Israeli settlements, is he really ready and able to embrace and put forward opposing policy positions? Can he ever be viewed by the Palestinians and the international community as an honest broker?

I am under no illusion about how difficult it will be to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Many Presidents and able diplomats have tried and failed to achieve settlement. But the United States must continue to do its best to reach an accord. Above all, we should not make the current situation worse. We need a steady hand in the Middle East.

I am not convinced that Mr. Friedman is qualified for this job, with no diplomatic experience and a history of extreme positions and intemperate language. His contrition is too little, too late. I am worried that by ignoring these huge red flags with his nomination, we run the risk of a diplomatic incident that could needlessly increase risk of conflict in the region. Therefore, I must vote no on this nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about President Trump's selection of David Friedman to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Israel.

Our relationship with Israel is of tremendous importance. We are strong allies, and we have a strong military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural relationship with the State of Israel. As a Jew, the importance of that relationship is something that I feel in my bones, and as a Senator, working to

make our relationship with Israel stronger is a major priority. I strongly believe that part of strengthening that relationship is doing everything we can to help make progress toward a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Helping to resolve that conflict has consistently been one of the top diplomatic priorities of the United States.

There are very important implications in this selection for the Israeli people, the Palestinian people, the Middle East region, and even beyond. We need an Ambassador who can rise to the challenge, someone who can bring the parties together for negotiations and be regarded as legitimate in the eyes of all parties. Mr. Friedman is not that man.

Mr. Friedman's past conduct demonstrates that he lacks the tools one needs to be a good diplomat. For starters, diplomacy is about choosing your words carefully. It is about reasoning with those with whom you disagree. Diplomacy means not resorting to insults and to name-calling when you have a disagreement, which is something that Mr. Friedman has done time and time and time again.

In an op-ed he penned for the newspaper Arutz Sheva, Mr. Friedman called supporters of the American Jewish Organization J Street ''far worse than kapos.''

Now, for those who don't share the history, I was born in 1951, and I grew up with the holocaust and the stories of the holocaust pounded into my head, and I know what ''kapos'' are. It is the term that refers to Jews who collaborated with the Nazis—with the Gestapo, the guards at the concentration camps during the holocaust. When asked to repudiate his statement on J Street, Mr. Friedman refused, and in fact doubled down, stating ''They're not Jewish, and they are not pro-Israel.'' For those who don't know, J Street is a pro-Israel organization dedicated to the two-state solution—a goal that is shared by successive U.S. administrations, both Democratic and Republican. The two-state solution is the only way to keep Israel a Jewish State and a democracy.

Mr. Friedman's smearing of our fellow Jews—my fellow Jews, many of whom are members of J Street, this is a calumny. This should be a disqualifier for someone seeking to represent the United States in the State of Israel. Mr. Friedman's statement shows that he lacks understanding of history—of our history, the history of the Jewish people—it shows he is intolerant of opposing views, and he is profoundly insensitive. That is probably why so many of my fellow Jews have reached out to me, have urged me to reject his nomination.

Mr. Friedman's offensive remarks don't stop there. He regularly insults those with whom he disagrees. He even called me a clown and a moron after I pointed out the anti-Semitic stereotypes evoked in the Trump campaign's final ad. As I told Mr. Friedman when we met in my office, I have been called a moron before—that kind of thing happens in campaigns all the time—but as I also reminded him, part of being a diplomat is being diplomatic.

Now, while I have serious concerns with Mr. Friedman's temperament, my biggest issue with this nominee is his lack of commitment to the peace process. For example, right after being nominated to serve as Ambassador, Mr. Friedman stated that he ''looked forward to doing this from the U.S. embassy in Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem.''

It has been a longstanding policy of the United States to recognize Tel Aviv as the capital of Israel. This policy has been viewed by successive administrations as important for helping maintain regional stability and peace with Israel and its neighbors. An abrupt change in this tradition would make it more difficult for the United States to play the role of arbiter, to achieve peace and security between the Israelis and the Palestinians. At a time when we need to reduce tensions in the region, Mr. Friedman was sending the exact wrong message. What I find even more troubling is Mr. Friedman's support for settlement building. Successive U.S. administrations have recognized that new settlements are barriers to peace. Mr. Friedman has served as president and has been actively fundraising for the American Friends of Beit El, the nonprofit that supports the expansion of that settlement—expansion which is illegal under international law, an expansion deep inside of Palestinian territory.

How can we possibly help advance peace between the two parties with a man who believes there ought to be more settlements—one of the very things that observers on both sides of this conflict recognize as a significant obstacle to peace. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has remained intractable for far too long, proving a hardship—a tragedy—for Israelis and Palestinians both and impacting regional and even global security. I believe—I am convinced that a just and lasting agreement between the two parties on a two-state solution, though very difficult, can and must be achieved. Confirming David Friedman as Ambassador of the United States to Israel will only serve to make that job more difficult, if not impossible, and in my mind would be a tragedy.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on the Friedman nomination.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, Senate will soon vote on the nomination of David Friedman to be U.S. Ambassador to Israel.

I oppose his nomination.

Mr. Friedman has made a career of derogatory and inflammatory statements about U.S. policy in the Middle East, about former U.S. officials, about the Palestinians, and about American Jews who have views that differ from his own.

He has written falsely that President Obama and Secretary Kerry engaged in ''blatant anti-Semitism,'' that liberal American Jews are ''far worse than kapos,'' and that they ''suffer a cognitive disconnect in identifying good and evil.''

He has accused the State Department of a ''hundred-year history of anti-Semitism,'' apparently because diplomats in both Republican and Democratic administrations have not always agreed with the actions of some of Israel's leaders.

Those comments alone should disqualify him for this sensitive position.

Mr. Friedman has also raised millions of dollars for Israeli settlers and bragged about leading the effort to remove the two-state solution from the Republican Party's platform.

Regarding the two-state solution, he wrote that it is ''an illusion that serves the worst intentions of both the United States and the Palestinian Arabs.'' That renunciation of longstanding U.S. policy should also, by itself, disqualify him for the job of Ambassador to Israel.

Mr. Friedman is certainly entitled to his own views as a private citizen, even if they are offensive and counter to U.S. interests and values. But can anyone honestly say that this nominee is qualified or suited to represent the American people in Israel?

Five former U.S. Ambassadors to Israel, who served under Republican and Democratic Presidents going back as far as President Reagan, say the answer is no.

An alliance as longstanding as ours with Israel, which has far-reaching consequences for the entire Middle East, requires effective daily management by an experienced diplomat who not only has knowledge of the region but the temperament and appreciation of our short- and long-term interests.

I do not see how anyone could conclude that Mr. Friedman possesses the requisite temperament or objectivity. The record is devoid of evidence that he appreciates the critical distinction between the interests of the United States and the parochial interests of an extreme constituency in Israel that he has fiercely advocated for over the course of his long career.

Mr. Friedman's confirmation hearing provided him the opportunity to assuage concerns about his divisiveness, including the many disparaging remarks he has made and his close identification with and support for, the Israeli settler movement.

During the hearing, he disavowed his past undiplomatic statements, saying he was speaking as a private citizen.

Mr. Friedman's remarkable confirmation conversion falls far short of convincing evidence that changing his title to ''Ambassador'' will cause him to divorce his life's work and objectively serve the interests of the American people.

We all want what is best for the American people. We also share a desire to find a viable solution to the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict that protects the rights and security of both peoples.

Neither goal can be achieved by pursuing policies that further inflame tensions and erode the role of the United States as an honest broker for peace.

There are any number of qualified Americans who could capably support that role. Mr. Friedman is not among them.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, our Ambassador to Israel is one of our most consequential diplomatic posts. Israel is our greatest friend and ally in the Middle East and one of our closest partners in the world. The bonds between our peoples have been unbreakable from Israel's beginning. Israel is a bastion of democracy and prosperity in a violent and unstable region, where Israel faces relentless threats to its security. It is imperative that our Ambassador to Israel have an even temperament, the utmost of integrity, and the ability to forge unity across entrenched divisions.

I have a profound and steadfast commitment to Israel and to the Jewish community. That is why I am so concerned with David Friedman's nomination to become Ambassador to Israel.

Mr. Friedman appears to have few, if any, of the qualities needed for this position. He is an extraordinarily polarizing figure who has expressed views far outside of the longstanding bipartisan consensus on Israel. His body of published work makes clear his extreme positions. Mr. Friedman has asserted that Israel cannot trust the majority of American Jews. He has accused the entire State Department—an institution he now seeks to join—of anti-Semitism. He has called our coalition allies and partners in the fight against the Islamic State ''cowards,'' ''hypocrites,'' and ''freeloaders.'' Given his radical and divisive rhetoric, I do not believe that he is capable of forging unity at home or stability abroad.

Furthermore, Mr. Friedman has written that he does not believe in a two-state solution. For decades, through Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the United States and the international community have held that the two-state solution is the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Mr. Friedman's position on the two-state solution, coupled with his offensive statements, led five former U.S. Ambassadors to Israel to urge the Senate not to confirm him.

Shimon Peres, one of Israel's greatest leaders, once said, ''Our problem is not to submit to the differences but to overcome them.'' Americans and Israelis deserve nothing less than an Ambassador who lives up to this ethos, one who seeks to strengthen Israel by advancing peace in the region. Given Mr. Friedman's public statements, I doubt that he can be that person. For these reasons, I cannot support his nomination.

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

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

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 2:15 p.m., the Senate vote on the Friedman 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 with no intervening action or debate.

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

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for a period of 10 minutes.

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

PATIENT PROTECTION AND AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as ObamaCare, on its seventh anniversary of being signed into law by our previous President, Barack Obama.

Looking back at what has happened to healthcare over the past 7 years, there isn't a whole lot of good news to report. Since that time, Americans have been hit with hundreds of billions in new taxes, healthcare costs have risen exponentially, and families have struggled with fewer options and reduced access to healthcare services.

Just in the last year, healthcare premiums have gone up 25 percent for the typical ObamaCare plan. That number is even higher in my home State of South Dakota where premiums have increased 37 percent. ObamaCare has also driven health insurance companies to completely leave the marketplace, leaving Americans with fewer insurance options. Again, I will use my own State as an example. Under ObamaCare, the number of companies offering insurance in the individual market in South Dakota has dropped from 13 to a mere 2 today. While this is unfortunate, we are better off than folks in Alaska, Alabama, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming, all of whom have no options at all, as only one insurer offers plans in those exchanges. This is also the case for more than 1,000 counties across the Nation, basically one-third of all the counties in total.

As a result of these skyrocketing costs and reduced options, the number of Americans enrolling in ObamaCare continues to drop dramatically. Projections continue to be millions fewer than predicted. Between 2016 and 2017, nearly a half-million fewer Americans signed up for the exchange. All of this has barely moved the number of uninsured South Dakotans between 2010, when ObamaCare was enacted, and today. So the health insurance market was crippled, premiums have skyrocketed for hard-working families, and our economy has suffered tremendously under the ACA, only to have the same number of insured and uninsured individuals in my home State as before we started.

Nationwide, Americans are rejecting ObamaCare in record numbers. We saw this rejection of ObamaCare repeatedly over the past 7 years, when the American people elected into office candidates who at least in part ran on the platform of repealing ObamaCare. ObamaCare's higher taxes, fees, and penalties on businesses and investors have also taken a toll. Meanwhile, consumers who are facing higher premiums and deductibles have less to spend on goods and services. With one-sixth of our economy tied to healthcare, this has been detrimental to growth and to opportunity. It has also been easy to see how the healthcare industry has rejected ObamaCare over the past 7 years, with many insurers pulling out of the market and in other places the markets collapsing altogether. This limits competition and leaves little room in the healthcare industry, which is why ObamaCare is failing to control the cost of healthcare in our country. Cost control is a crucial component in providing truly affordable healthcare, and that begins with the elimination of ObamaCare's added bureaucracy and paperwork. We must get government out of the way and allow competitive markets to work once again, and that is what we are seeking to do with ObamaCare's replacement, which is expected to receive a vote in the House later today.

Since we started the process of repealing and replacing ObamaCare, my office has received a number of calls and emails from South Dakotans who have expressed concerns. I want to make it clear to them and to all Americans that during the period in which we transition away from ObamaCare and toward a more affordable, competitive system, we understand that the continuation of coverage is an essential component. We plan to include a number of items that are very important to the American public: guaranteed renewal of coverage, portability of coverage for those who change jobs or leave the workforce by retiring, and a ban on lifetime limits, because if you bought insurance, you shouldn't run out of insurance.

The provisions of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act which were included in ObamaCare should be included in our plans. There should be no exclusions on preexisting conditions if one maintains insurance from policy to policy, without lapses, and we should include provisions to allow children to remain on their families' plans until they are at least the age of 26.

We understand that there is a way to retain all of these positive provisions

which are vital to ensuring continued health insurance coverage for all American families who want it, while also providing a fair and open marketplace that provides a strong, healthy, competitive market. This, in turn, will bring affordable, efficient health insurance with innovative products that will actually help to control the cost of care. That is what the GOP alternative, while still far from perfect, is seeking to do. One thing we do know is that the end result will be better than ObamaCare.

As a father and a grandfather, I understand how important it is to have access to affordable healthcare. No one should be priced out of healthcare coverage for one's family. But our current system is simply not working. After 7 years of ObamaCare, the American people are dealing with higher healthcare premiums, fewer options, more taxes, and reduced access to care. Health providers are struggling with more bureaucracy, with more time spent filling out paperwork instead of caring for patients, and being frustrated by ObamaCare's crippling new regulations.

As I have said from time to time, ObamaCare is a rapidly sinking ship, and there is simply no hope for a recovery. On its seventh anniversary, it is hurting more people than it is helping, and it must be repealed and replaced before it totally crumbles under its own weight.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to comment on the nomination of Mr. Friedman to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Shortly, we will be having that vote.

I consider the U.S.-Israel relationship to be a strategic anchor for the United States in the Middle East and one of our most important relationships with any country. Since the creation of the State of Israel, support for this relationship has been bipartisan, bicameral, and supported by successive U.S. administrations. This bilateral relationship is also sustained by the deep bonds of friendship between the people of our two countries. This relationship has benefited Israel and has benefited the United States.

Given the range of strategic challenges across the globe that our country faces and the unprecedented instability and violence embroiled in the Middle East today, it is critical that we take steps to unify support for the U.S.-Israel relationship across the political spectrum. Thus, I believe it is vital that the U.S. Ambassador to Israel be seen as a unifying figure in this enduring relationship.

I really do believe that there is broad understanding and support in the Senate and the House for the special relationship between the United States and Israel—Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East, a country that we can rely on for important intelligence information and that has an economy which is similar to ours. It is a country that has enjoyed a special relationship with the United States since 1948, when Harry Truman recognized Israel after the historic vote at the United Nations.

Following extensive consideration of Mr. Friedman's record and taking into account his statements during his nomination hearing, I have concluded that his past record would make it very difficult for him to serve as that unifying force. For that reason, I am unable to support his nomination as America's top diplomat in Israel.

I appreciate Mr. Friedman's efforts before the committee to express regret for his substantial record of divisive, inflammatory, and offensive statements. Unfortunately, I believe the body of Mr. Friedman's published works, not to mention his public statements, will compromise his effectiveness in representing the United States and all Americans, as well as the Government of Israel and all Israelis.

Taken together, Mr. Friedman's statements and affiliations make it clear that he does not believe a two-state solution is necessary for a just and lasting peace. I am concerned that Mr. Friedman's history on this issue, in which he calls the two-state solution a scam, will undermine his ability to represent the United States as a credible facilitator of the peace process. There is simply no realistic, sustainable prospect for lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians other than as two states, living side by side, with security.

I thank Chairman CORKER for the manner in which this nomination was handled before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I think we had ample opportunity, and I thank Chairman CORKER for that, but I do urge my colleagues to reject this nominee.

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. DURBIN. 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. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate, notwithstanding the previous order, move to the rollcall vote now.

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

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

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

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 96 Ex.]

YEAS—52

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
Corker	Kennedy	Strange
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Manchin	Tillis
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NAYS—46

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

NOT VOTING—2

Isakson	Paul

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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

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

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

PROTOCOL TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON THE ACCESSION OF MONTENEGRO

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 1, treaty document No. 114–12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

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

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The treaty will be stated.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Treaty document No. 114–12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the Treaties Calendar No. 1, treaty document No. 114–12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

Mitch McConnell, Cory Gardner, Steve Daines, John Barrasso, Joni Ernst, Bob Corker, John Cornyn, Lindsey Graham, Jeff Flake, James M. Inhofe, Roy Blunt, David Perdue, John McCain, Pat Roberts, Tom Cotton, Jerry Moran, Mike Rounds.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for the information of Senators, we will have the cloture vote on this treaty on Monday night at 5:30 p.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

(The remarks of Mr. MARKEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 708 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The Senator from Connecticut.

AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, at this hour, we still don't know what the House of Representatives is going to do. They are amending and changing and modifying the reform of one-sixth of America's economy under the cover of darkness, trying to secure the votes necessary to fulfill a political promise. We await their decision as to how much havoc they wreak.

I wanted to come down to the floor today to address for a moment the exceptional process that is occurring right now, as we speak, in the House of Representatives and to talk about one of the reported changes they are considering before sending the product over to the Senate.

Just to review for a minute, Speaker RYAN likes to talk about his approach to healthcare as a three-pronged approach. Well, the Congressional Budget Office, headed by a gentleman handpicked by the Republican House conference, agrees that it is a three-pronged approach; they just have a little bit different interpretation of those three prongs.

First, they say higher costs—15 to 20 percent spikes in premiums for everybody right off the bat and then dramatically higher costs, especially for older people, sicker people, and poorer people. If you are young and if you are relatively affluent and healthy, you may make out a little bit better under this proposal, but if you are not in that category, you are going to pay a lot higher costs and get less care.

This is the headline from the CBO report: 24 million people lose health coverage. That is catastrophic. That is the total population of 17 U.S. States. We just kick them off health insurance without anywhere to go other than our emergency rooms.

Remember, all of this is in order to finance a giant tax cut for the rich. I had a chart up here yesterday that showed that in this bill, if you make zero to $200,000, you get no tax cut, but if you make over $200,000, you get a nice, healthy tax cut. It could be up to $7 million on average for some of the wealthiest taxpayers. So there will be higher costs for everybody, except for maybe a very small slice of the population, but with less care. I mean, it is a nightmare when it comes to the number of people who lose care under this bill, all in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy.

That is the background on what TrumpCare is and what the American Health Care Act is. People hate it. I mean, people hate it. There is a new poll out by Quinnipiac University that shows stunning numbers. The approval numbers for this bill are under 20 percent.

Republicans kicked the living you know what out of the Affordable Care Act, and they never got its approval ratings down to under 20 percent, as has happened to the American Health Care Act in its third week of existence. That is pretty impressive, for 18 percent of Americans to approve of a bill that has only been out there for a few weeks. And it is not because they don't know anything about it; over 50 percent of Americans don't like it, 18 percent support it, and 56 percent don't support it. Across demographic groups, across age groups, everybody hates this thing because they get it. They are not dumb. They know that this is taking healthcare from them and passing along higher costs to them in order to finance a tax cut for the rich. It is pretty simple. People really didn't need a lot of time to understand it.

Republicans in the House know that as this thing hangs out there, it is getting less popular. It is hard to get less popular than 18 percent. Those are tough numbers to do worse than. The reason Republicans are racing this bill through the process is because they know how deeply unpopular it is because they know it is a scam. They know it is essentially just taking healthcare from Americans and forcing them to pay more in order to finance a tax cut for the rich.

What is happening today in the House is they are blowing up their rules in order to push a bill through that no one will have looked at. It is possible that they are going to file a gigantic reform to the entire American healthcare system and then call a vote on it within hours. Come on.

In 2009 and 2010, Republicans were blistering critics of Democrats, who they said were forcing the Affordable Care Act through the process too quickly. But in 2009 and 2010, the House held 79 bipartisan hearings and markups on the health reform bill over the period of an entire year. House Members spent nearly 100 hours in hearings, heard from 181 witnesses from both sides of the aisle, considered 239 amendments, and accepted 121 amendments.

This bill was introduced 2 weeks ago. The first time the American public ever looked at it was 2 weeks ago, and the House is rushing it through today. Two weeks. Fourteen days. Twenty days. Not a year. Not 79 hearings. Not 100 hours of hearings. And we are talking about bringing it up before the Senate for a vote next week, with 20 hours of debate on a reordering of one-sixth of the American economy.

It is really extraordinary how this bill is getting jammed through the process because Republicans know that every day it hangs out there, more people figure out what it is—a massive transfer of wealth from regular, ordinary Americans, through less care and higher costs, to the very rich and also insurance companies and drug companies, which get a big tax cut.

On today's modification of the bill, the talk today is that in order to make the bill a little bit meaner and a little bit crueler, the House is going to remove from the underlying law the requirement that insurance companies cover a basic set of what are called essential benefits. This change is being demanded by the very, very conservative wing of the House Republican conference. They call themselves the Freedom Caucus. This is a group of sort of the most radical Members in the House of Representatives. They are demanding that these essential healthcare benefits be stripped out of the law in order to get their votes.

Let's talk about what these essential healthcare benefits are. Basically the law now says that if you are offering an insurance plan and you want to call it health insurance, then you have to actually offer to cover healthcare. So the essential healthcare benefits—what every plan today has to offer in order to be able to call itself insurance in this country—are ambulatory patient care, which means outpatient care, emergency care, hospitalizations; pregnancy, maternity, and newborn care; mental health and substance abuse care; prescription drugs; rehabilitation if you get injured; lab services; tests; chronic disease management—management for diabetes or heart and liver conditions; and pediatric services, services for kids. That is it. Those are the essential healthcare benefits.

Frankly, if you are buying a health insurance plan, wouldn't you expect that it would cover your emergency care if you were to go to an emergency room? If you are buying healthcare in this country, what good is it if it doesn't cover a hospitalization when you get very sick? If you are buying an insurance plan in this country, don't you think it is going to cover your kids when they need basic pediatric services?

So what is happening now is something different from healthcare reform in the House of Representatives. What is happening now is a radical rethink of what healthcare insurance is. If all of a sudden health insurers don't need to cover the cost of your hospitalizations, don't need to cover mental illness at all, don't need to cover addiction coverage at all, then is it really insurance any longer? If it is not covering that list of things, what is it covering?

CBO has an answer for this. CBO says that if there is an insurance plan that doesn't cover this list of benefits, they won't count it as insurance. So when they are giving you the numbers of people who will have insurance or not have insurance after this bill, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says: We don't really count it as insurance if it doesn't cover basic stuff, such as hospitalizations, outpatient services, prescription drugs, and pediatric services.

So what is happening now in the House of Representatives is really a radical rethink of healthcare insurance. Under the law they are contemplating passing, healthcare insurance wouldn't need to cover anything. You could buy an insurance plan, pay your premium, and then be told that it doesn't cover your kid when he gets diagnosed with schizophrenia, that it doesn't cover your daughter when she gets in an accident and has to go to the emergency room, that it doesn't cover your spouse when they get really sick and are hospitalized for 3 days. What kind of coverage would that be any longer if it didn't cover that list of things?

Let's be honest. This would be a massive transfer of cost to individuals. The No. 1 prong of TrumpCare is higher costs. If insurance companies don't need to cover any of these things anymore but you still have to buy them, then it is just a massive shift of costs to individuals because, remember, TrumpCare penalizes you if you don't buy insurance.

The Affordable Care Act did the same thing, admittedly. The Affordable Care Act said: If you don't buy insurance, you are going to pay a penalty. But that is why the Affordable Care Act said that insurance has to really be insurance. It has to cover stuff because if we are going to require you to buy it or we are going to penalize you if you don't buy it, then insurance should really be insurance.

Well, TrumpCare penalizes you if you don't buy insurance. You would pay a massive penalty. For a lot of people, the penalty could be $5,000 if they don't buy insurance. But now the change they are considering in the House of Representatives means the insurance product you will be forced to buy won't cover diddly.

By the way, when your insurance company doesn't cover it and you have to pick up the cost, it is going to cost you way more money. Everybody has probably seen a bill from a hospital. Let's say you had to go in and get a colonoscopy. You get your bill, and you always sort of scratch your head because you see two numbers—you see the number the hospital bills and then you see the number your insurance company pays. Often, the number the insurance company pays is like one-third of what that hospital billed. Why is that? It is because the insurance company is negotiating with the hospital on behalf of thousands of patients, so they get that price way, way down. The insurance company only pays a fraction of the cost that is billed. If you don't have insurance coverage for it, if all of a sudden it is not a benefit in your plan because the American Health Care Act told insurance companies they didn't have to cover a hospitalization, then you will pay that higher price. You don't get the insurance company discount. You will pay that higher number. That is going to bankrupt people.

The families in my State, when their child gets hooked on heroin, they are going to find a way to pay for that care so that their child doesn't become another statistic, another one of the 900 who died in my State last year from overdoses. They are going to do everything possible to get that child care for that addiction. They will mortgage their house, they will sell their house, they will drain their savings account, they will sell off every possession they have to make sure their child does not die from an overdose and so that child gets the care they need. If their insurance company won't cover it, then they will do everything necessary to cover it, and you will have a rapid increase in the number of people whose lives are ruined, who go bankrupt because of their medical costs—something that doesn't happen right now because the Affordable Care Act gives you real subsidies to afford care. It gives you real help to be able to buy insurance, and it requires that insurance companies actually provide you with insurance.

This is an extraordinary thing that is happening in the U.S. House of Representatives right now. Nobody likes this bill. Healthcare experts think it is a joke. The American public has roundly rejected it. It is getting meaner and crueler every day in order to round up the votes necessary to get it passed. Why? Because this bill is not about solving any problem in the healthcare system. It doesn't solve a single problem. Again, except for this narrow group of younger, healthier, affluent people whose premiums will be a little bit less, everybody else is worse off. It only solves one problem, a political problem—the promise that the Republicans made to repeal the Affordable Care Act. But they didn't spend any time thinking about how to actually do it. So they are stuck now with an awful bill that nobody likes, that doesn't solve a single problem, and that is getting meaner and meaner every single day.

It was bad enough, and now this bill is frankly getting into some really radical territory—talking about totally rethinking insurance and letting insurance companies offer you a product that covers nothing and then it requires you to buy it. Think about that. We are going to require you to buy insurance, but the insurance isn't going to cover anything. TrumpCare, the American Health Care Act—whatever you want to call it—has three prongs: higher costs, less care, and tax cuts for the rich.

We will have an opportunity here in the Senate to get this right. As to the House of Representatives, I don't know if they are going to pass this. I don't know if it is going to fall apart. But we will have a chance to get this right. Republicans and Democrats coming together, we can admit together that there are still a lot of things that are wrong in our healthcare system.

In the Affordable Care Act, there are some good parts of it, but other parts need improvement. We can come together and decide to tackle this problem—the high drug costs, whatever it may be—together and reject this partisan, rushed approach in the House of Representatives. It does nothing except give us higher costs and less care in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy.

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. REED. 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

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the deep and growing concerns about Russia's interference in the United States' 2016 Presidential election and the implications of Russia's broader malign activities for our national security.

On Monday, we learned from FBI Director Comey that there is an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election and whether associates of then-candidate and now-President Donald Trump were communicating with Moscow. It is absolutely essential that Congress and the American people get clear and comprehensive answers on, first, what happened; second, what are Russia's strategic goals and intentions for further interference in democratic processes here and in Europe; and third, what we need to do to counter this threat going forward. That is why I have repeatedly called for an independent, transparent, special counsel to investigate the legal aspects of Russian efforts to influence our election and a bipartisan select committee within the Senate to look at all aspects of Russia's destabilizing activities here and around the world.

I am concerned that the politicization of the issue of Russia's

interference in our elections and its hostile actions against Western institutions and values is diverting our attention from what otherwise should be recognized as a clear and potent threat to America's security. We need to focus on what is critical: Russia is attacking American democracy as part of an even broader assault on our cornerstone NATO alliance and the post-Cold War international order.

The threat posed by Russia's actions is not merely ''fake news,'' as serious as that phenomenon may be, but a very real, very strategic threat to U.S. interests. Russia is testing America and the transatlantic community across multiple fronts.

Today, I will highlight just how broad and fundamental this threat from Russia really is.

What should be clear to everyone is that last year Russia engaged in a systematic and strategic effort to influence the U.S. Presidential election. While we do not know all the details of Russia's involvement, we know that in January the U.S. intelligence community—including the CIA, the FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, or the ODNI—issued its assessment that Russia engaged in bold and unprecedented efforts to influence and undermine trust in the U.S. Presidential election.

Among the January intelligence report's findings were the following: first, that President Putin, in their words, ''ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election.''

The intelligence community also found that ''Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency.''

The report further found that Russia's influence campaign was multifaceted and included covert intelligence operations such as cyber espionage against U.S. political organizations like the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee. It combined the release of hacked information with overt propaganda efforts through Russian government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media actors, or, as they are referred to, trolls.

Another key finding was that Russia's influence efforts in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election reflect—in the words of the intelligence community—''a significant escalation'' compared to previous information operations.

The intelligence community also warned that these Russian activities, including ''cyber-enabled disclosure operations'' likely represent a ''New Normal'' in Russian conduct toward the United States and our allies and partners.

The intelligence community further assessed that Russia will use the lessons learned from the 2016 U.S. Presidential election to influence future elections in the United States and overseas. We do not have to look very far for evidence supporting this conclusion.

Russia is alleged to have targeted an April 2016 referendum in the Netherlands on a partnership agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly rejected by Dutch voters. This year, Russia is openly intervening in France's Presidential election to be held in April. For example, Russia has loaned tens of millions of dollars to the far-right National Front Party in France, whose leader, Marine Le Pen, has defended Russia's annexation of Crimea and criticized international sanctions against Russia.

Germany, which holds parliamentary elections in September, has also been targeted by Russian hackers and trolls—straight out of the Kremlin playbook we saw used here last year. Russia is attempting to steadily erode the integrity and western orientation of multiple Eastern European countries through a variety of state and state-controlled or state-influenced activities. These coordinated and focused Russian operations threaten to undermine the European cohesion which underpins the post-Cold War international order. This pattern of Russian interference will only intensify with time if it goes unchallenged.

Russia's malign activities also threaten our core security relationships with our transatlantic allies and partners. The NATO alliance has been the bedrock of our security relationship with our European allies. Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, countries in Central and Eastern Europe have aspired to integrate more closely with the West, whether militarily through NATO membership or economically within the European Union, or both. But President Putin rejects the post-Cold War international order and seeks to reestablish a Russian sphere of influence over his immediate neighbors by weakening democracy, collective security, and economic cooperation across the region.

In pursuit of this strategic goal, Putin has demonstrated a willingness to use all tools at his disposal, including cyber hacking, disinformation, propaganda, economic leverage, corruption, and even military force, to violate the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors and undermine support for their further integration into Europe.

Since 2008, in neighboring Georgia, Russia has occupied two regions and recognized their independence, which the international community widely condemns as a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. Georgia's aspirations since the 2008 Bucharest Summit to join the NATO Alliance have been on hold.

In Ukraine, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its continuing support to Russian-led separatists in eastern Ukraine are part of Putin's strategy of destabilizing the Kyiv government and blocking Ukraine's further integration westward. Putin has repeatedly used influence operations to hide the presence of ''little green men'' on Ukrainian soil, to spread disinformation about Ukrainian political leaders, and to influence financially corrupt Ukrainian oligarchs to support Russia. Putin is also using propaganda and other activities to try to break western unity in support of the United States and EU sanctions intended to pressure Russia to comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements for ending the conflict in Ukraine. It is critically important to maintain, and potentially strengthen, these sanctions to change Russia's aggressive behavior and get to a peaceful political settlement to end the fighting in Ukraine.

In Montenegro, it appears that Russia has added political assassination as a potential weapon to block an Eastern European country from pursuing membership in NATO. Last month, the British press reported that ''Russian nationalists'' under the direction of Russian intelligence officials plotted to assassinate then-Prime Minister Djukanovic during Montenegro's elections in October. According to these reports, Montenegrin authorities foiled the assassination attempt just hours before the plot was to be carried out. This attempted coup d'etat represents a new and dangerous level of interference by Russia to discourage Montenegro and others from further integrating with the West.

As some of my colleagues have read in the February 14th New York Times article, Russia has fielded a missile system that violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, or INF, Treaty—a ground-launched intermediate-range nuclear missile that threatens all of NATO. The INF Treaty was signed by President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. This landmark treaty dramatically reduced Cold War nuclear tensions by eliminating an entire class of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles that could have struck Moscow or Berlin in less than 10 minutes.

Now Russia has moved nuclear-capable, short-range, ground-launched Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania. The Iskander missile's range threatens German borders—something not seen since the 1980s. The Iskander deployment runs counter to a detente that has been in place since 1989, when President Bush reduced U.S. conventional forces in Europe—and Russia did the same—in order to relieve destabilizing tension in the region and lessen the risk of escalation or miscalculation. Furthermore, Russian aggression goes beyond the violations of the INF Treaty and the Iskander missile.

During the 2014 invasion of Crimea, Russia practiced snap nuclear exercises to test the readiness of its Armed Forces to send a signal that there was

a nuclear backstop to the invasion. More disturbingly, by invading Ukraine, Russia violated the Budapest Memorandum, a multilateral commitment in which Ukraine and three other former Soviet states pledged to transfer to Russia the nuclear weapons they retained after the collapse of the Soviet Union in return for Russian recognition of their sovereignty.

Besides unilaterally reneging on its Budapest commitments, in 2014 Russia has pulled out of the DOD and DOE—Department of Defense and Department of Energy—Cooperative Threat Reduction Programs, which secured nuclear materials at storage sites and national borders. Russia has some of the largest stockpiles of nuclear materials in the world that are vulnerable to insider threats. In 2016, Russia suspended its participation in the agreement with the United States to convert 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium for use as fuel for reactors.

Since the very beginning of the Cold War, nonproliferation and arms control agreements between Russia and the United States have always received a high priority from both countries, regardless of how relations in other areas went up or down. Russia's recent actions call into question whether this can continue.

Russian actions in Syria pose a further challenge to stability in the Middle East and the broader international community. Russia's military operations to prop up the murderous Assad regime belies Moscow's claim that it intervened to fight violent extremists, including ISIS and al-Qaida. Russia has provided significant political, economic, and military support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, even as he has slaughtered tens of thousands of Syrian civilians and used chemical weapons against his own people. Russia has repeatedly exercised its veto power in the U.N. Security Council on behalf of the Syrian regime in defiance of international standards and U.S.-led peace efforts, and, just last month, Russia vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution seeking to punish Syria for using chemical weapons.

For all of these reasons, we must recognize that Russia's alarming interference in our election is only one aspect of a much broader and dangerous threat to our core national security interests. Russia's malign behavior needs to be investigated fully and in a manner that is free of political considerations. We need answers to key questions, including:

What are Russia's overall strategic security goals, and how do Russian influence activities in Europe and the United States advance those goals?

What are the tools of Russia's influence? How has Russia used, or continues to use, those tools in influencing campaigns in Europe? How do Russian activities in Europe compare to what was evident in the U.S. Presidential elections last year?

How has Russia used influence activities in concert with other unconventional warfare tactics and operational activities—for example, to support proxy forces in Ukraine and elsewhere?

What is the threat these Russian influence activities pose to U.S. democratic institutions? To NATO? To the European Union? To the post-Cold War liberal order and value system?

What are the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the United States and European countries that Russia is successfully exploiting and magnifying?

Finally, how can the U.S. Government counter and deter Russia's influence activities, and what capabilities, structures, and other resources are needed for these purposes?

An investigation of these questions would best be conducted by an independent, transparent, outside body appointed in a bipartisan manner. However, if Congress cannot reach consensus to make that happen, then, as a ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, I intend to work with the chairman to undertake the necessary effort within the committee and across the Senate. I believe we can work in a bipartisan fashion on this critical threat to our national security. I look forward to shedding light on this issue and examining what we need to do as a country to defend ourselves against and deter Russian malign influence.

As a final point, we are focused, of course, on what happened in 2016—and it is a topic of daily discussions and newspaper articles—but one of the most sobering factors is that we have an election in process right now for 2018. If it demonstrates the same interference, Russia could have an effect on that election. Indeed, there are indications that they are actually probing State election systems—the names of voters, how the States calculate and vote. Nothing has been established that would suggest they attempted to influence that activity, but the simple probing suggests that we have much to do to protect ourselves going forward—indeed, as much as looking back and finding out what went on in the 2016 election.

For these reasons, and many more, we have to work together, as I suggested and encouraged, in a bipartisan way to get at the answers—not just to look backward but to protect ourselves going forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TERROR ATTACK IN LONDON

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, before I begin my remarks on the Supreme Court nomination, I want to just say a word about the terrorist attack in London yesterday.

I was devastated to hear that two Utahans, Kurt and Melissa Cochran, were victims in yesterday's attack. While Melissa is recovering, I was heartbroken to hear that Kurt has since passed away from his injuries.

I just want to offer our most sincere condolences to the Cochrans and ensure that we help them in any way we can.

I know all our prayers are with the victims and with their families, friends, and loved ones.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. President, it is with great disappointment that I rise to address the treatment of Judge Neil Gorsuch by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

Today marks the close of his confirmation hearing, which began on Monday. This hearing was extraordinarily thorough, examining just about every facet of his record and his life.

The nominee himself delivered an outstanding performance, enduring more than 20 hours of intense questioning over 2 very long days. He displayed an impressive command of the law and the kind of intelligence one expects of someone with such stellar credentials. He showed the proper understanding of the role of a judge in our constitutional system of self-government: to apply, not make, the law. He demonstrated this crucial quality both in his affirmative answers and in the times he had appropriately refused to prejudge issues that might come before him. Throughout, his demeanor was serious, thoughtful, and humble. These qualities have defined his service as a judge for the last decade and will serve him well on the U.S. Supreme Court.

As for my fellow Senators, many of them approached this hearing the right way, posing questions that gave us real insight into the nominee's record and judicial philosophy. Thanks to their hard work, Judge Gorsuch has now been vetted as extensively as any nominee to come before the Senate in the whole length of my service here. I thank them for their careful work and good judgment.

In particular, I want to single out my friend and colleague Senator GRASSLEY. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, he was charged with the monumental task of planning and executing the whole endeavor. He performed admirably, and we all owe him our sincere gratitude. He is one of the best people here, and he is totally honest and decent.

Regretfully, I feel compelled to contrast that responsible approach of many of my colleagues with the actions of a number on the other side of the aisle. Frankly, some of the treatment of Judge Gorsuch has made me ill. In him, we have a man who is superbly qualified and who quite obviously understands how his job is to say what the law is, not what he wishes it might be. In fact, I do not believe any fair examination of the whole of his

record on the bench can reasonably yield any meaningful clues as to what his policy views are. He is the kind of nominee whom, in an ideal world, we should be able to confirm by universal acclamation. Yet that is not the sort of treatment we are seeing—far from it.

Instead, we see a desperate campaign being waged against him to derail his nomination at all costs. This is the sort of approach that has long been advocated for by many far-left activists intent on attacking in their belligerent ways and stacking the courts with ideologues committed to imposing liberal policies without respect for what the law and the Constitution actually command.

As someone with great respect for all of my colleagues—even those with whom I often disagree—I had hoped they would resist the siren song of their activist base and give Judge Gorsuch a fair shake. Unfortunately, I see many of them falling prey to the temptations of this scorched-earth approach. Whatever their motivation—be it the outcome of the Garland nomination, the apparent unwillingness to accept the results of the election, or the desire for judges to push their political agenda—many of them appear willing to employ tactics they used to recognize, rightly, as inappropriate and even dangerous. In doing so, they threaten to inflict lasting damage on the judiciary, the Senate, and our politics more broadly.

Consider their demand that Judge Gorsuch answer politically charged hypotheticals about potential future cases. For decades, nominees of both parties have refused to comply, so much so that the practice is then referred to as the ''Ginsburg standard,'' after current Justice Ginsburg, and they had been quite right to do so. To offer an advisory opinion that is inconsistent with the Constitution's allocation of powers—which give judges the authority to decide only actual cases and controversies, not offer broad advisory opinions—is inconsistent with the core characteristic of the judicial process, which considers issues in the particular legal and factual context of an individual case and gives parties the opportunity to make their arguments in full, and it asks judges to prejudice themselves when they should be arbiters, raising serious due process concerns for future litigants who deserve a fair hearing.

Having participated in 14 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominees, I fully understand the temptation to ask these kinds of questions. Indeed, I have seen many Senators of both parties fall prey to the temptation, only to have a nominee politely respond about how it would be inappropriate to answer.

It is one thing to make the occasional mistake of this variety and move on. I have seen it happen countless times, but that is not what happened this week. Instead, I witnessed many of my colleagues devote almost their entire half hour rounds to posing these sorts of inappropriate questions. When Judge Gorsuch responded appropriately and explained his inability to answer—oftentimes with an extensive explanation of the rationale for doing so—he was lambasted by some of my colleagues for his refusal to engage in this dangerous practice.

Worse yet, these harsh attacks came from Senators who I have seen gladly embrace the very same answer from nominees in the past. What they once demanded, they now reject. What they once avoided, they now embrace. Simply put, it is hard not to interpret their attacks as hypocrisy of the highest order.

This is a completely illegitimate line of attack on Judge Gorsuch, and it should be repudiated forcefully.

Consider also the way in which some of my colleagues misrepresented Judge Gorsuch's record. It involved just a few simple steps. First, cherry-pick one of the judge's opinions in which a sympathetic victim lost; next, gloss over the legal issues at hand that mandated the outcome Judge Gorsuch reached; then, fail to mention how he was often joined in these opinions by his colleagues appointed by Presidents Clinton and Obama; after that, fail to mention the many times Judge Gorsuch ruled in favor of litigants similar to the one who lost in the case at hand; finally, make a wild assertion and accusation about how that case shows how Judge Gorsuch is biased against ''the little guy.''

We should call these phony attacks for what they are: bogus attempts to mischaracterize his record intentionally.

Any fair analysis of the record Judge Gorsuch has established on the bench can lead to only one conclusion: He is the type of judge who will reach the result commanded by the best reading of the law, free from any political agenda.

He follows his oath to do justice without respect to persons. As Judge Gorsuch himself rightfully put it, quoting Justice Scalia, ''If you're going to be a good and faithful judge, you have to resign yourself to the fact that you're not always going to like the conclusions you reach. If you like them all the time, you're probably doing something wrong.''

There will always be times when the law produces a result we disagree with. That is a simple fact of life. Sometimes that is our fault for not writing the law better, but the appropriate response is to change the law, not to demand that a judge ignore the law to reach a result we like.

As legislators, it is, by definition, our responsibility to change the law to produce better, more just results. If my colleagues think a law like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act is producing bad results, it is their right to try to change it. They can count on me fighting tooth and nail to protect religious liberty, but at least they will be doing their job as lawmakers, not shirking it and demanding that unelected judges do their dirty work, nor impugning the honor of good judges like Judge Gorsuch who refuse to ignore the law on behalf of a political agenda.

In Judge Gorsuch, we have a Supreme Court nominee as fine as I could ever imagine. He is the type of man we all should be clamoring to step into the late Justice Scalia's big shoes. But instead of the best traditions of the advice and consent process that many of us have tried to live up to, what is he treated to? Hypocritical attacks on the very judicial independence that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle claim to prize above all else, misleading attacks that distort his record, and now a promise to filibuster his nomination by the minority leader. My gosh, what have we come to around here?

I remember when Justice Ginsburg went through with only three votes against her and not much debate, and she refused to answer any of the questions that my friends on the other side were demanding of Judge Gorsuch and of other Republican judges. Frankly, I stuck up for her and felt that was the right thing for her. I have great respect for her because of the way she handled those proceedings and others as well. We didn't do this in earlier years. It has become so radical around here and so political around here that we are besmirching the very people who have become the judges in this land and are doing such a good job.

This is a travesty of the highest order. Judge Gorsuch is a brilliant, decent man who has devoted his life to serving his country. He has done exactly what we want as a careful judge for more than a decade. What does he get when nominated to the highest Court in the land? He gets his name dragged through the mud. He gets baited with questions we all know he cannot answer, that nobody can answer. If they are not trick questions, they are certainly improper, and then he is attacked for not answering. He gets his record mischaracterized and is accused of cruelty and hardness of heart. He gets the kind of treatment that leads him to regret putting his family through what ought to be a dignified process.

It is time to stop this madness, stop the dishonest attacks. Instead, let's have a debate worthy of the world's greatest deliberative body and confirm this absolutely outstanding nominee.

If my friends on the other side would treat somebody as respectable and highly prized and praised as Judge Gorsuch and treat them the way he was treated in some instances in these hearings, may we bar the door on the next nominee of this administration. That will be Armageddon, I guess, and we can't let this body descend into that sort of catastrophe.

I will insist on our nominees being people of the highest order, like Judge Gorsuch, people who will make us all

proud, people who will respect both sides but who will enforce the law, and people who, when it becomes time to change the law, can properly make that decision and have the guts to do it. There aren't many cases that have to be changed, however. All I can say is there are some that both sides wish would be changed, and on both sides.

All I can say is this: I hope our colleagues will treat this President's nominees with greater respect. I have always tried to treat their nominees with great respect, and I helped get them through. Justice Ginsburg had only three votes against her, if I recall correctly. It was very few votes. There are judges who are now on the bench who I couldn't support, but I didn't stop them from having a vote up or down. Frankly, there are judges on the Circuit Court of Appeals whom we allowed to come up and whom I personally would not have approved as a President or otherwise but who were picked properly by the Democratic President and who had enough good recommendations on their side to sit on the bench. I think that is what has made this country a great country—that we understand that there are different points of view, not just in politics, but with regard to the law itself. And all of us have to understand that and realize that when somebody's elected President, that person, whether he or she, deserves to have fair consideration of the judicial nominees.

It is no secret that President Obama put almost 50 percent of the Federal bench on the bench, and he had a lot of up-and-down votes on them. Yes, there were some notable differences and notable debates, but by and large, the President got whomever he wanted. And I have to say that in the past, Republican Presidents generally got whomever they wanted. But in the intervening number of years since Roe v. Wade, we have had nothing but big problems that I think have resulted in the denigration of the bench and which should never have occurred.

I hope my colleagues, all of whom I deeply admire and like, will take some of these things into consideration and treat Judge Gorsuch with the true and deliberate respect that he deserves. I hope they can bring themselves to vote for him because he is truly a wonderful man, a great father, a wonderful husband to his wife, a tremendous person from the West, a fly fisherman, a fellow whom every one of his law clerks deeply loves, and a person who, by any measure, is one of the brightest judges in the country today. I can't really think of anybody who would be brighter than he is or any better than he is.

So Donald Trump picked one of the best people, if not the best person in America, for this job, and I hope my colleagues on the other side will recognize that in spite of their dislike, and sometimes even hatred, for Donald Trump, this is important. And it is important that we start handling these matters with greater dignity, greater fairness. When we really do disagree, fine; let's have a debate and battle on it, and let the chips fall where they may. But not all of these deserve to be in that category, and certainly Judge Gorsuch does not deserve to be in that category. He is an absolutely outstanding person.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

RUSSIA AND CALLING FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A SPECIAL PROSECUTOR

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, sovereign nations across the globe are brought together by different unifying forces. It can be a shared heritage, language, religion, or outside historical forces that led to borders drawn decades or centuries ago.

As a nation, we are unique. We are diverse in every sense of the word, but even in these polarizing times, we are overwhelmingly unified. We are unified by our belief in democracy, free enterprise, and economic opportunity. We are all entrusted in nurturing the ideas enshrined in our Constitution—the idea that our system of democratic government enables us to work toward a more perfect union. At a time when the promise of democracy is receding for far too many around the world, we must do everything we can to uphold our country's free and fair elections, the foundation of our democracy.

Our elections should serve as a global benchmark for the peaceful transition of power. As President Reagan said, we must be ''the shining city upon the hill,'' and we must lead by example. Our elections require a strong and steady commitment from our newly naturalized citizens; from families whose families fought in the Revolutionary War; from volunteers who cover 16-hour shifts to keep polling locations open; from country, city, and township clerks.

The preservation of free and fair elections requires a strong commitment from our highest elected official in the land. As Americans, we look to the President of the United States to safeguard our democracy from foreign adversaries.

When we are presented with clear and mounting evidence that the Russian Government, at the personal discretion of Russian President Vladimir Putin, orchestrated a campaign to undermine this most fundamental institution and interfere in our election, we should expect nothing less than a clear and forceful response from the White House that this kind of behavior is simply unacceptable. Unfortunately, what we have seen from President Trump and the White House so far amounts to little more than confusion, evasion, and a whole lot of smoke.

President Trump has spoken time and again about wanting to build closer ties with Russia. On the campaign trail, he frequently fawned over Putin's strength as a leader. In 2013, he asked his Twitter followers, ''Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Moscow—if so, will he become my new best friend?''

While I don't believe that Putin attended the pageant, the nature of the Putin-Trump relationship remains an open question. It confuses me and quite frankly alarms me that President Trump speaks so fondly of a man who brutally cracks down on his political opponents and journalists at home while stirring up conflict and aggressions abroad.

Make no mistake, Vladimir Putin is no friend of the United States or of the American people. Our Nation's intelligence agencies agree with high confidence that his government orchestrated a campaign to undermine the integrity of our recent election, and Putin has sought at every turn to destabilize the international order that has kept the American people and our allies secure for decades.

Russia's interference in our election was not an isolated incident. It is part of a broader effort to undermine the NATO alliance and weaken western democracies. I heard from our French and German allies at the Munich Security Conference last month about their concerns that Russia will continue to engage in disinformation campaigns in European elections. As we aspire to be the free-market driven, democratic ''city upon a hill,'' Putin's government works to sow chaos globally in an effort to further consolidate power in his nationalist, self-enriching regime.

These attempts to destabilize Russia's neighbors and rivals are not limited to cyber space and computer code. These provocations involve military aircraft, ships, nuclear capable missiles, heavy artillery, drones, and efforts to redraw international borders.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I believe that the highest duty of Congress is to keep Americans safe. Russia's dangerous and unprofessional military provocations not only place American servicemembers and NATO allies at risk, they endanger civilian lives and raise the specter of escalating regional conflict.

Just last month, Russian aircraft flew within a few hundred feet of the USS Porter in international waters in a dangerous mock attack—an action the ship's captain called out as ''unsafe and unprofessional.''

Last summer, while on a congressional delegation to meet with NATO allies, I heard directly from Estonian leaders about Russia's blatant disregard for their sovereignty. Russian forces kidnapped a border guard in Estonian territory and sentenced him behind closed doors to 15 years in prison, in what a top European Union official called ''a clear violation of international law.''

We have seen the Russians fly reconnaissance and fighter jets in international airspace, with their transponders switched off in order to avoid detection—at one point, nearly colliding in midair with a passenger airplane. NATO has been forced to scramble jets almost 800 times—let me repeat

that: 800 times—in 2016 alone, just to respond to Russia's encroachments on NATO airspace.

As the President speaks glowingly about Putin, Mr. Putin returns the favor by deploying a dangerous new cruise missile, in clear violation of the Reagan-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Simultaneously, a Russian spy ship has been spotted lurking off the U.S. coast, trying to gather intelligence information near the Navy's primary east coast submarine base.

We are also seeing Russia undertake the largest military buildup in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War and at a pace faster than we ever, ever saw during the Soviet era.

Russia is reopening defunct military outposts and building new ones all across the polar region. There are 13 new Russian airfields that are scheduled to open by the end of this year. The Russian military recently staged an exercise in the Arctic region with well over 12,000 troops.

As the Russians build up their forces in the Arctic, the United States is falling behind. Our principal maritime force in the Arctic is the U.S. Coast Guard, but they have only one heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, that is capable of keeping Arctic shipping lanes open or conducting search and rescue missions year-round. A new icebreaker to replace the Polar Star is still a few years away.

In contrast, the Russians have over 40 icebreakers in their fleet, many of them nuclear, with plans for three new icebreakers underway. At a time when we should be investing in our Arctic capabilities, the Trump administration has been considering deep cuts to the Coast Guard's budget.

Russia's expansionist activities and military probing are not occurring in a vacuum. The numerous threats and provocations that I have outlined occur as Russia continues to wage war in eastern Ukraine in the wake of their illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilizing the opportunity for the Ukrainian people to chart their own political and economic destiny. There are 10,000 people who have lost their lives in this conflict as a direct result of Russian aggression.

Last year, as I traveled with my Senate colleagues to Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, I learned firsthand about the efforts in these countries to strengthen their civil institutions and root out corruption, build lasting partnerships, and stand up to Russian provocations. While they are doing their part, they continue to look to the United States for global leadership.

This year, U.S. troops deployed to Eastern Europe to demonstrate our ironclad commitment to our NATO allies, where they were welcomed with open arms. We are working with our partners in Iceland to enhance their capabilities to detect and respond to a recent increase in Russian submarine patrols.

I am also proud to stand with the airmen of the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard, who deployed from my State to build on their long record of successful cooperation with our partners in Latvia.

When the Kremlin is threatening our allies, buzzing our Navy warships, and meddling in foreign elections, now is not the time to call into question the commitment or the resolve of the United States of America.

Vladimir Putin's world view is shaped by his time in the KGB during the Cold War. He is committed to projecting Russian strength, both at home and abroad, through intimidation and aggression. Strength is what he respects. If Putin's provocations are not met with a strong response, they will continue and likely escalate, putting American interests and the American people at risk.

Top officials in the Trump administration have been dispatched to crisscross Europe and reassure the world of our commitments to global security. I joined Vice President PENCE and Secretary Mattis in Germany last month for the annual Munich Security Conference.

They spoke of America's commitment to NATO and the international order, which was built from the ashes of World War II, in an apparent attempt to reassure our nervous allies, but our allies are not trying to understand the aims of the Mattis administration or the Pence administration. They are trying to determine if President Trump will stand behind NATO and the institutions that have served as a counterweight to Russian aggression for decades.

The American people are also watching the White House, and they deserve to know that those who serve at the highest levels of government will always have America's best interests at heart. But every week we are faced with mounting evidence that the Trump administration and the Trump campaign have ties to Russia and are working to cover up their interactions with Russian officials.

Earlier this week, in testimony before the House Intelligence Committee, FBI Director Comey announced 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 Russia's efforts.'' This bears repeating. The FBI Director has confirmed that there is an active investigation into coordination between a Presidential campaign and a foreign adversary. This is just the latest development in a long string of disturbing revelations about President Trump's associates.

Ousted campaign chairman Paul Manafort has a deep web of business and political connections to Russian interests. Other campaign advisers have backed off previous claims that they never spoke with Russian officials. In fact, the coverup of these interactions has already resulted in the first resignation from the Trump administration.

Not long after President Obama imposed sanctions on the Russian officials and military intelligence agencies that were responsible for interfering in our election, former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn had a secret, off-the-record discussion with Russian Ambassador Kislyak, in which he discussed lifting these sanctions under the incoming Trump administration.

Top officials at the Justice Department clearly warned the White House that Mr. Flynn was vulnerable to Russian blackmail. He resigned only after it became clear that he misled the public and the Vice President about the substance of these off-the-record conversations.

But it doesn't just end there.

The Attorney General, at best, misled the Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings about his record of contact with Russian officials. He testified under oath that he ''did not have communications with the Russians'' during the campaign. When it became clear that he had actually met with the Russian Ambassador at least twice last year, including in a one-on-one meeting in the final weeks of the campaign, he was forced to recuse himself from the Justice Department's criminal investigation into this very, very serious issue.

It has been my experience that, when people are caught covering up their meetings and contacts with someone, they usually have something to hide. If you have nothing to hide, there is no reason for a coverup.

The serious national security implications of the Trump administration's potential ties with Russia cannot be overstated. This is a time when we need to make clear that Russian aggression will not stand. Instead, the President has attempted to distract the public through unsubstantiated allegations about the wiretapping of Trump Tower—an allegation that has been refuted by FBI Director Comey and others. President Trump continues to double down by calling into question the motives of those who want assurances about integrity in our elections.

Let me be clear. This is not about partisan politics. When there is so much smoke, there is probably some fire somewhere. If another country is infiltrating our government and political institutions or if Vladimir Putin has favors to cash in from officials at the highest levels of government, that is a serious problem.

Russia has endangered our servicemembers, threatened our allies, illegally annexed Crimea, engaged in war crimes in their bombing of Aleppo, and actively worked to undermine our democracy. These revelations are only adding more smoke to the Russia fire, and it is clear we need a special prosecutor to investigate.

The American people expect this investigation to be free from any political interference or influence or bias. We need someone to cut through the smoke and clear the air. An independent special prosecutor should be appointed to examine Russia's campaign to interfere in our election as well as any association or coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia.

I also believe that the time has come to create an independent, nonpartisan commission to fully investigate Russian interference. Earlier today, I cosponsored legislation introduced by Senator CARDIN that would create such a commission and provide it with the necessary subpoena power to get the answers that the American people clearly deserve.

This is not about Democrats or Republicans or about relitigating the 2016 election. This is about our national security. This commission, modeled after the 9/11 Commission, would provide a comprehensive report on what occurred last year and make recommendations as to how we can best defend the integrity of future elections.

This is about how we move forward together. This is about how we maintain the independence of our government from foreign influence and instill faith in Americans that the White House is truly working for them.

This is about moving past months of coverups and finally extinguishing this smoldering Russian fire or proving that all of this smoke is, truly, just a series of misunderstandings.

This issue shakes the foundations of our democracy, but our Union has survived harder challenges than this.

At a time when the public's trust in government is called into question, we must do everything we can to restore faith in the integrity and the impartiality of our institutions.

Just as we, as Americans, are unified in our faith in democracy and economic opportunity, we are unified in our belief in the rule of law. Just as we must show strength abroad through our military and our alliances, we must show strength at home by rooting out corruption and protecting our democratic process.

All of us—Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the White House, our diplomats and our military—must send a clear, unified message to authoritarian leaders in Moscow and everywhere else that threats levied against the United States will never be tolerated and that there will be a price to pay for making them.

The American people expect us to keep them safe while strengthening our Republic against enemies, both foreign and domestic. It is our duty to prove that we are up to the job.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO IVORY GERHARDT CYRUS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as my colleagues know, I have been coming to the floor week after week to recognize an Alaskan who has made a difference in his or her community. As I have said repeatedly—I am a little biased, of course—I have the honor of living in the most beautiful State in the country, but it is our people who truly make it special. They are resilient, kind, and giving. And it is the next generation that is going to continue to make my State the best place in the world to live.

This week I would like to introduce my colleagues to 18-year-old Ivory Gerhardt Cyrus, this week's Alaskan of the Week. Ivory lives in Kiana, a beautiful, close-knit Inupiat village of less than 400 people on the banks of the Kobuk River in Northwest Alaska. Like many villages in Alaska, there are no roads in and out. People travel to Kotzebue, which is the closest hub city—it is not very much of a city but a big village—about 40 miles away by plane or snow machine, boat, or sometimes dog team. That is where Ivory was raised—in Kiana—and where, against many odds, she has strived.

Ivory was born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which made getting through school a challenge. She was at times misunderstood, at times bullied, and many didn't know how to deal with her properly.

About 120 kids each year are diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in Alaska. When she was in middle school, Ivory began committing herself to helping them by speaking out about her own experiences and by advocating the way students with behavioral issues are treated in school. She was an advocate for them.

Now she is an honor roll high school senior, graduating this spring, and along the way, she has become a State of Alaska trainer for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. She gave a presentation at an international conference recently on disability and diversity, and she was named one of five recipients of the 27th annual Women of Achievement and Youth Awards in Alaska.

This is what I find most impressive about Ivory: She is passing a message of hope and service on to her peers. She started a group, encouraging the members of the group to do one positive thing each day. The name of the group is appropriately entitled ''One Positive Thing,'' or ''OPT.'' That message has spread throughout her community, and now villages in Kiana are remembering to do one positive thing each day for themselves, their families, and their community. Last year, she held her first OPT conference in Kiana for youth all across the region. This year, that conference—the next OPT conference, One Positive Thing—will be held on April 7 and 8.

Ivory is an exceptional young woman. She is going to go on to do exceptional things. Next fall, she plans on attending the University of Alaska Anchorage where she plans to continue to do one positive thing each day and will bring that positive attitude to the students at UAA. She is going to continue to encourage others to do that as well.

I congratulate her for all of her accomplishments, for being our Alaskan of the Week, and congratulations to her parents, Jean and Tom, for the wonderful job they have done in raising this exceptional young lady.

Ivory gives us all hope for the future.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SULLIVAN. 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.

UNITED STATES-COSTA RICA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the productive partnership between the United States and Costa Rica. I recently had the chance to meet with President Guillermo Solis, and I can attest that this is a bilateral relationship strengthened by Costa Rica's unwavering support for democracy and human rights, comprehensive economic relations, and a deep-rooted commitment to security and the environment. Since 1851, the United States has enjoyed formal diplomatic relations with Costa Rica, one of Latin America's most enduring democracies, and the close cooperation between our two countries is an example of how international engagement consistently advances U.S. national interests and national security.

In recent years, Costa Rica has become one of the United States' most strategic security partners in Central America. In 2016, in response to the challenges of increasing cocaine trafficking in the region, President Solis's administration developed a security strategy that sets aggressive goals to expand its capacity to control Costa Rica's sovereign airspace and maritime territory. Last year, Costa Rica seized more than 24,000 kilos of cocaine that were ultimately bound to the United

States. Despite a difficult fiscal situation, Costa Rica is projected to increase its investment in security by 20 percent in 2017. I commend the Obama administration's decision to donate two Island-class cutters to the Costa Rican Coast Guard, which will greatly boost Costa Rica's capacity to combat the narcotics trade. This also serves as a reminder of the strategic value of the State Department's security cooperation at a time when the Trump administration is proposing shortsighted cuts to our foreign assistance budget.

Additionally, I want to call attention to Costa Rica's collaboration with the United States in addressing the humanitarian challenges related to individuals fleeing violence in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of migrants from these three countries who have requested asylum in Costa Rica more than quadrupled, a dramatic increase that reflects the urgency of the situation in Central America. In a clear demonstration of President Solis's leadership on these issues, Costa Rica and the United States signed an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, to establish a relocation and processing facility in Costa Rica for up to 200 at-risk migrants at a time from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This critical screening provides immediate protection for those most vulnerable and opens opportunities for these individuals to be relocated to third countries.

Our joint agreement with UNHCR is but one example of U.S. and Costa Rican collaboration at multilateral fora. Costa Rica has consistently voted with the United States at the United Nations on critical issues related to Syria, North Korea, and Ukraine. In the past year, Costa Rica has also used its voice and vote at the Organization of American States to express concern about the growing challenges to democracy and human rights in Venezuela.

Furthermore, in August 2016, Costa Rica's commitment to human rights was on display when it became the first country to ratify the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance—an important step toward a more just and egalitarian society within the Americas. The convention reinforces international standards on all forms of discrimination, reaffirms the commitment of member states of the OAS to the complete and unconditional eradication of racism, and takes a step forward in the legal definition of contemporary forms of racism.

As a champion of environmental stewardship, Costa Rica has made great strides to develop renewable energy. Costa Rica recently set an ambitious carbon neutrality goal for 2021 and is well positioned to achieve this important objective. The country recently ran 75 days straight on renewable power, and, with continued foreign investment and U.S. diplomatic assistance, Costa Rica is on its way to becoming a carbon-neutral nation. I am hopeful that our diplomatic mission to Costa Rica will continue to support the country's interest in being a leader in the fight against climate change. Helping Costa Rica realize innovations in its power sector helps foster a broader strategic partnership with an important neighbor in our hemisphere.

At a moment characterized by the Trump administration's isolationist rhetoric, it is critically important to recognize that the United States is safer when we cooperate with other countries in the region to fight the battle against organized crime and illegal drug-trafficking. At the same time, Costa Rica's cooperation with the United Nations to support orderly and lawful migration, its collaboration with its neighbors in the region, and its efforts to promote human rights regionally are worthy of our commendation. Costa Rica is a true partner of the United States, and it is imperative that we continue to strengthen and expand the cooperation between our two countries to promote more security, prosperity, and stability in Central America and across the hemisphere.

TRIBUTE TO BARBARA VACHON

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Barbara Vachon, who retired this March after 16 years of service to the Senate. For as long as I have been in the Senate, with just a 2-month exception, Barb has served as my executive assistant and my right hand.

Barb's service to the Senate began in 2001, when her friend Trecia called and offered her a temporary position in Senator Jim Jeffords' office. In New Hampshire at the time, Barb decided she would take a chance and try out life in Washington, DC. Barb thought she was coming down to Washington for a 2-month assignment, answering phones and staffing the front office until the office could hire someone right out of college, but Barb quickly became an invaluable member of Senator Jeffords' team. Eventually, she became the Senator's executive assistant, working alongside him every day until his retirement from the Senate in 2007.

Barb's first year in the Senate included Senator Jeffords switching parties, 9/11, and the anthrax and ricin scares. Any one of these events might have given a different person a reason to leave the Senate, but Barb stayed and worked as hard as ever. When Senator Jeffords retired in 2007, Barb helped Senator BERNIE SANDERS' office learn the ways of the Senate for 2 months, after which she joined my office.

From day 1, Barb was always the person who made the trains run on time in my office. Barb had the challenging and sometimes impossible task of keeping my day on schedule, while at the same time juggling phone calls, personal notes, briefing memos, and any number of inquiries that came across her desk. There were even a few times where she managed to track down particularly old and rare library books at my request. No matter the task at hand, Barb approached her work with good humor and a can-do attitude that impressed everyone.

Barb's contributions in my Senate office are immeasurable, but I thought it was worth trying to quantify some of the ways in which she has served the people of Pennsylvania and our Nation. During her decade of service to Pennsylvania, Barb welcomed more than 200 ambassadors, dignitaries, and administration officials to my office, drafted more than 500 letters, and greeted over 1,000 Pennsylvanians at my ''Keystone Coffees.'' She acted as a mentor and support system for all my staff members, and befriended everyone she worked with in the Senate. Everyone, from the Capitol Police officers she passed on her 3-block commute, to the photographers in the Senate Photo Studio who patiently waited while Barb shepherded our constituents for photos, knows how valued Barb was to our team and to me personally.

Having been in the Senate long before I was, Barb understood how to balance the everyday needs in the office with the overall goals we set for ourselves when we first began our service here. Barb provided everyone in my office, myself included, with the important perspective that is often lost here in the Senate: it is easy to get bogged down in details or small problems, but the work we do here is important, lasting, and honorable. Barb never lost sight of how fortunate we are to work in this institution, and I know our team is grateful to have always had that reminder.

It is hard to imagine my office without Barb, but I know she will enjoy her retirement, whether she is home in New Hampshire or traveling the world. I wish her and her children, Heather and Michael, well in this new chapter.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO LESLIE CARTNER

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, this week, I have the distinct honor of recognizing Leslie Cartner, commander of the Yellowstone Battalion of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps in Billings. Leslie's devotion to the Yellowstone Battalion, the only Sea Cadet organization in the State of Montana, has been outstanding. In the next few weeks, Leslie will complete her tenure as Yellowstone Battalion Commander and transfer responsibility for the Sea Cadet program to another capable Montanan.

In 1962, Congress chartered the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps. Today there are over 380 Sea Cadet units and nearly 9,000 young Americans participating in the program. In the Yellowstone Battalion, under Leslie's leadership, the

cadets have been trained in drill and ceremony, first aid, inspection procedures, and taught the basics of fighting a fire while onboard a ship. In addition to learning introductory level Navy skills, the cadets have received character-building instruction in avoiding substance abuse and prevention of bullying and harassment. One of the instructors for the Yellowstone Battalion, Navy veteran George Blackard, described Leslie as the driving force behind the local Sea Cadet program and ''the one who really got it off the ground.'' I strongly share George's appreciation for the work Leslie has done to enhance the program and her commitment to helping build the next generation of leaders.

From Libby to Ekalaka, Montanans are doing great things to strengthen their communities. A thank you for a job well done, I tip my cap to Leslie.

Good job, Sailor.●

TRIBUTE TO DOUG GRIFFIN

● Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, today I wish to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing and congratulating Doug Griffin of Newton, NH, for being named an ''Advocate of the Year'' by the Addiction Policy Forum. After Mr. Griffin lost his daughter Courtney to an opioid overdose in September 2014, he became a passionate advocate, determined to increase awareness of the opioid epidemic in the State of New Hampshire. Granite Staters and Americans impacted by this urgent crisis owe him a debt of gratitude for his work, and I am grateful that the Addiction Policy Forum has honored him with this distinction.

Mr. Griffin has been a leader in calling for easier access to naloxone, Narcan, for families at risk of an overdose, even testifying on the issue before the New Hampshire State Legislature. My colleagues in the U.S. Senate remember Mr. Griffin from his testimony on the rise of opioid-related deaths and the importance of passing the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act last year. In addition to his role as cochair of the Addiction Policy Forum's families committee, Mr. Griffin has spearheaded several local efforts in the Granite State, including hosting a monthly church service for people with substance use disorders and their families, a club for young students to raise awareness of the dangers of opioids, and a project to create a farm-based sober living facility for those in recovery.

New Hampshire has benefited greatly from Mr. Griffin's devotion and leadership. On behalf of my colleagues and the U.S. Congress, I thank Mr. Griffin for all the advocacy work he has done and continues to do. I congratulate him again on being named one of the Addiction Policy Forum's ''Advocates of the Year''.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

At 10:33 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bills:

S. 305. An act to amend title 4, United States Code, to encourage the display of the flag of the United States on National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

H.R. 1228. An act to provide for the appointment of members of the Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance to replace members whose terms expire during 2017, and for other purposes.

The enrolled bills were subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

At 12:20 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 372. An act to restore the application of Federal antitrust laws to the business of health insurance to protect competition and consumers.

H.R. 1101. An act to amend title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to improve access and choice for entrepreneurs with small businesses with respect to medical care for their employees.

H.R. 1238. An act to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to make the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for Health Affairs responsible for coordinating the efforts of the Department of Homeland Security related to food, agriculture, and veterinary defense against terrorism, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that pursuant to section 803(a) of the Congressional Recognition for Excellence in Arts Education Act (2 U.S.C. 803(a)), the Minority Leader reappoints the Honorable DEBBIE DINGELL of Michigan to the Congressional Award Board.

MEASURES REFERRED

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

H.R. 372. An act to restore the application of the Federal antitrust laws to the business of health insurance to protect competition and consumers; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

H.R. 1101. An act to amend title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to improve access and choice for entrepreneurs with small businesses with respect to medical care for their employees; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

H.R. 1238. An act to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to make the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for Health Affairs responsible for coordinating the efforts of the Department of Homeland Security related to food, agriculture, and veterinary defense against terrorism, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

ENROLLED BILLS PRESENTED

The Secretary of the Senate reported that on today, March 23, 2017, she had presented to the President of the United States the following enrolled bill:

S. 305. An act to amend title 4, United States Code, to encourage the display of the flag of the United States on National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC–1033. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Further Delay of Effective Dates for Five Final Regulations Published by the Environmental Protection Agency Between December 12, 2016 and January 17, 2017'' (FRL No . 9960–28–OP) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC–1034. A communication from the Secretary of Defense, transmitting a report on the approved retirement of Lieutenant General Andrew E. Busch, United States Air Force, and his advancement to the grade of lieutenant general on the retired list; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC–1035. A communication from the Chairman, Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Council's 2016 Annual Report to Congress; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC–1036. A communication from the Executive Director, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Annual Update of Filing Fees'' ((RIN1902–AF35) (Docket No. RM17–00006–000)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2017; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

EC–1037. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Further Delay of Effective Dates for Five Final Regulations Published by the Environmental Protection Agency Between December 12, 2016 and January 17, 2017'' (FRL No . 9960–28–OP) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1038. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Technical Correction to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Particulate Matter'' ((RIN2060–AS89) (FRL No. 9958–29–OAR)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1039. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Limited Federal Implementation Plan; Prevention of Significant Deterioration Requirements for Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5); California; North Coast Unified Air Quality Management District'' (FRL No. 9960–32–Region 9) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the

Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1040. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Further Delay of Effective Date for the Final Rule Entitled 'Accidental Release Prevention Requirements: Risk Management Programs Under the Clean Air Act' Published by the Environment Protection Agency on January 13, 2017'' ((RIN2050–AG82) (FRL No. 9959–57–OLEM)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1041. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Delay of Effective Date for Partial Approval and Partial Disapproval of Attainment Plan for the Idaho Portion of the Logan, Utah/Idaho PM2.5 Nonattainment Area Published by the Environmental Protection Agency on January 4, 2017'' (FRL No. 9960–35–Region 10) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1042. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plans; Texas; El Paso Carbon Monoxide Limited Maintenance Plan'' (FRL No. 9957–56–Region 6) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1043. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plans; New Mexico; Albuquerque/Bernalillo County; Inspection and Maintenance Program Error Correction'' (FRL No. 9957–41–Region 6) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1044. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plans; Louisiana; Volatile Organic Compounds Rule Revision and Stage II Vapor Recovery'' (FRL No. 9958–60–Region 6) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1045. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Alabama: Final Authorization of State Hazardous Waste Management Program Revisions'' (FRL No. 9959–14–Region 4) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1046. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Air Plan Approval; Georgia; Atlanta; Requirements for the 2008 8-Hour Ozone Standard'' (FRL No. 9957–89–Region 4) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 16, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1047. A communication from the Director of Congressional Affairs, Office of New Reactors, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Consolidated Guidance About Materials Licenses'' (NUREG–1556, Volume 11, Rev. 1) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–1048. A communication from the Chair of the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''2017 Report to Congress on Medicaid and CHIP''; to the Committee on Finance.

EC–1049. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a financial report for fiscal year 2016 relative to the Biosimilar User Fee Act of 2012; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1050. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a financial report relative to the Animal Generic Drug User Fee Act for fiscal year 2016; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1051. A communication from the Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a financial report relative to the Animal Generic Drug User Fee Act for fiscal year 2016; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1052. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''Fiscal Year 2016 Compounding Quality Act Annual Report''; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1053. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report to Congress on the Use of Mandatory Recall Authority Submitted Pursuant to Section 206 of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, Public Law 111–353''; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1054. A communication from the Regulations Coordinator, Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''340B Drug Pricing Program Ceiling Price and Manufacturer Civil Monetary Penalties; Delay of Effective Date'' (RIN0906–AA89) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1055. A communication from the Secretary of Education, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Open Licensing Requirement for Competitive Grant Programs'' (RIN1894–AA07) received in the Office of the President pro tempore of the Senate; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC–1056. A communication from the Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Competitive and Noncompetitive Non-formula Federal Assistance Programs - Specific Administrative Provisions for the Veterinary Services Grants Program'' (RIN0524–AA70) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC–1057. A communication from the Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Board's Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report on the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No FEAR Act); to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

EC–1058. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Air Traffic Service (ATS) Routes; Southwest Oklahoma'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2015–3835)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1059. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airspace Designations; Incorporation by Reference Amendments'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–8926)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1060. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Establishment of Class E Airspace; Wessington Springs, SD'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9193)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1061. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of VOR Federal Airways V–235 and V–293 in the Vicinity of Cedar City, Utah'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9265)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1062. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Air Traffic Service (ATS) Routes; Eastern United States'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–0986)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1063. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Revocation of Class E Airspace; Farmington, MO; and Amendment of Class E Airspace for the Following Missouri Towns; Ava, MO; Cameron, MO; Chillicothe, MO; Farmington, MO; and Festus, MO'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6986)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1064. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal

Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Establishment of Class E Airspace; Weed, CA'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9320)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1065. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Establishment of Class E Airspace; Iron Mountain, MI'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6271)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1066. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Establishment of Class E Airspace; Grand Chenier, LA'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6661)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1067. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace for the following Ohio Towns; Findlay, OH; Ashland, OH; Celina, OH; Circleville, OH; Columbus, OH; Defiance, OH; Hamilton, OH; Lima, OH; and London, OH'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–8839)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1068. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class D and E Airspace for the following Texas Towns: Houston Sugar Land, TX; Alice, TX; Bay City, TX; Breham, TX; Burnet, TX; Falfurrias, TX; Graford, TX; and Hamilton, TX'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–85053)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1069. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; Santa Rosa, CA'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6967)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1070. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; Willows, CA'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9138)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1071. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; St. Petersburg, FL'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2017–0015)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1072. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace for the Paragould, AR'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–8835)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1073. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; Barter Island, AK'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9173)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1074. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; Mapleton, IA'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–8834)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1075. A communication from the Chief of Staff, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Connect America Fund; ETC Annual Reports and Certifications'' ((RIN3060–AF85) (FCC 17–12)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1076. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6896)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1077. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9298)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1078. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–6893)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1079. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (Previously Eurocopter Deutschland GmbH) Helicopters'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2015–0674)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1080. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (Previously Eurocopter Deutschland GmbH) Helicopters'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2017–0155)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1081. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; The Boeing Company Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2015–3984)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1082. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; The Boeing Company Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–7423)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1083. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; The Boeing Company Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–4225)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1084. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation Helicopters'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2017–0169)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1085. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Bell Helicopter Textron'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2017–0154)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1086. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Learjet Inc. Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9388)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate

on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1087. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; United Instruments, Inc. Series Altimeters'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9345)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1088. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Rolls-Royce plc Turbofan Engines'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2012–0004)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1089. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Rolls-Royce plc Turbofan Engines'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9510)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1090. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of Class E Airspace; Milwaukee, WI'' ((RIN2120–AA66) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9491)) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 17, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC–1091. A communication from the Management and Program Analyst, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Airworthiness Directives; Pilatus Aircraft Ltd. Airplanes'' ((RIN2120–AA64) (Docket No. FAA–2016–9357)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 22, 2017; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated:

POM–12. A concurrent resolution adopted by the Legislature of the State of South Dakota expressing support for, and unity with, the State of Israel; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1014

Whereas, the United States has long supported a negotiated settlement leading to a sustainable two-state solution with the democratic, Jewish state of Israel and a demilitarized, democratic Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security; and

Whereas, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 claims ''the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace''; and

Whereas, by referring to the ''4 June 1967 lines'' as the basis for negotiations, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 effectively states that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, are ''occupied territory,'' thereby equating these sites with outposts in the West Bank that the Israeli government has deemed illegal; and

Whereas, passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 effectively lends legitimacy to efforts by the Palestinian Authority to impose its own solution through international organizations and through unjustified boycotts or divestment campaigns against Israel, and will require the United States and Israel to take effective action to counteract the potential harmful impact of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334; and

Whereas, the Obama Administration's decision not to veto United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 is inconsistent with long-standing United States policy and makes direct negotiations more, not less, challenging; and

Whereas, Israel has been granted her lands under and through the oldest recorded deed, as recorded in the Old Testament scriptures held sacred and revered by Jews and Christians alike, as presenting the acts and words of God; and

Whereas, the claim and presence of the Jewish people in Israel has remained constant throughout the past four thousand years of history; and

Whereas, the legal basis for the establishment of the modern state of Israel was a binding resolution under international law, which was unanimously adopted by the League of Nations in 1922 and subsequently affirmed by both houses of the United States Congress; and

Whereas, this resolution affirmed the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the historical region of the land of Israel, including the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem; and

Whereas, Article 80 of the United Nations Charter 22 recognized the continued validity of the rights granted to states or peoples which already existed under international instruments, and therefore the 1922 League of Nations resolution remains valid, and the six hundred fifty thousand Jews currently residing in the areas of Judea, Samaria, and eastern Jerusalem reside there legitimately; and

Whereas, Israel declared its independence and self-governance on May 14, 1948, with the goal of reestablishing its God-given and legally recognized lands as a homeland for the Jewish people; and

Whereas, the United States, having been the first country to recognize Israel as an independent nation and as Israel's principal ally, has enjoyed a close and mutually beneficial relationship with Israel and her people; and

Whereas, there are increasing incidents of anti-Semitism around the world, including across the United States reflected in official hate crime statistics; and

Whereas, the international boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement is one of the main vehicles for spreading anti-Semitism and advocating for the elimination of the Jewish State; and

Whereas, the dramatic increase in boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign activities on college campuses around the country has resulted in increased animosity and intimidation against Jewish students, negatively impacting student programming related to the State of Israel and politics in the Middle East; and

Whereas, leaders of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement say their goal is to eliminate Israel as the home of the Jewish people; and

Whereas, messaging at anti-Israel rallies has adopted the boycott, divestment, and sanctions slogan: ''from the river to the sea Palestine will be free'' which means that there would be no Israel between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea and that the State of Israel will cease to exist; and

Whereas, Israel is the greatest friend and ally of the United States in the Middle East and the values of our two nations are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate one from the other; and

Whereas, a strong and independent Israel supports our long cherished beliefs of democracy and liberty which we believe is the right of all mankind; and

Whereas, there are those in the world who have continually sought to destroy Israel, from the time of its inception as a state, and those same enemies of Israel also hate, and seek to destroy, the United States; and

Whereas, the promise of the God of Israel, who is the Creator acknowledged in our own Declaration of Independence and referenced by our own Founding Fathers in the creation of our nation, is that He will bless those who bless Israel. Let it be known that the State of South Dakota openly blesses Israel with our friendship and that we stand in support of the Israeli people and celebrate our many culture ties and gratitude for our cordial and mutually beneficial relations since 1948, a friendship that continues to strengthen with each passing year: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the House of Representatives of the Ninety-Second Legislature of the State of South Dakota, the Senate concurring therein, that the Legislature calls on Congress and President Donald J. Trump to oppose and counteract United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 against Israel by all means necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That South Dakota stands proudly with Israel and thanks our only Middle East democracy, for Israel's cordial and mutually beneficial relationship with the United States and with the state of South Dakota. We stand in support of Israel in its legal, historical, moral, and God-given right of self-governance and self-defense of the entirety of its own lands. We recognize that Israel is neither an attacking force nor an occupier of the lands of others, and that peace in the Middle East for us, is contingent on a whole and united Israel; and be it further

Resolved, That the chief clerk of the House of Representatives prepare copies of this resolution and forward them to the President of the United States, the speaker and clerk of the United States House of Representatives, the president and secretary of the United States Senate, and the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., for transmission to the proper authorities in the State of Israel.

POM–13. A concurrent resolution adopted by the Legislature of the State of South Dakota expressing support for, and unity with, the State of Israel; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1014

Whereas, the United States has long supported a negotiated settlement leading to a sustainable two-state solution with the democratic, Jewish state of Israel and a demilitarized, democratic Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace and security; and

Whereas, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 claims ''the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the

achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace''; and

Whereas, by referring to the ''4 June 1967 lines'' as the basis for negotiations, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 effectively states that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site, are ''occupied territory,'' thereby equating these sites with outposts in the West Bank that the Israeli government has deemed illegal; and

Whereas, passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 effectively lends legitimacy to efforts by the Palestinian Authority to impose its own solution through international organizations and through unjustified boycotts or divestment campaigns against Israel, and will require the United States and Israel to take effective action to counteract the potential harmful impact of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334; and

Whereas, the Obama Administration's decision not to veto United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 is inconsistent with long-standing United States policy and makes direct negotiations more, not less, challenging; and

Whereas, Israel has been granted her lands under and through the oldest recorded deed, as recorded in the Old Testament scriptures held sacred and revered by Jews and Christians alike, as presenting the acts and words of God; and

Whereas, the claim and presence of the Jewish people in Israel has remained constant throughout the past four thousand years of history; and

Whereas, the legal basis for the establishment of the modern state of Israel was a binding resolution under international law, which was unanimously adopted by the League of Nations in 1922 and subsequently affirmed by both houses of the United States Congress; and

Whereas, this resolution affirmed the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the historical region of the land of Israel, including the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem; and

Whereas, Article 80 of the United Nations Charter 22 recognized the continued validity of the rights granted to states or peoples which already existed under international instruments, and therefore the 1922 League of Nations resolution remains valid, and the six hundred fifty thousand Jews currently residing in the areas of Judea, Samaria, and eastern Jerusalem reside there legitimately; and

Whereas, Israel declared its independence and self-governance on May 14, 1948, with the goal of reestablishing its God-given and legally recognized lands as a homeland for the Jewish people; and

Whereas, the United States, having been the first country to recognize Israel as an independent nation and as Israel's principal ally, has enjoyed a close and mutually beneficial relationship with Israel and her people; and

Whereas, there are increasing incidents of anti-Semitism around the world, including across the United States reflected in official hate crime statistics; and

Whereas, the international boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement is one of the main vehicles for spreading anti-Semitism and advocating for the elimination of the Jewish State; and

Whereas, the dramatic increase in boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign activities on college campuses around the country has resulted in increased animosity and intimidation against Jewish students, negatively impacting student programming related to the State of Israel and politics in the Middle East; and

Whereas, leaders of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement say their goal is to eliminate Israel as the home of the Jewish people; and

Whereas, messaging at anti-Israel rallies has adopted the boycott, divestment, and sanctions slogan: ''from the river to the sea Palestine will be free'' which means that there would be no Israel between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea and that the State of Israel will cease to exist; and

Whereas, Israel is the greatest friend and ally of the United States in the Middle East and the values of our two nations are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate one from the other; and

Whereas, a strong and independent Israel supports our long cherished beliefs of democracy and liberty which we believe is the right of all mankind; and

Whereas, there are those in the world who have continually sought to destroy Israel, from the time of its inception as a state, and those same enemies of Israel also hate, and seek to destroy, the United States; and

Whereas, the promise of the God of Israel, who is the Creator acknowledged in our own Declaration of Independence and referenced by our own Founding Fathers in the creation of our nation, is that He will bless those who bless Israel. Let it be known that the State of South Dakota openly blesses Israel with our friendship and that we stand in support of the Israeli people and celebrate our many culture ties and gratitude for our cordial and mutually beneficial relations since 1948, a friendship that continues to strengthen with each passing year: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the House of Representatives of the Ninety-Second Legislature of the State of South Dakota, the Senate concurring therein, that the Legislature calls on Congress and President Donald J. Trump to oppose and counteract United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 against Israel by all means necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That South Dakota stands proudly with Israel and thanks our only Middle East democracy, for Israel's cordial and mutually beneficial relationship with the United States and with the state of South Dakota. We stand in support of Israel in its legal, historical, moral, and God-given right of self-governance and self-defense of the entirety of its own lands. We recognize that Israel is neither an attacking force nor an occupier of the lands of others, and that peace in the Middle East for us, is contingent on a whole and united Israel; and be it further

Resolved, That the chief clerk of the House of Representatives prepare copies of this resolution and forward them to the President of the United States, the speaker and clerk of the United States House of Representatives, the president and secretary of the United States Senate, and the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., for transmission to the proper authorities in the State of Israel.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. GRASSLEY, from the Committee on the Judiciary, without amendment:

S. 178. A bill to prevent elder abuse and exploitation and improve the justice system's response to victims in elder abuse and exploitation cases (Rept. No. 115–9).

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mr. MCCAIN for the Committee on Armed Services.

Air Force nominations beginning with Brig. Gen. Tony D. Bauernfeind and ending with Brig. Gen. Mark E. Weatherington, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on March 9, 2017. (minus 1 nominee: Brig. Gen. Mark D. Camerer)

Air Force nominations beginning with Col. Dagvin R. M. Anderson and ending with Col. David H. Tabor, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record on March 9, 2017.

Army nomination of Maj. Gen. Paul A. Ostrowski, to be Lieutenant General.

Army nomination of Lt. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland, to be Lieutenant General.

Army nomination of Brig. Gen. Francisco A. Espaillat, to be Major General.

Army nomination of Col. Jeffrey A. Roach, to be Brigadier General.

(Nominations without an asterisk were reported with the recommendation that they be confirmed.)

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. CORNYN (for himself and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 704. A bill to provide that members of the Armed Forces performing services in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt shall be entitled to tax benefits in the same manner as if such services were performed in a combat zone; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. HATCH (for himself, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. BLUNT, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 705. A bill to amend the National Child Protection Act of 1993 to establish a national criminal history background check system and criminal history review program for certain individuals who, related to their employment, have access to children, the elderly, or individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. FRANKEN:

S. 706. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the treatment of medical evidence provided by non-Department of Veterans Affairs medical professionals in support of claims for disability compensation under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Ms. COLLINS (for herself and Mr. NELSON):

S. 707. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that pass-through businesses do not pay tax at a higher rate than corporations; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. BROWN, and Mrs. CAPITO):

S. 708. A bill to improve the ability of U.S. Customs and Border Protection to interdict fentanyl, other synthetic opioids, and other narcotics and psychoactive substances that are illegally imported into the United States, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. NELSON:

S. 709. A bill to prohibit the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency from taking administrative action to recover certain payments for disaster or emergency assistance, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. MANCHIN (for himself and Mrs. CAPITO):

S. 710. A bill to reinstate and extend the deadline for commencement of construction of a hydroelectric project involving Jennings Randolph Dam; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. THUNE (for himself, Mr. CARDIN, and Mr. ROBERTS):

S. 711. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for S corporation reform, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. KING, Mr. KAINE, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. CASEY, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. UDALL, Ms. HIRONO, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. WARNER, Mr. BROWN, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. 712. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to reform the rights and processes relating to appeals of decisions regarding claims for benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Ms. CANTWELL (for herself and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 713. A bill to establish the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area in the State of Washington; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Ms. CANTWELL (for herself and Mrs. MURRAY):

S. 714. A bill to amend Public Law 103–434 to authorize Phase III of the Yakima River Basin Water Basin Water Enhancement Project for the purposes of improving water management in the Yakima River basin, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. KING (for himself and Ms. COLLINS):

S. 715. A bill to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to release on behalf of the United States the condition that certain lands conveyed to the City of Old Town, Maine, be used for a municipal airport, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. PORTMAN (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mrs. CAPITO, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. BARRASSO, and Mr. LEE):

S. 716. A bill to require that any debt limit increase be balanced by equal spending cuts over the next decade; to the Committee on the Budget.

By Mr. SULLIVAN (for himself, Ms. HEITKAMP, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mrs. CAPITO, Mr. CORNYN, and Mr. DAINES):

S. 717. A bill to promote pro bono legal services as a critical way in which to empower survivors of domestic violence; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. PETERS (for himself, Mr. CASSIDY, Mr. BOOZMAN, and Mr. FRANKEN):

S. 718. A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to make college affordable and accessible; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. WHITEHOUSE (for himself, Mr. DAINES, Mr. PETERS, Ms. DUCKWORTH, and Mr. GARDNER):

S. 719. A bill to establish a grant program at the Department of Homeland Security to promote cooperative research and development between the United States and Israel on cybersecurity; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. CARDIN (for himself and Mr. PORTMAN):

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; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. UDALL (for himself, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. CARPER):

S. 721. A bill to require the disclosure of certain visitor access records; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. CORKER (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. COTTON, Mr. CASEY, Mr. CRUZ, Mr. BENNET, Mr. RISCH, Mr. COONS, Mr. SULLIVAN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. YOUNG, and Mr. DONNELLY):

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; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

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

By Mr. LEE (for himself, Mr. HATCH, Mrs. FISCHER, Mr. SASSE, Mr. COONS, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. FLAKE, and Mr. GARDNER):

S. Res. 92. A resolution expressing concern over the disappearance of David Sneddon, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. MCCAIN):

S. Res. 93. A resolution congratulating the European Union on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community and laid the foundation for decades of European peace and prosperity; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. PORTMAN (for himself and Ms. HARRIS):

S. Res. 94. A resolution designating March 2017 as ''National Read Aloud Month''; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. CASEY (for himself and Mr. ISAKSON):

S. Res. 95. A resolution designating March 22, 2017, as ''National Rehabilitation Counselors Appreciation Day''; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. CASEY (for himself, Mr. ISAKSON, and Ms. HASSAN):

S. Res. 96. A resolution designating March 25, 2017, as ''National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day''; considered and agreed to.

By Mr. SHELBY (for himself and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. Res. 97. A resolution authorizing the printing of a collection of the rules of the committees of the Senate; considered and agreed to.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 168

At the request of Mr. WICKER, the names of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) were added as cosponsors of S. 168, a bill to amend and enhance certain maritime programs of the Department of Transportation.

S. 170

At the request of Mr. RUBIO, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 170, a bill to provide for nonpreemption of measures by State and local governments to divest from entities that engage in commerce-related or investment-related boycott, divestment, or sanctions activities targeting Israel, and for other purposes.

S. 301

At the request of Mr. LANKFORD, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 301, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to prohibit governmental discrimination against providers of health services that are not involved in abortion.

S. 372

At the request of Mr. PORTMAN, the name of the Senator from Georgia (Mr. PERDUE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 372, a bill to amend the Tariff Act of 1930 to ensure that merchandise arriving through the mail shall be subject to review by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and to require the provision of advance electronic information on shipments of mail to U.S. Customs and Border Protection and for other purposes.

S. 389

At the request of Mr. WYDEN, the name of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET) was added as a cosponsor of S. 389, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that kombucha is exempt from any excise taxes and regulations imposed on alcoholic beverages.

S. 394

At the request of Mr. ROUNDS, the name of the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 394, a bill to amend chapter 44 of title 18, United States Code, to provide that a member of the Armed Forces and the spouse of that member shall have the same rights regarding the receipt of firearms at the location of any duty station of the member.

S. 425

At the request of Mr. CARDIN, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 425, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to improve the historic rehabilitation tax credit, and for other purposes.

S. 448

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 448, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for treatment of clinical psychologists as physicians for purposes of furnishing clinical psychologist services under the Medicare program.

S. 479

At the request of Mr. BROWN, the names of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) were

added as cosponsors of S. 479, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to waive coinsurance under Medicare for colorectal cancer screening tests, regardless of whether therapeutic intervention is required during the screening.

S. 486

At the request of Mr. CASEY, the names of the Senator from Wisconsin (Ms. BALDWIN) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY) were added as cosponsors of S. 486, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for the non-application of Medicare competitive acquisition rates to complex rehabilitative wheelchairs and accessories.

S. 512

At the request of Mr. BARRASSO, the name of the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 512, a bill to modernize the regulation of nuclear energy.

S. 534

At the request of Mrs. FEINSTEIN, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FRANKEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 534, a bill to prevent the sexual abuse of minors and amateur athletes by requiring the prompt reporting of sexual abuse to law enforcement authorities, and for other purposes.

S. 537

At the request of Mr. FRANKEN, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 537, a bill to amend title 9 of the United States Code with respect to arbitration.

S. 573

At the request of Mr. PETERS, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. HASSAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 573, a bill to establish the National Criminal Justice Commission.

S. 591

At the request of Mrs. MURRAY, the name of the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. MANCHIN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 591, a bill to expand eligibility for the program of comprehensive assistance for family caregivers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to expand benefits available to participants under such program, to enhance special compensation for members of the uniformed services who require assistance in everyday life, and for other purposes.

S. 604

At the request of Mr. HATCH, the name of the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) was added as a cosponsor of S. 604, a bill to allow certain State permitting authority to encourage expansion of broadband service to rural communities, and for other purposes.

S. 605

At the request of Mr. DAINES, the name of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 605, a bill to amend the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to discourage litigation against the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management relating to land management projects.

S. 623

At the request of Mr. RUBIO, the name of the Senator from Delaware (Mr. COONS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 623, a bill to enhance the transparency and accelerate the impact of assistance provided under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to promote quality basic education in developing countries, to better enable such countries to achieve universal access to quality basic education and improved learning outcomes, to eliminate duplication and waste, and for other purposes.

S. 668

At the request of Mr. CARPER, the names of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN), the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) were added as cosponsors of S. 668, a bill to nullify the effect of the recent Executive order regarding border security and immigration enforcement.

S. 681

At the request of Mr. TESTER, the names of the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) were added as cosponsors of S. 681, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the benefits and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to women veterans, and for other purposes.

S. 697

At the request of Mr. DAINES, the name of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. UDALL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 697, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to lower the mileage threshold for deduction in determining adjusted gross income of certain expenses of members of reserve components of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

S. 699

At the request of Mr. MURPHY, the name of the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 699, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish mental and behavioral health care to certain individuals discharged or released from the active military, naval, or air service under conditions other than honorable, and for other purposes.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. CORNYN (for himself and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 704. A bill to provide that members of the Armed Forces performing services in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt shall be entitled to tax benefits in the same manner as if such services were performed in a combat zone; to the Committee on Finance.

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. 704

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 ''Sinai Service Recognition Act''.

SEC. 2. TREATMENT OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS PERFORMING SERVICES IN THE SINAI PENINSULA OF EGYPT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of the following provisions of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, a qualified hazardous duty area shall be treated in the same manner as if it were a combat zone (as determined under section 112 of such Code):

(1) Section 2(a)(3) (relating to special rule where deceased spouse was in missing status).

(2) Section 112 (relating to the exclusion of certain combat pay of members of the Armed Forces).

(3) Section 692 (relating to income taxes of members of Armed Forces on death).

(4) Section 2201 (relating to members of the Armed Forces dying in combat zone or by reason of combat-zone-incurred wounds, etc.).

(5) Section 3401(a)(1) (defining wages relating to combat pay for members of the Armed Forces).

(6) Section 4253(d) (relating to the taxation of phone service originating from a combat zone from members of the Armed Forces).

(7) Section 6013(f)(1) (relating to joint return where individual is in missing status).

(8) Section 7508 (relating to time for performing certain acts postponed by reason of service in combat zone).

(b) QUALIFIED HAZARDOUS DUTY AREA.—For purposes of this section, the term ''qualified hazardous duty area'' means the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, if as of the date of the enactment of this section any member of the Armed Forces of the United States is entitled to special pay under section 310 of title 37, United States Code (relating to special pay; duty subject to hostile fire or imminent danger) for services performed in such location. Such term includes such location only during the period such entitlement is in effect.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), the provisions of this section shall take effect on June 9, 2015.

(2) WITHHOLDING.—Subsection (a)(5) shall apply to remuneration paid after the date of the enactment of this Act.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. BROWN, and Mrs. CAPITO):

S. 708. A bill to improve the ability of U.S. Customs and Border Protection to interdict fentanyl, other synthetic opioids, and other narcotics and psychoactive substances that are illegally imported into the United States, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak again today about the epidemic of deadly, illicit fentanyl plaguing our Nation and how, through bipartisan legislation I have introduced today, we can help to stop this dangerous opioid from flowing into our country from abroad.

I want to start by providing some basic information about fentanyl. What

is fentanyl? Well, fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine. Although pharmaceutical fentanyl can be misused, the current fentanyl epidemic in our country is being fueled by illicitly manufactured fentanyl and illicit versions of chemically similar compounds known as fentanyl analogs.

Fentanyl, in its powder form, is often mixed with other illegal drugs like heroin or it is disguised in pill form to resemble an opioid painkiller like OxyContin. Many drug users overdose on fentanyl because they have no idea it is cut into whatever substance they are injecting or whatever pills they are swallowing. They simply do not realize just how deadly fentanyl is.

In fact, just a few salt-size grains of fentanyl can kill an adult. Where does illicit fentanyl come from? According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, Mexico is the primary source for illicit fentanyl trafficked into the United States. Distributors in China are the principal source of the precursor chemicals, the chemical building blocks used to manufacture fentanyl in Mexico and elsewhere.

China is also a source of finished product illicit fentanyl coming into the United States. Why is illicit fentanyl trafficking increasing? Well, we are in the midst of an opioid epidemic that has begun with the overprescription and resulting abuse of prescription opioids like OxyContin. When users found those pills too expensive to sustain their addiction, they turned to cheaper heroin.

Now they are turning to even cheaper and more powerful fentanyl, which has become an extremely lucrative product for drug dealers and drug cartels. According to the DEA, a kilogram of heroin can be purchased from Colombia for about $6,000 and then sold on the wholesale drug market for $80,000—purchased for 6,000, sold for $80,000. By comparison, a kilogram of pure fentanyl can be purchased from China for less than $5,000 and then sold on the market for $80,000 as well.

Because it is so potent that 1 kilogram of fentanyl can be cut with agents like talcum powder or caffeine, resulting in 24 kilograms of product to be sold, that means that one $5,000 kilogram of fentanyl actually reaps a whopping profit in the neighborhood of $1.6 million.

What has been the impact of the fentanyl epidemic on the United States? Well, the DEA is so concerned about fentanyl that in March of 2015, it issued a nationwide alert that highlighted the drug as a threat to health and public safety. Between 2014 and 2015, overdose deaths in the United States from synthetic opioids, principally illicit fentanyl, increased 72 percent.

In 2015, there were more than 9,500 such overdose deaths in the United States. Last year, it is estimated that my home State of Massachusetts suffered more than 2,000 opioid-related overdose deaths, largely fueled by the deadly rise of illicit fentanyl. In fact, Massachusetts ranked second notionally per capita in synthetic opioid deaths, which includes fentanyl, with the number of deaths between 2014 and 2015 increasing by 109 percent.

Massachusetts authorities are now finding fentanyl in 74 percent of the State's opioid overdose deaths. If those figures hold up, that means last year there will have been roughly 1,500 fentanyl-related deaths in Massachusetts in 2016. If the fentanyl epidemic were to hit the entire Nation as hard as it is hitting Massachusetts, the country would lose almost 75,000 people each year to fentanyl. Think about that. Those are more deaths than the United States suffered in the entire Vietnam war.

Fentanyl is the Godzilla of opioids. It will overrun communities and lay them to waste, unless we take action now to stop it. So how do we stop it? There is no easy solution to a crisis caused by a drug that is so small, so powerful, so profitable that those who traffic in it just want to make money, but we know we must act.

First, we need to raise awareness of the dire threat fentanyl poses to our Nation. We need to educate the public about it. We need to elevate the issues to the highest levels of our government and the governments of the countries from which it comes. To help with that effort, last week, the Senate adopted a bipartisan sense of the Senate resolution on fentanyl trafficking that I introduced with Senator RUBIO from Florida. I thank him for his partnership on that resolution. I thank Senators TOOMEY, SHAHEEN, KING, JOHNSON, and NELSON for adding their support.

The resolution calls on our government to use its broad diplomatic and law enforcement resources in partnership with Mexico and China to disrupt the trafficking of fentanyl. We are seeing the signs of some progress. In October of 2015, China added 116 synthetic chemicals, including 6 fentanyl products, to its list of controlled chemical substances. In February of 2017, China agreed to make carfentanil, a powerful fentanyl analogue, and three other fentanyl analogues illegal.

Earlier this month, I led a group of 10 Senators in urging Secretary of State Tillerson to secure the votes of the 53 member nations of the U.N. Commission on Narcotic Drugs in favor of the scheduling of the fentanyl precursors. Last week, the Commission voted unanimously in favor of controlling these substances. This international cooperation is expected to yield meaningful dividends in the fight against illicit fentanyl.

Fentanyl will require us to build bridges to our international partners, not walls. Indeed, I recently visited Mexico, where I met with law enforcement officials at the border, on the front lines of the smuggling and trafficking of narcotics into the United States. That is why today, Senators RUBIO, BROWN, CAPITO, and I introduced legislation to help this front line of drug detection at the border. It is called the INTERDICT Act. It provides badly needed high-tech equipment and other resources to U.S. Customs and Border Protection to help it detect and interdict illicit fentanyl being trafficked into the United States.

Here is how it works. There are two principal ways drugs like fentanyl are trafficked into the United States. First, coming from Mexico, they are smuggled across the southwest border of the United States. They are hidden in vehicles, beneath false floors, behind hidden compartments, and elsewhere. The drugs are also carried into the United States by people, sometimes hidden in the hollowed-out heels of their shoes.

Second, illegal fentanyl is also purchased online from overseas vendors in China and elsewhere—often on the dark web—and then shipped to Mexico or directly to the United States through the mail or express consignment carriers.

Fentanyl shipped this way is often concealed inside legitimate goods, with fentanyl suppliers using various methods to mislabel shipments. For example, some conceal the powder in those small silica packages that say ''do not eat'' placed alongside everyday items. Others gift wrap shipments or label them as household products like laundry detergent to avoid detection.

Customs and Border Protection has many different methods it uses to find contraband being smuggled into the United States at the border or through the mail. These include drug-sniffing dogs, various kinds of scanners, fiber-optic scopes, and physical searches. When Customs and Border Protection finds a suspicious substance using those and other methods, it has had success identifying it as an illicit drug like fentanyl with the help of high-tech, handheld chemical screening devices.

So anytime Customs and Border Protection finds a suspicious powder, pill, or liquid, it can use a handheld device—really something that looks and feels like a Nintendo Game Boy—to conduct a test, in the field, with real-time results. That means narcotics like illicit fentanyl can be detected, identified, and seized quickly and on the spot. Those rapid results provide vital information for law enforcement officers to continue their investigation and, if appropriate, proceed with seizure and arrest. Not only does the use of this technology disrupt the flow of the drugs into the country, it protects the health and safety of law enforcement officials from exposure to dangerous substances like illicit fentanyl.

Often, Border Patrol agents don't know what the powdery substance they have uncovered is and whether it poses a threat to them. That is especially alarming with illicit fentanyl, given its strength.

Exposure to a small amount by contact with the skin or through inhalation can be fatal. Increased use of these high-tech devices will provide important protections for our law enforcement officers on the front lines. The INTERDICT Act also provides for additional equipment back in Customs and Border Protection laboratories, including more scientists who analyze and interpret test results.

The INTERDICT Act ensures that Customs and Border Patrol will have hundreds of additional portable chemical screening devices available at international ports of entry and mail and express consignment facilities and additional equipment and personnel available in their laboratories so that they can provide support during all operational hours.

Again, I thank Senator RUBIO, Senator BROWN, and Senator CAPITO for working together on a bipartisan basis so we can give these additional tools to fight this fentanyl epidemic. I urge all my colleagues to support this bill to fight the scourge of illicit drugs. It knows no political, geographic, or socioeconomic boundaries. It is the epidemic of our time.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 92—EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DAVID SNEDDON, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Mr. LEE (for himself, Mr. HATCH, Mrs. FISCHER, Mr. SASSE, Mr. COONS, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. FLAKE, and Mr. GARDNER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 92

Whereas David Louis Sneddon is a United States citizen who disappeared while touring the Yunnan Province in the People's Republic of China as a university student on August 14, 2004, at the age of 24;

Whereas David had last reported to family members prior to his disappearance that he intended to hike the Tiger Leaping Gorge in the Yunnan Province before returning to the United States and had placed a down payment on student housing for the upcoming academic year, planned business meetings, and scheduled law school entrance examinations in the United States for the fall;

Whereas People's Republic of China officials have reported to the Department of State and the family of David that he most likely died by falling into the Jinsha River while hiking the Tiger Leaping Gorge, although no physical evidence or eyewitness testimony exists to support this conclusion;

Whereas there is evidence indicating that David did not fall into the river when he traveled through the gorge, including eyewitness testimonies from people who saw David alive and spoke to him in person after his hike, as recorded by members of David's family and by embassy officials from the Department of State in the months after his disappearance;

Whereas family members searching for David shortly after he went missing obtained eyewitness accounts that David stayed overnight in several guesthouses during and after his safe hike through the gorge, and these guesthouse locations suggest that David disappeared after passing through the gorge, but the guest registers recording the names and passport numbers of foreign overnight guests could not be accessed;

Whereas Chinese officials have reported that evidence does not exist that David was a victim of violent crime, or a resident in a local hospital, prison, or mental institution at the time of his disappearance, and no attempt has been made to use David's passport since the time of his disappearance, nor has any money been withdrawn from his bank account since that time;

Whereas David Sneddon is the only United States citizen to disappear without explanation in the People's Republic of China since the normalization of relations between the United States and China during the administration of President Richard Nixon;

Whereas investigative reporters and nongovernmental organizations with expertise in the Asia-Pacific region, and in some cases particular expertise in the Asian Underground Railroad and North Korea's documented program to kidnap citizens of foreign nations for espionage purposes, have repeatedly raised the possibility that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was involved in David's disappearance; and

Whereas investigative reporters and nongovernmental organizations who have reviewed David's case believe it is possible that the Government of North Korea was involved in David's disappearance because—

(1) the Yunnan Province is regarded by regional experts as an area frequently trafficked by North Korean refugees and their support networks, and the Government of the People's Republic of China allows North Korean agents to operate throughout the region to repatriate refugees, such as prominent North Korean defector Kang Byong-sop and members of his family who were captured near the China-Laos border just weeks prior to David's disappearance;

(2) in 2002, North Korean officials acknowledged that the Government of North Korea has carried out a policy since the 1970s of abducting foreign citizens and holding them captive in North Korea for the purpose of training its intelligence and military personnel in critical language and culture skills to infiltrate foreign nations;

(3) Charles Robert Jenkins, a United States soldier who deserted his unit in South Korea in 1965 and was held captive in North Korea for nearly 40 years, left North Korea in July 2004 (one month before David disappeared in China) and Jenkins reported that he was forced to teach English to North Korean intelligence and military personnel while in captivity;

(4) David Sneddon is fluent in the Korean language and was learning Mandarin, skills that could have been appealing to the Government of North Korea after Charles Jenkins left the country;

(5) tensions between the United States and North Korea were heightened during the summer of 2004 due to recent approval of the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–333) that increased United States aid to refugees fleeing North Korea, prompting the Government of North Korea to issue a press release warning the United States to ''drop its hostile policy'';

(6) David Sneddon's disappearance fits a known pattern often seen in the abduction of foreigners by the Government of North Korea, including the fact that David disappeared the day before North Korea's Liberation Day patriotic national holiday, and the Government of North Korea has a demonstrated history of provocations near dates it deems historically significant;

(7) a well-reputed Japanese non-profit specializing in North Korean abductions shared with the United States its expert analysis in 2012 about information it stated was received ''from a reliable source'' that a United States university student largely matching David Sneddon's description was taken from China by North Korean agents in August 2004; and

(8) commentary published in the Wall Street Journal in 2013 cited experts looking at the Sneddon case who concluded that ''it is most probable that a U.S. national has been abducted to North Korea,'' and ''there is a strong possibility that North Korea kidnapped the American'': Now, therefore, be it—

Resolved, that the Senate—

(1) expresses its ongoing concern about the disappearance of David Louis Sneddon in Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China, in August, 2004;

(2) directs the Department of State and the intelligence community to jointly continue investigations and to consider all plausible explanations for David's disappearance, including the possibility of abduction by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;

(3) urges the Department of State and the intelligence community to coordinate investigations with the Governments of the People's Republic of China, Japan, and South Korea and solicit information from appropriate regional affairs and law enforcement experts on plausible explanations for David's disappearance;

(4) encourages the Department of State and the intelligence community to work with foreign governments known to have diplomatic influence with the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to better investigate the possibility of the involvement of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in David Sneddon's disappearance and to possibly seek his recovery; and

(5) requests that the Department of State and the intelligence community continue to work with and inform Congress and the family of David Sneddon on efforts to possibly recover David and to resolve his disappearance.

SENATE RESOLUTION 93—CONGRATULATING THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY OF ROME, WHICH ESTABLISHED THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY AND LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR DECADES OF EUROPEAN PEACE AND PROSPERITY

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. MCCAIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 93

Whereas 6 European countries signed the Treaty of Rome on March 25, 1957, creating the European Economic Community, which established a customs union and common market among the signatory countries in order to foster economic cooperation and interdependence;

Whereas the United States welcomed and supported this European economic integration, recognizing that this kind of union would promote interdependence and therefore prevent future war and conflict;

Whereas this economic integration has broadened and evolved into the European

Union, a unique political and economic union covering much of the European continent and based on the principles of rule of law and representative democracy, which has pursued common policies in economic, security, diplomatic, and political areas and has helped bring unprecedented peace and stability to Europe and its neighbors;

Whereas European integration has been essential in opening and expanding markets, strengthening the rule of law and respect for basic freedoms, and fostering democracy in Europe itself, both in European Union members and aspiring nations;

Whereas, since World War II, the United States has firmly supported and been an active partner in the European integration project, working with Europe to rebuild its war-torn continent through the Marshall Plan and to create an Atlantic security alliance built on shared values and ideals, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to permanently prevent the kind of conflict we had just endured;

Whereas the United States and Europe have since engaged in a close and robust Transatlantic partnership, constructed on a strong foundation of shared values and commitment to democracy, freedom and the rule of law, to the benefit of the United States, Europe, and the rest of the world;

Whereas a strong United States-European Union partnership has helped build our mutual economies, ensured unprecedented peace in Europe, and remains essential to creating a freer, safer, and more prosperous and more interconnected world;

Whereas the Transatlantic economy is the world's largest and wealthiest market and the single most important driver of global economic growth and prosperity, with the United States and European Union together accounting for over half of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), generating $5,500,000,000,000 in yearly commercial sales and employing up to 15,000,000 workers in domestic jobs on both sides of the Atlantic;

Whereas mutual investment is the backbone of the Transatlantic economy, and the United States and Europe are each other's primary source and destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI);

Whereas the United States and the European Union are each other's largest trading partners, and United States-European Union trade totaled approximately $687,000,000,000 during 2016, almost double the level at the beginning of the century;

Whereas the Transatlantic economy drives innovation, with the United States and European Union investing more in mutual Research and Development than any other 2 international partners and collaborating across areas of science and technology, including marine and Arctic science, transportation and energy technologies, and health research;

Whereas this historic partnership goes far beyond economic and commercial ties, and the United States and the European Union work together to promote peace and stability, protect human rights, foster democracy and sustainable development, combat global threats like terrorism, and eradicate disease and poverty;

Whereas the United States and the European Union have developed numerous mechanisms to strengthen the Transatlantic relationship and to improve communication and collaboration among our respective governments, including annual European Union-United States Summit meetings and the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, which facilitates meetings between members of the European Parliament and the United States Congress on issues of mutual concern;

Whereas, despite representing approximately 12 percent of the world's population, the United States and the European Union together provide more than three-quarters of official development assistance worldwide and have established an ongoing Development Dialogue to improve the quality and effectiveness of development aid;

Whereas the United States and the European Union collaborate to promote peace and stability and prevent conflict around the world, working together to address conflicts including those in Syria and Ukraine and confront global security challenges like terrorism, nuclear weapons proliferation, transnational crime, and cybercrime;

Whereas, in pursuit of an integrated, free, and peaceful Europe, the United States and the European Union have worked together to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Balkans and to advance their cooperation with and integration into institutions like NATO and the European Union.

Whereas, in response to its annexation of Crimea and continued aggression in the sovereign nation of Ukraine, the United States and the European Union imposed and have maintained sanctions to increase the diplomatic and financial costs on the Russian Federation for its illegal actions;

Whereas, in the face of ongoing threats from terrorism, the United States and the European Union cooperate closely to target terrorist financing, secure transportation and borders, provide mutual assistance with cross-border investigations and extraditions, and share information; and

Whereas leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have long recognized the value of and expressed their commitment to the Transatlantic partnership, including—

(1) President John F. Kennedy, who said in 1962 that ''we do not regard a strong and united Europe as a rival but as a partner,'' and asserted that the United States believed ''that a united Europe will be capable of playing a greater role in the common defense, of responding more generously to the needs of poorer nations, of joining with the United States and others in lowering trade barriers, resolving problems of commerce, commodities, and currency, and developing coordinated policies in all economic, political, and diplomatic areas'';

(2) President Ronald Reagan, who addressed the European Parliament in 1985 ''to reaffirm to the people of Europe the constancy of the American purpose'' and to state that ''America remains . . . dedicated to the unity of Europe'' and ''is at your side today, because, like you, we have not veered from the ideals of the West—the ideals of freedom, liberty, and peace'';

(3) President Barack Obama, who stated in a 2016 address in Germany that ''the United States, and the entire world, needs a strong and prosperous and democratic and united Europe. . .because Europe's security and prosperity is inherently indivisible from our own'' and recognized that ''Europe helps to uphold the norms and rules that can maintain peace and promote prosperity around the world''; and

(4) Vice President Mike Pence, who asserted that ''our two continents share the same heritage, the same values and above all, the same purpose to promote peace and prosperity through freedom, democracy and the rule of law'' and reiterated that the United States ''will stand with Europe, today and every day,'' while traveling in Europe in February 2017: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) congratulates the European Union and its member states on the 60th anniversary of the historic signing of the Treaty of Rome;

(2) commends the European Union for its critical role in spreading peace, prosperity, and stability throughout Europe and worldwide, as well as its close and enduring partnership with the United States;

(3) recognizes the challenges the European Union, its Transatlantic partners, and the broader global community continue to face, including an unprecedented migration and refugee crisis, increased Russian aggression and interference, violent extremism, and the rise of nationalist and populist sentiment; and

(4) affirms the desire of the United States Government to strengthen the Transatlantic partnership with the European Union and its member states.

SENATE RESOLUTION 94—DESIGNATING MARCH 2017 AS ''NATIONAL READ ALOUD MONTH''

Mr. PORTMAN (for himself and Ms. HARRIS) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 94

Whereas medical experts have concluded that reading aloud is the ''single most important'' activity in which parents can participate in order to prepare their children to read and learn;

Whereas recent research has concluded that, by 3 years of age, there is a gap in early brain development between children whose parents read to them and children whose parents do not;

Whereas Congress has highlighted the importance of early childhood literacy by including funding for State comprehensive literacy plans and targeted funds toward early childhood education programs in the Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114–95; 129 Stat. 1802);

Whereas, in 2013, Read Aloud 15 MINUTES launched a decade-long national campaign highlighting the importance of reading aloud to children, starting from birth; and

Whereas Read Aloud 15 MINUTES now has more than 21 National Leadership Partners and 10,000 grassroots partners, including day care facilities, schools, libraries, health centers, and rotary clubs in all 50 States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates March 2017 as ''National Read Aloud Month''; and

(2) encourages parents and guardians to read to their children for 15 minutes every day because of the developmental benefits that activity has for children.

SENATE RESOLUTION 95—DESIGNATING MARCH 22, 2017, AS ''NATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS APPRECIATION DAY''

Mr. CASEY (for himself and Mr. ISAKSON) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 95

Whereas rehabilitation counselors conduct assessments, provide counseling, support families, and plan and implement rehabilitation programs for individuals in need of rehabilitation;

Whereas the purpose of professional organizations for rehabilitation counseling and education is to promote the improvement of rehabilitation services available to individuals with disabilities through quality education for counselors and rehabilitation research;

Whereas various professional organizations have vigorously advocated for up-to-date education and training and the maintenance of professional standards in the field of rehabilitation counseling and education, including—

(1) the National Rehabilitation Association;
(2) the Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association;
(3) the National Council on Rehabilitation Education;
(4) the National Rehabilitation Counseling Association;
(5) the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association;
(6) the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification;
(7) the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation; and
(8) the Council on Rehabilitation Education;

Whereas, in March of 1983, the president of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education testified before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives and was instrumental in bringing to the attention of Congress the need for qualified rehabilitation counselors; and

Whereas credentialed rehabilitation counselors provide a higher quality of service to individuals in need of rehabilitation and the development of an accreditation system for rehabilitation counselors supports the continued education of rehabilitation counselors: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates March 22, 2017, as ''National Rehabilitation Counselors Appreciation Day''; and

(2) commends—

(A) rehabilitation counselors for their dedication and hard work in providing counseling to individuals in need of rehabilitation; and

(B) professional organizations for their efforts in assisting individuals who require rehabilitation.

SENATE RESOLUTION 96—DESIGNATING MARCH 25, 2017, AS ''NATIONAL CEREBRAL PALSY AWARENESS DAY''

Mr. CASEY (for himself, Mr. ISAKSON, and Ms. HASSAN) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 96

Whereas a group of permanent disorders of the development of movement and posture that are attributed to nonprogressive disturbances that occur in the developing brain is referred to as ''cerebral palsy'';

Whereas cerebral palsy, the most common motor disability in children, is caused by damage to 1 or more specific areas of the developing brain, which usually occurs during fetal development before, during, or after birth;

Whereas the majority of children who have cerebral palsy are born with cerebral palsy, but cerebral palsy may be undetected for months or years;

Whereas 75 percent of individuals with cerebral palsy also have 1 or more developmental disabilities, including epilepsy, intellectual disability, autism, visual impairment, or blindness;

Whereas, according to information released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—

(1) the prevalence of cerebral palsy is not changing over time; and

(2) an estimated 1 in 323 children has cerebral palsy;

Whereas approximately 764,000 individuals in the United States are affected by cerebral palsy;

Whereas, although there is no cure for cerebral palsy, treatment often improves the capabilities of a child with cerebral palsy;

Whereas scientists and researchers are hopeful for breakthroughs in cerebral palsy research;

Whereas researchers across the United States conduct important research projects involving cerebral palsy; and

Whereas the Senate can raise awareness of cerebral palsy in the public and the medical community: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates March 25, 2017, as ''National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day'';

(2) encourages each individual in the United States to become better informed about and aware of cerebral palsy; and

(3) respectfully requests that the Secretary of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Executive Director of Reaching for the Stars: A Foundation of Hope for Children with Cerebral Palsy.

SENATE RESOLUTION 97—AUTHORIZING THE PRINTING OF A COLLECTION OF THE RULES OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE

Mr. SHELBY (for himself and Ms. KLOBUCHAR) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 97

Resolved, That a collection of the rules of the committees of the Senate, together with related materials, be printed as a Senate document, and that there be printed 250 additional copies of such document for the use of the Committee on Rules and Administration.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. CORNYN. 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 Thursday, March 23, 2017 at 10 a.m. in 325 Russell Senate Office Building.

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The Committee on Armed Services is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 23, 2017, at 9:30 a.m., in open session.

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 23, 2017 at 9:30 a.m. to conduct a hearing entitled ''Nomination of Mr. Jay Clayton to be a Member of the Securities and Exchange Commission.''

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate, on March 23, 2017, at 9:30 a.m., in room SH–216 of the Hart Senate Office Building, to continue a hearing entitled ''The Nomination of the Honorable Neil M. Gorsuch.''

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 23, 2017 from 2 p.m., in room SH–219 of the Senate Hart Office Building.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

The Subcommittee on Personnel of the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 23, 2017, at 2:30 p.m., in open session.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND SECURITY

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation is authorized to hold a meeting during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 23, 2017, at 10 a.m. in room 253 of the Russell Senate Office Building.

The Committee will hold Subcommittee Hearing on ''FAA Reauthorization: Perspectives on Improving Airport Infrastructure and Aviation Manufacturing.''

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the technology fellow on my staff, Christopher Soghoian, be granted privileges of the floor for the remainder of this Congress.

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

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a member of my staff, Tannis Fox, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of the 115th Congress.

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

APPOINTMENTS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair, on behalf of the Democratic leader and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, pursuant to the provisions of Public Law 114–328, appoints the following individuals to serve as members of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service: Alan Khazei of Massachusetts and Mark Gearan of New York.

The Chair, on behalf of the Vice President, pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 6968(a), appoints the following Senator to the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Naval Academy: the Honorable JAMES LANKFORD of Oklahoma (Committee on Appropriations).

NATIONAL CEREBRAL PALSY AWARENESS DAY

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 96, submitted earlier today.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 96) designating March 25, 2017, as ''National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Day.''

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I further 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. 96) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

AUTHORIZING THE PRINTING OF A COLLECTION OF THE RULES OF THE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 97, submitted earlier today.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 97) authorizing the printing of a collection of the rules of the committees of the Senate.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to and the motion 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. 97) was agreed to.

(The resolution is printed in today's RECORD under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

ORDERS FOR MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2017

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 3 p.m., Monday, March 27; 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; further, that following leader remarks, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of Executive Calendar No. 1, the Montenegro treaty; further, that the filing deadline for first-degree amendments under rule XXII for the cloture motion filed during today's session of the Senate be at 3:30 p.m. on Monday, March 27; and finally, that notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, the cloture vote occur at 5:30 p.m.

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

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2017, AT 3 P.M.

Mr. SULLIVAN. 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 5:54 p.m., adjourned until Monday, March 27, 2017, at 3 p.m.

CONFIRMATION

Executive nomination confirmed by the Senate March 23, 2017:

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DAVID FRIEDMAN, OF NEW YORK, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO ISRAEL.