

and what do we hope it leads to? Certainly, we want more transparency, competition, and choice, but in order for that to happen, we need more disclosures so the average customer of a bank knows what they are getting into.

Have any of us taken the time to read the back of that monthly credit card statement? As a lawyer, I can tell you that if you asked for the entire statement concerning fees at banks, it is over 100 pages. It is almost impossible to decipher. We have to get down to the basics, where we understand our relationship with these financial institutions so we can choose those that serve our needs or the needs of our businesses. That is why the Pew Charitable Trusts came up with a valuable suggestion. They have a one-page disclosure form that lists the basic fees banks charge. What they are suggesting is every bank should adopt this just as we have a basic box on the back of food products with ingredients we can turn to. It shows how many calories, how much sodium, how many carbohydrates. We could have a basic disclosure on every bank's Web site so America can go shopping. Competition, free market. I think that is a healthy thing.

The second thing we need to follow on is the discovery that there are such things as swipe fees. We suspected it, but we didn't know what was going on when we handed over a piece of plastic at a restaurant or grocery store to buy something. It turns out every time that is swiped, the retailer, the restaurant or the business, is charged. How much are they charged? A variety of different amounts. Frankly, that grocery store, that bookstore has no ability to negotiate that fee. It is a "take it or leave it" situation. You want plastic from Visa or MasterCard, then you go ahead and pay this fee or else. That has changed, and the world has changed with it.

When the Federal Reserve got the new authority October 1 to put in place a reasonable swipe fee for debit cards at about 21 cents a transaction, things started changing. There is a lot of money at stake. If we add up all the money collected at banks across America for swipe fees, for debit and credit cards, it is about \$50 billion a year. It is a huge amount. We all pay it. We pay on the bottom line at the restaurant or grocery store or wherever we shopping if we use plastic.

Now there is a 21-cent ceiling established by the Federal Reserve on the debit card fees that Visa and MasterCard set on behalf of large banks, and that is what caused all the reaction by the banks, saying they were going to charge their customers even more because of it.

We need even more disclosure. For the largest banks in America, the top 1 percent of banks, if we go to an ATM machine today and put in our card, at some point they will usually notify us what the ATM fee is and we can accept it or not accept it. I think that same

kind of disclosure should be made on swipe fees. On the monthly credit card statements across America, we should see in parentheses next to purchases how much was paid by that retailer to the credit card company and the card-issuing bank. I think it will be a surprise to many people as to how much they are paying every time they use plastic. I should say how much retailers are paying and then charging customers in higher prices because of swipe fees when they use plastic. That is more information. That is more transparency. That allows us to understand the relationship that, to this point, has been hidden in secret. I think that is an important thing.

I have also been talking to Senator REED of Rhode Island. He has some thoughts on interesting legislation he and I are working on concerning the actual cost of credit card fee transactions to the banks and to the credit card companies so we will have a better understanding in that category as well.

What we are saying is something significant has happened over the last several weeks. I hope it is the beginning of a trend. One way to make sure this trend continues to the benefit of consumers and families and small businesses all across America is to make sure Richard Cordray is appointed as the head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. This, to me, is an agency which can continue this battle on behalf of consumers. It is literally the only consumer financial protection agency in the Federal Government.

Many on the other side of the aisle don't like it. They don't believe in strong government oversight of these financial institutions on Wall Street. I disagree. I think Americans deserve to be given the basic information about their financial transactions so, with that information, they can make their own decisions. I am not saying government should steer them one way or the other, but at least give us the basic information. Let me decide the best bank for my family. Let me decide the best credit card or debit card for my family or my business. That is all we can ask.

Finally, let me say this: This establishment of a debit card swipe fee limit is a breakthrough for many retailers. When I talk to retailers, large and small, some of them chain stores and others just local stores, they were getting killed with this fee. It turned out to be the second or third most expensive item every single month. After personnel, after rent, here came the swipe fees they had to pay to Visa, MasterCard, and the banks that issue their card.

Now these retailers feel like there has been a light that has been shined on this process and a limit that has been established when it comes to debit cards. Sadly, in some cases it has been abused. Redbox, which is a retailer of movies that most of us see—even in Springfield, IL—next to the drug store, where we put in \$1 and take a movie home, has announced they had to raise

the price of their movies from \$1 to \$1.20 because of this new law. We looked into it. Here is what happened. They used to be charged a lower swipe fee by the debit and credit card companies, but now these companies are trying to make up their money that their bank allies are losing from this ceiling and they are raising their lower swipe fee rates to unreasonably high levels and passing the higher charges along to merchants like Redbox. So some merchants need help.

The Federal Reserve has continuing jurisdiction and authority when it comes to that help. I hope they will take a look at some of the consequences to companies such as Redbox. I think what happened to them is unreasonable and unfair. I think the Federal Reserve has the authority to change it.

So we are at a tipping point. For years, the big banks had been rigging the rules with a lot of fees and charges we were not even aware of. The consumers of America have said enough. Through a combination of reasonable regulation and consumers voting with their feet, we are bringing transparency and competition back to the financial services industry. It is working and it is long overdue.

Consumers are now saying they will only do business with banks that care about serving them instead of squeezing them. It is a good thing.

We have to do more things. Let's confirm Richard Cordray and let's get it done soon so the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau can go to work to help us. Let's ensure that all bank fees are transparent, such as the model checking account fee disclosure I mentioned earlier from the Pew Charitable Trusts. And let's ensure that all swipe fees are transparent, because consumers ultimately pay those fees in higher prices.

By promoting transparency and competition, we're going to help restore the balance between Wall Street and Main Street.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I rise today to speak about the significance of the month of November, which just began. About 10 years ago, Members of Congress decided to designate November as "National Adoption Month." I think it was probably because November is sort of the beginning of the holiday season, with Thanksgiving and then Christmas to

follow in December. So it is a time when Americans from all parts of our country take stock, slow down, and think about how important family is. We saw that a little bit last night with Halloween and all the children and their parents trick-or-treating throughout our Nation. Then, as Thanksgiving approaches, it becomes even more significant as families from all different walks of life gather around tables.

Some tables are very plentiful and others are rather sparse based on the economic strength of the family. Nonetheless, many families gather for these holidays.

It reminds us that there are over 500,000 children in our country today who are without family. They have been separated from their families, sometimes for good cause, but it is all tragic. Children have to be separated from families that abuse or grossly neglect them, and they have to be placed temporarily until we, as government officials and nonprofit organizations, can do a better job of either strengthening and reuniting those children with their families and trying to heal the families or trying to promote another family for that child or that sibling group.

We do much in Congress both collectively as well as individually in our own way to try to bring attention to the fact that there are orphans in America. Of the 500,000 children in foster care, about 100,000 have had parental rights terminated because the State has decided that reunification is not possible because children would be harmed irreparably by going back to that family. So we work to try to find another family, a better family to raise children.

Governments do a lot of things well, but one that governments don't do well is raise children. Moms and dads and parents and families and responsible adults do that, not government. So these children, then, are in the temporary care of the government, but it is our hope they can be placed as soon as possible into the loving arms of families.

I have met hundreds of families who have adopted, including my own. It is a blessing to my husband and to me. I have just recently met a family from Minnesota. The parents already have several biological children. When they found out about the death of a woman and her husband in the Philippines that resulted in nine children of that family being orphaned, they stepped up and adopted all nine of those children from the Philippines. Because of the good work of Senator KLOBUCHAR and others, they were able to bring that whole sibling group to the United States.

I could go on and on and tell my colleagues the most remarkable stories. As Members travel around the Capitol complex this month, they will be very happy to see, in the Rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building, a very

special exhibit. It is the National Heart Gallery Exhibit.

About some 10 years ago, or maybe even less, some great nonprofits got together and said: What can we do to help show Americans that these are beautiful children with lots of potential just waiting for a chance for a family to call their own? As a result, photographers donated their time to take beautiful portraits of these children so they don't look like just mug shots but beautiful portraits of these children, and some of them are going to be on display. This is an opportunity for us to become more familiar with how many different kinds of children are available for adoption. I say that as sensitively as I can.

These are children who are waiting for a family. They would love to be adopted. They want to have a family forever. A person doesn't just need a family until they are 18; a person needs a family forever. A young lady would like a father to walk her down the aisle when she is married or she would like her mother to show up at the baptism of her child. A person would like a place to go home to even in their forties and fifties for Thanksgiving. So we don't think anyone is too old to be adopted, and everyone needs a family. So we will see pictures of these children.

Let me make a couple of other points about this national exhibit. It has traveled around to many cities. Perhaps it has been to the Presiding Officer's State of New Hampshire, I don't know. We would be happy to have it in Louisiana. But it is in the Nation's Capital for this 10th anniversary.

These numbers do sound staggering: 500,000 in foster care and 100,000 waiting to be adopted. Let me put it in this perspective. There are over 100 million children in the United States—one-third of our population—between the ages of roughly zero and 13. So 100,000 is a relatively small number. There are roughly 300,000 churches in America. So if just one family within three churches—just one family among three churches—decided to step up and say they will take a child into their home, we would have no more orphans in the United States, which is our goal. Our goal is for every child in the United States and in the world, if they are separated from their birth family, to find within a short period of time a home to call their own, preferably with a relative in kinship care but, if not, somewhere in the community.

I don't think this is a difficult or an impossible task. It seems overwhelming, but when we think of the assets of the world and we juxtapose the assets and strengths of the world against this particular problem, it is most certainly doable. If we can go to the Moon, if we can explore science and space, we most certainly can put our good minds and senses together to figure out a way that governments can work better with nonprofits to make this happen.

I wish to conclude by recognizing what I believe is one of the extraordinary organizations in the world doing this work, and that is the Dave Thomas Foundation. Many people may remember Dave Thomas as the founder of Wendy's, but I remember Dave Thomas as a child who came out of the foster care system—or a man who came out of the foster care system; I did not know him as a child. But I can remember him—he has passed, of course—coming to Congress advocating on behalf of foster care children, of which he was one.

Now, he beat the odds. Not only did he go on to be successful and go on to create one of the most successful businesses in America today and perhaps even in the world, but as he has passed, his foundation carries on that work. They have just released a wonderful report which will come more into focus in the coming weeks.

The bottom line is that through the work of this foundation, they have come up with new strategies—not complicated, quite simple, child-focused, recruitment strategies that each and every one of our States can employ or deploy and use without a lot more expense to see significant increases in the number of older children—particularly children with mental challenges and emotional challenges—adopted. In fact, they have increased, according to the study.

Research shows that children in foster care served by Wendy's Wonderful Kids are 1.7 times more likely and children with mental disorders are 3 times more likely to be adopted using these different strategies.

So, in conclusion, this is National Adoption Month. We have the Heart Gallery in the Capitol and in Washington with pictures of some of the most extraordinary children. Their families may be broken, their families may be dysfunctional, but it doesn't mean they are. It means they are full of potential, ready for a family to call them their own, and to step up and to live up to their potential. There are many organizations, from this nonprofit to Wendy's Wonderful Kids, the Dave Thomas Foundation, and hundreds of others working to solve this problem.

So I thank my colleagues. Many have been very active this last year in this regard. I wanted to honor the Heart Gallery and the great work of the organizations that have put that together. It has made a meaningful difference, making these children, through these beautiful photographs, very real to all of us so we know they are not just statistics but they are children with heartbeats and dreams and hopes and aspirations, and they would make wonderful additions to many of our families.

Thank you, Madam President. I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MERKLEY). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent to speak for such time as I may consume, but it will probably be in the neighborhood of 20 or 25 minutes.

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

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today I wish to take a few moments to talk about the importance of the oversight work of the Congress. It is a very critical function of Congress. As one of the three branches of government, Congress is a very important pillar of our government. Our system provides for checks and balances between the three branches of government. Not only do we in the Congress legislate, but we must make sure the other two branches are not overstepping their power, and that is the function of oversight.

I have been conducting oversight of the executive branch since I first came to the Senate. I take oversight very seriously. It is often an overlooked function for Members of Congress. It is not a glamorous function. It is a lot of hard work.

Some people have said recently that my oversight work is political. Quite honestly, people who say that are the ones who are, in fact, political or may be ignorant of what I do because I happen to be an equal opportunity overseer. I do not care if it is a Democrat or a Republican occupying the White House; if something needs to be investigated, I am going to investigate it.

In 2008, I was glad to hear the President-elect talk about the most transparent government ever that he was going to institute under his administration. Unfortunately, up to this point, this administration has been far from transparent—at least far from transparent in the way he said he was going to be so transparent. If any of us thought it was bad before, it is worse now.

But my message about oversight is combined with a very important reminder about the rule of law, a philosophy upon which our country was founded. So I would like to talk about this administration's evasive and disappointing response to Congress about two different policies: first, the immigration policy and administrative enforcement of that, and second, Operation Fast and Furious. I will first discuss immigration.

Since the founding of our country, our immigration laws have been a source of discussion. We were born a nation of immigrants and still are wel-

coming to people coming to our country legally. We have welcomed men and women from diverse countries and provided protection to many who flee from persecution. We have been generous, and we will continue to be generous. Yet we have seen our country face many challenges and have attempted to restrict immigration levels. The first immigration law of 1790 tried to limit citizenship to certain individuals and institute what is called the "good moral character" requirement. We created quotas in the 1920s, to only do away with those quotas 45 years later. We even provided amnesty to millions of undocumented and hard-working people in the last big immigration law to pass Congress in 1986. Today, we are faced with another challenge of how to deal with more than 10 million undocumented persons.

Congress struggles with this challenge on a yearly basis. It is important for lawmakers to bear in mind that the policies we make should benefit our country in the long term and that they must be fair to current as well as future generations.

People in foreign lands yearn to be free. They go to great lengths to be a part of our great country. It is a privilege that people love our country and want to become Americans. At the same time, however, we must not forget the great principle upon which our country was founded, and that great principle is the rule of law. We want to welcome new Americans, but we need to live by the rules we have set. We cannot let our welcome mat be trampled on, and we cannot allow our system of laws to be undermined.

As a Senator, like all of my colleagues, I took an oath of office to honor the Constitution. I bear a fundamental allegiance to uphold the rule of law. That is why I am deeply concerned about the immigration policies that are coming from this White House. The President's policies may be an impermissible intrusion on Congress's plenary authority over immigration law. They are pushing the envelope, and there is little transparency into their actions at a time when transparency was promised by this administration at the time they were sworn in.

As many of you know, last summer I exposed an internal homeland security memo that outlines ways President Obama could circumvent Congress and grant legal status to millions of undocumented individuals. So this is where oversight becomes very important—whether or not this memo is an intent to get around a law Congress passes which the President of the United States, under his oath of office, has pledged to faithfully enforce. This memo was entitled "Administrative Alternatives to Comprehensive Immigration Reform." That title in and of itself kind of signifies efforts to get around law, to get around what Congress intended. Its purpose was, in their words, "to reduce the threat of removal of certain individuals present

in the United States without authorization." Now why, if you are enforcing and faithfully executing the laws of the United States, would you want to "reduce the threat of removal of certain individuals present in the United States without authorization"? Aren't those words, "without authorization" in and of themselves an indication that people might be here illegally?

The memo outlined more than a dozen ways to keep individuals in the country and to provide them with benefits or protections. I, along with my colleagues in the Congress, have asked repeatedly for assurances that those options were not being explored. But, you know what. Our concerns have not been addressed. The President and the Secretary of Homeland Security have only said they do not plan to provide such benefits to the entire population of undocumented individuals. They claim they will use their discretionary authority and pursue relief on a limited and case-by-case basis. To the extent to which it is limited and it is case-by-case, I confess, the law probably provides for some administrative discretion because if you are going to have people come to this country, Congress is not going to be able to write a law that is going to take every instance into consideration. But I go back to that title: "Administrative Alternatives to Comprehensive Immigration Reform." So there is a need to change the laws on immigration, update them. So if everybody admits there is that need, why do you need administrative alternatives, unless you are trying to get around what Congress intended?

So we are asking these questions, and yet we have no idea if it is true that they want to do it strictly on a case-by-case and very limited basis because we have reason to believe we are talking about hundreds of thousands of people because we have no idea how many people are truly receiving the benefits and what standards are being used when determining that an individual is granted parole or deferred action. These are the questions that, in our oversight capacity, we are asking, but we are not getting very many answers, as I am going to show you here.

Again quoting the title, "Administrative Alternatives to Comprehensive Immigration Reform," this memo from last summer also included a proposal to lessen the "extreme hardship standard." Under current law, aliens are inadmissible for 3 to 10 years if they have been unlawfully present in the United States for 180 days in the case of a 3-year inadmissibility or 1 year in case of 10 years of inadmissibility. The Department has discretion to waive the grounds for inadmissibility if it would result in an extreme hardship. Again, I am willing to grant that there is some leeway in the law here.

The amnesty memo states: "To increase the number of individuals applying for waivers and improve their chances of receiving them, Citizenship