

that somehow the Russian-speaking population in the region was being oppressed and attacked and was in danger and so they needed to intervene.

To this day, Russia still will not admit the military role they are playing on the ground in Crimea. So in addition to violating this international norm, which is an outrageous behavior, they have lied about it and think they can get away with it. The point I am making is, if in the 21st century a country is allowed to invade a neighbor, lie about it and lie about the reasons for it and they can get away with it without significant costs, we have created a dangerous precedent with which we are going to have to live. All over the world there are powerful nations that can now claim land they do not control belongs to them.

I took a trip in February to Asia. I visited Japan and the Philippines and South Korea. You know what the No. 1 fear in that region is. That China has similar claims to Russia. They claim all sorts of pieces of territory and of oceans that belong to them. They claim it belonged to them 1,000 years ago and should belong to them now. They have taken a different tack, but the point is, if we now live in a world where a country can make territorial claims and then simply act on them without any repercussions from the international community, then I think the 21st century is starting to look more and more like the early 20th century, a time that subjected the world to two devastating World Wars.

We cannot allow this to go unpunished. The only way this can be punished is if the free countries of the world rally together and impose sanctions and costs on Vladimir Putin and his cronies for having taken this action. That will never happen—the free world will never be able to rally to impose those costs—unless the United States leads that effort. We can't do it alone, but it cannot be done without us.

That is why it is so important that measures such as the one the Senate now is considering happen with the highest amount of bipartisan support we can muster. We may not agree with every aspect of it—I certainly do not—but we must weigh the equities. If we were to put this on a scale, the need to do something about Ukraine so far outweighs the things about the legislation before us that we don't like because of the implications it has not just on our Nation but on the world and the role we must play. If some other country around the world fails to pass sanctions, fails to take steps or does so in a way that is divided, it might have some impact, but when the United States fails to act in a decisive way, it has a dramatic impact.

One of the arguments our adversaries around the world use is asking our allies: Why are you still in the camp of the United States? They ask: Why are you still allying yourself with the United States? They are unreliable.

Their government is always bickering and deeply divided. They can't come together in Washington to do anything. Do you think, if you are ever invaded or ever get into trouble, the United States could possibly muster the domestic political support necessary for them to come to your assistance? Don't count on America. Count on us or count on yourself.

I have already explained why there is danger in that, but that is the argument these countries use against us. What I fear is that if we fail to take decisive and unified action in this body, in the Senate, to send a strong message—and while we may not agree on every component of this, and I have already said I believe it was a mistake for the administration to push for that IMF reform language—if we do not send a strong and decisive message, then I think this will be spun against us. I think this will be used as evidence to our allies and other countries around the world why America is no longer reliable, either economically or militarily.

The consequences of that could extend far beyond Europe into other regions of the world, such as Asia. This is not a game. This is not some domestic political dispute. This issue has ramifications that will directly impact the kind of world our children will inherit. In fact, it will dramatically impact the kind of world we will have to live in over the next 20, 30, and 40 years. We cannot afford to make a mistake. We cannot afford to be wrong.

I hope I can convince as many of my colleagues as possible to support this legislation, with all of its flaws, so we can send a clear message that on these issues we are united as a people and as a nation and that we remain committed to U.S. global leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader.

PHILIPPINES CHARITABLE GIVING ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I understand we have an announcement from the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Under the previous order, the Senate having received H.R. 3771, the text of which is identical to S. 1821, the Senate will proceed to consideration of the measure, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3771) to accelerate the income tax benefits for charitable cash contributions for the relief of victims of the Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, H.R. 3771 is read a third time and passed, S. 1821 is indefinitely postponed, and the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table.

SUPPORT FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY, INTEGRITY, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMIC STABILITY OF UKRAINE ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I enjoyed very much the remarks of the Senator from Florida. He is very much concerned about this, very much plugged into the situation of what is happening in Ukraine, but I would like to make a couple of comments about that from a slightly different perspective, one that is from my current position as the ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

I would like to look at just one part of this proposal; that is, the money that would be coming out of the military to take care of a problem the military should not have to take care of at a time when things are very serious. The IMF has all the authority it needs to meet all of Ukraine's borrowing needs—that is the \$35 billion—with its existing commitments from the global community. The IMF does not need additional U.S. funds to help Ukraine. It does not make sense to double the size of the IMF by ratifying a 2010 agreement, paying for it with money that could be used by DOD to address the shortfalls which I am going to talk about.

By the way, there is another option out there because the House has a bill. Chairman ROYCE of the House Foreign Affairs Committee is marking up a bill today as we are speaking that I believe addresses our response to Ukraine in a more responsible way. The House bill is likely to provide \$68 billion in Ukraine aid that does not expand the IMF and removes it from the bans on LNG. This does not contain IMF reform. It does not take money from the DOD. I think that is good.

The Senator from Florida commented that we wouldn't be in the position we are in right now with the Europeans afraid to come to the aid of Ukraine if it weren't for the fact they are reliant upon Russia for their ability to produce LNG. We in this country have had a real boom in getting in the tight formations of the LNG. Right now we need to be exporting more of it to get the price up so it can be produced for ourselves in this country. No better way than to start exporting this to countries such as Ukraine. If we are doing this, the Western European countries would not be reliant upon Russia for that ability.

I think we have an opportunity there to do something with this bill, and hopefully we will be able to satisfy the needs of Ukraine and at the same time not provide further damage to our military.

I recognize that out of the \$315 million pricetag in total aid for the package, it rightly cuts \$150 million from the State Department. That is true. That is where it should come from. But it also then takes an equal amount—

\$150 million—away from the Department of Defense to double the size of IMF in order to give authority that isn't actually required for the IMF to adequately loan to Ukraine, and should not be included as part of this bill.

The unnecessary proposed \$157 million of defense rescission to pay for this aid has already been used by OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, and by the DOD, Department of Defense, to build the current defense budget. These funds have already been spent and we cannot get any more out of the military right now. If Defense is forced to pay for this aid, then the services will likely have to reduce their readiness accounts.

Readiness accounts mean lives because we talk about risk. If we are not ready, to the degree we are not ready, we incur more risk, and risk is translated into lives. Our national security funding can't be treated like an ATM. Mr. President, \$157 million can be used to support critical defense readiness needs, such as an Army brigade combat team for 6 months, 1,000 Marine embassy security personnel for 1½ years, about 2 months of the O&M for a second carrier air wing or almost two F-16 squadrons for 1 year.

What has happened to the military, if only people out there would understand, and they do not—there are a lot of Republicans and Democrats both out there not talking about this, the most serious problem we are facing in this country—is what the Obama administration has done to our military.

I remember so well 5 years ago going to Afghanistan so I could respond to the President's budget, which was at that time talking about what he was going to be doing to the military. I knew he would begin 5 years ago to start disarming America, and what did he do. He did away with our only fifth-generation fighter, the F-22; he did away with our carrier capability, the C-17; did away with our future combat system; and he did away with our ground-based interceptor in Poland. Of course, we are desperately looking for something to protect the Eastern part of the United States as a result of that. That was all in the first year, the first step in disarming America.

Since that time, the President in his budget has taken out of the military some \$487 billion. If he goes through with his sequestration, it will be another one-half billion dollars.

People don't realize where this all started. They will say: Wait a minute. It is just entitlements. Entitlements are a problem, because 60 percent of the total budget goes to entitlements. But keep in mind, there is also discretionary spending which is nondefense discretionary spending. When this President took office, the first thing done was to take \$800 billion for a stimulus, none of which was used for the military. That obligated us on non-defense discretionary spending for the rest of the time at the expense of defense. So now we are in a situation

which is so serious in this country that even our military leaders have come out and made statements. People have to understand how critical this situation is and how we have disarmed this country.

Secretary Hagel 2 weeks ago said:

American dominance on the seas, in the skies, and in space can no longer be taken for granted.

Is this America? We have taken this for granted since World War II, and all of a sudden—because of what has happened through this administration to the military in the last 5 years—we can no longer do this.

General Amos, head of the Marines, agrees with me on increased risk:

We will have fewer forces arriving less-trained, arriving later to the fight. . . . This is a formula for more American casualties.

We just said when the risk increases, then our very brave troops die.

Under Secretary Frank Kendall of this administration, on January 3, said:

We're cutting our budget substantially while some of the people we worry about are going in the opposite direction. We've had 20 years since the end of the cold war [and sort] of a presumption in the United States that we are technologically superior militarily.

That is not the case now.

The top military person, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, was appointed to the position by President Obama. He said to our committee, the Armed Services Committee, that we are putting our military on a path where the "force is so degraded and so unready" that it would be "immoral to use the force."

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Immoral to use the force. This is supposed to be America. We are supposed to be a superior country. What has happened to us?

Admiral Winnefeld, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the second highest position, stated:

[T]here could be for the first time in my career instances where we may be asked to respond to a crisis and we will have to say that we cannot.

Unfortunately, this is something which not many people are aware of in terms of what we are doing.

Yes, we want to do what we can for Ukraine, and we believe the State Department certainly has an obligation. But the other half of the amount, the \$157 million, cannot come from the military because we are so unready today.

When we are considering this, we have to consider we have a real serious problem with our military. Unfortunately, people are not aware of this, and a lot of politicians don't talk about it because they are uncomfortable talking about it.

SEBELIUS V. HOBBY LOBBY

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today in the Supreme Court something very significant is happening.

I am from Oklahoma. David Green and his wife, of Oklahoma City, started a business called Hobby Lobby by mak-

ing picture frames in their garage. It wasn't that long ago. I can remember them doing that. They were able to open their first store which was about 300 square feet.

With the profits they made in their little garage operation, David Green's faith, practice, and his day-to-day business decisions led him and his family to build a successful nationwide company. Over the years, their business has grown to 602 stores. With plans to expand, Hobby Lobby has an annual revenue upward of \$2.5 billion, and David has had success despite running his business in a very countercultural way.

For instance, all of the retail stores close at 8 p.m. each night and all day on Sunday so employees can spend time with their families. This is appreciated by the company's some 16,000 employees who are paid above the minimum wage. Hobby Lobby's generous employee benefit plan includes an on-site clinic with no copay at Hobby Lobby headquarters and eligibility to enroll in medical, dental, and prescription drug plans, along with long-term disability, life insurance, and a 401(k) plan with a generous company match. This is something they have done since long before ObamaCare came along.

At one point Hobby Lobby was challenged by a competitor who said they would bury the company with their money; so the firm opened their doors on Sunday, ultimately earning the company some \$150 million in revenue each week over and above what the competitor previously had been able to raise. Eventually David Green said he was challenged by God to trust in Him with his business to go back to his policy of closing on Sundays. He did, and his business has prospered. David's Christian faith runs deeper than his desire to have a profitable, successful company. But he is getting both. When he was faced with the decision to make money or obey God, he chose to obey God, whatever the consequences.

More recently he was faced with a new test. It didn't come from a competitor. It came from the U.S. Government.

Part of ObamaCare requires employers not only to provide health insurance to their employees but also to provide free access to the pills which terminate pregnancies. David, as I and many others, believes that life begins at conception. I believe that; David believes that. We are free to believe that. Offering an option to end that life would be a violation of our moral compass as defined by his faith and our faith.

Here is a guy who feels so strongly in his belief, and as his actions have shown, he would rather pay the \$1.3 million a day in fines from the Obama administration than comply with the law—in other words, killing an unborn child.

Today the Obama administration is claiming this privately-owned business is waging a war on women for not

agreeing to provide these treatments for its employees free of charge—never mind that he has been offering his employees health insurance since long before the government mandated it.

So we have the faith of an individual and what he is willing to do for his faith: He is willing to stand up to this abusive government. If we restrict those of faith from applying their conscience to the world around, then we quench the progress of freedom.

The Obama administration is attempting to write a new moral code if it is going to tell people like David Green he no longer has the freedom to apply his faith and convictions to how he operates his private business.

The case before the Supreme Court today is about maintaining freedom, which starts by preserving the fundamental freedom of religion under the First Amendment—whether it is practiced in a temple or a public square. Hobby Lobby is not alone, but it is a leader in this battle. More than 100 institutions have filed similar claims. Four universities in my State of Oklahoma have also filed a lawsuit along the same lines.

So here we have a situation—and it is hard to believe this can happen in America—where there is a man who has built up and is actively employing 16,000 people who otherwise might not be employed. He is providing income, selling products. He is a self-made man who started out in his garage. He has built up a giant operation all throughout America and has made a great contribution. Along comes the Obama administration and ObamaCare which says: We are going to fine you \$1.3 million a day if you don't offer these abortions.

This is actually being considered right now in the U.S. Supreme Court. I think God is on our side and I think we are going to have a good outcome. But imagine, one man taking the risk of \$1.3 million a day in fines just to stand behind his faith and behind the 16,000 people who work for him to make sure that good happens.

Mr. President, I yield the floor

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I wish to speak about the same topic as my good friend from Oklahoma.

I was at the Supreme Court listening to the arguments on this case, *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby*, and another case involving a Pennsylvania company which I wish to speak about as well.

Of course, this case, as the Senator from Oklahoma has pointed out, starts with the Affordable Care Act and what many people and I believe the Supreme Court will decide is a blatant violation in religious freedom in the way that act would be applied.

There is nothing in the act that deals with the rule which sets those big fines up or establishes how those fines would be collected—or, in fact, nothing in the act which specifies specific things that have to be in the so-called model plan.

That all is up to the administration, all up to the Department of HHS—unless the Court or the Congress does what needs to be done here, which is to say there are certain boundaries you can't cross.

The so-called Affordable Health Care Act—which seems to be providing neither better health care nor better affordability—was signed into law 4 years ago this week. In that 4 years we have seen disastrous effects of the health care act. One of those is the workplace effect where more and more people work less and less.

Why do they work less and less? Because for the first time ever the government has said businesses and people had an obligation to provide insurance for somebody who worked more than 30 hours. Prior to that law, many people with insurance worked less than 30 hours. It may not have been insurance which the President of the United States would have specified they had, but it was insurance which appeared to be working for them. But once the government says: Here is what you have to do, the government ironically also appears to be saying: Here is what you don't have to do.

So we know the workplace effects are bad. We know this is one of the principal reasons given for people working part time without benefits instead of working either full time or part time with benefits. We see the cut in Medicare and the impact it has on seniors. We see the increasing amount of money you have to spend before your insurance kicks in for so many people. We know this law is not working for American families or American individuals. Now we see a case where the law doesn't work for the Constitution.

Specifically, the law forces businesses such as Hobby Lobby—mentioned by the Senator from Oklahoma, Senator INHOFE—to offer health insurance for employees which covers services that violate their religious belief. This is a company which has always prided itself in its ability to offer health care coverage better than its employees might be able to get other places. This is a company which starts its nonseasonal employees at a rate about twice minimum wage, its lowest paid employee. This is not a company which is in any way trying to take advantage of its employees. This is a company which in every indication through the existence of the company is they want to act in a certain way which is comfortable with its faith.

The penalties? If you don't do what the government says, the penalties are \$36,500 per employee per year. In the case of this company, which has locations all over the country and a significant number of employees, that is more than \$450 million a year. If you don't provide insurance at all, one of the points made by the government lawyers today, your option would be you would only pay a \$2,000 penalty. So \$2,000 a year if you don't offer insurance at all; \$36,500 a year per employee

if you don't offer exactly the insurance the all-knowing government has decided you need to have.

What a foolish position for the Federal Government to be in: Your penalty, if you are this big company but privately held, closely held by a family—this happens to be a big and successful company but not a publicly-traded company. It happens to be a company that chose to incorporate but incorporated within the ability of the family to do so in a closely-held way. If you don't pay—if you don't do what the government says, your penalty would be less than the insurance you are providing by quite a bit—if you don't provide insurance at all. If you don't do exactly what the government says, it is probably the amount of money that puts your company out of business.

Hobby Lobby, with more than 500 arts and crafts stores around the country, is being joined in the case today. The cases were joined together by *Conestoga Wood Specialties*, a company that manufactures kitchen cabinets. Their case was presented at the same time. This company was founded by the Hahns family, a Mennonite family from Pennsylvania. It is a smaller company than Hobby Lobby, but a company that still upholds their own religious beliefs and has a tradition of upholding those religious beliefs in everything they do. These two companies of very different size do not object to all of the things in the list of things the government says you have to offer. In fact, in the area of contraception, they object to only 4 of the things that happen after conception, the things that would create an abortion in their view after conception. They both traditionally offered other kinds of contraception, but this crosses their religious boundary. So for these 4 things only the government would say you have to pay \$36,500 per employee per year.

There are at least 46 cases filed concerning for-profit companies that have the same kinds of religious objections. More than 10 of those lawsuits are in my State of Missouri. It is not just about one set of religious beliefs, but it is about protecting all Americans' First Amendment rights to pursue their faith-based principles and what they believe. These happen to be a Mennonite family and an evangelical Christian family. The largest Christian group in America, the Catholic Church, has a broader sense of what they think would violate their religious beliefs. But the point here is not what the government is specifically trying to force you to do; it is that the government under the laws that we have passed should not be able to force you to do things that violate your faith principles.

There are many faith-based groups that have different views of how you deliver health services. I met with many of those groups over the course of the last 2 years since this rule came out. There are 84 different briefs that have been filed with the Court on behalf of these two cases, suggesting as

friends of the Court that here is something you should think about and look at. On those 84 amicus briefs they are at least 3 to 1 in favor of the families that own these companies that want to be able to run their companies based on their faith-based principles.

The numbers of people that are concerned about this are large, and they include a very diverse set of coalitions of people who care. One brief from a bipartisan group of 107 Members of Congress said you should uphold the law that Congress passed that protects people's freedom of religion—not to mention the Constitution itself—where freedom of religion is the first freedom mentioned and the first sentence in the First Amendment to the Constitution. It is important in our history of who we are. Twenty-one states have joined this case on behalf of these companies. Doctors' and women's organizations have filed briefs advocating that the Court respect the religious rights of companies. Protestant and Catholic theologians have filed briefs, as have the Rabbinical Council of America, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, Crescent Foods, a halal food company, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities. All have a broad diversity of religious views, but they agree on one thing: This is a principal tenet of who we are.

President Jefferson said in a letter he wrote to the New London Methodists in 1809 that of all the rights we hold, we should hold the right of conscience most dear. Once the government can start telling you what to believe and how you apply what you believe, we have given up the most fundamental of all freedoms.

Congress has a long tradition of protecting religious liberty. The Congress enacted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to ensure broad protection of religious liberty. The HHS regulations do not satisfy the high bar set by that act. That is a position that I hope the Court upholds. The mandate is an enormous government overreach, and it violates Americans' constitutional rights.

While this mandate severely fines religious individuals, it exempts plenty of other nonreligious institutions. The administration has already exempted 100 million employees from the mandate for commercial or political reasons. People should also not be forced to give up their business to hold on to their faith or to give up their faith to hold on to their business. These family businesses are not publicly traded corporations.

I am not a lawyer, but I am told on the best authority there is not one court case that diminishes the rights of these kinds of corporations. In fact, numerous Federal courts have upheld the ability of for-profit corporations to bring racial discrimination cases. So you could have a racial profile as a cor-

poration, but you couldn't have a religious profile as a corporation. This is an untenable position for the government to take.

The Supreme Court has heard this case today. I join my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both Chambers to urge the Court to preserve the fundamental religious freedoms that Americans have enjoyed, the Constitution demands, that laws passed overwhelmingly by the Congress and signed by the President in 1993 continue to be the standard that is applied to our right of conscience, our right of belief, of what we want to believe, must believe, and do believe.

I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues to talk about this very same topic.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. I thank Senator BLUNT. I did not get to hear all of Senator INHOFE's comments, but as an Oklahoman I think we couldn't have a finer company or a finer corporate citizen than the Green family, in terms of their chains of stores around the country and what they have done. The reason they are successful is because they actually care, nurture, and support every one of their employees.

They work on principles that they truly believe in, and it has really been the key to their success. They are never open on the sabbath. They believe in paying somebody a livable wage. They are big in the community. As a matter of fact, they are one of the largest contributors to organizations that are funded in the charitable realm. They go down deep to actually help people. They come with pure motives.

The Senator from Missouri mentioned what Thomas Jefferson said in 1809:

No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of civil authority.

I want you to listen to that for a minute. Jefferson, one of the authors of the rules of the Senate, one of the key Framers of the very Constitution that we live under, recognized that it is most important to protect this conscience of the Green family to do what they think, according to their faith, is the right thing to do.

My colleague referenced the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Why was that necessary? Because we saw civil government starting to impede into an arena that Thomas Jefferson warned about. That is why it was passed, that is why it was signed, and that is why it is the law of the land. This is going to be a seminal case, and it has nothing to do with birth control. Hobby Lobby pays for birth control. It always has and always will. It has to do with can we allow the civil government to impede to such a level, as my colleague from Missouri said, that the government can now tell you what your values are, what you have to

think, and how you have to act, on the basis of what the government says your values are.

As an obstetrician who has delivered more than 4,000 children, as somebody who has cared for every complication of pregnancy, as somebody who believes in the value of newly created human life, all the Greens are saying is: We really shouldn't have to pay our money to abort a baby when we find it unconscionable to take innocent human life. It doesn't mean that people that work for them cannot get an abortion. It just says they don't want to violate their own conscience by supplying it.

The other issue that ought to be evident to everybody is that plan B is over the counter. It is not even part of your health care. You can go buy it. As a matter of fact, there is not even an age limit on it now. A 12-year-old can go buy it over the counter. So it is not about limiting abortion; it is about the conscience of a very successful company. The reason they are successful is they follow the teachings of their faith. Now we have government in a position where they are going to tell them what their faith is.

Let me reiterate what Jefferson said:

No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of civil authority.

These are deeply felt and held beliefs based on their faith.

The other side of this is we see their deeply held beliefs and how they have rescued universities, how they have come to the aid of food pantries, how they have actually been active in the community. Everywhere they are involved they are out following the same deeply held beliefs of helping the poor and indigent, giving people an opportunity through a college education that they never would have had, giving people a day of rest.

Their stores are not open late. Their employees get to go home. They could sell more products if they were open later. They could sell more product if they were open on Sunday. They choose not to because they think the principles under which they operate their business based on their faith have created an environment which allows everybody who works for them to succeed. If you go through their businesses, if you go through their warehouses, and if you go to their stores, what you see is a smile on almost everybody's face. Why? Because people enjoy working there, because they are treated as human beings. They are lifted up. They are given opportunity. They are given the very things that we all want for our neighbors and for ourselves.

My hope is that the Constitution will be looked at as the Supreme Court considers this case and that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act will be looked at as the Supreme Court considers this case.

The Affordable Care Act is not affordable; it is unaffordable. For Americans it has a \$2 trillion cost over the next 10 years. It is a disaster in terms of how it has been implemented. It is going to be a disaster in terms of quality care and delayed care because of the increased deductibles that almost everybody is facing. We shouldn't let it be a disaster in terms of destroying businesses.

We ought to embrace this family and their business for what they have done. They have taken advantage of the American enterprise system in a way that has built tremendous success, that has benefited not just the Green family but hundreds of thousands of people through their generosity, and their capability to empower people to get ahead.

I am glad to see my colleague, and I yield the floor.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I would ask for an additional 5 minutes for the Senator from New Hampshire.

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

Ms. AYOTTE. Thank you, Madam President.

I come to the floor today to talk about a very important case that the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on this morning that goes to the very core of our Nation's foundation—the future of religious freedom in the United States.

As Americans we cherish our religious liberty. It lies at the heart of who we are as a people, and we know we must always guard against threats to our religious freedom enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution. That is why I am joining my colleagues Senator BLUNT and Senator COBURN on the floor today and speaking in support of the constitutional rights that all Americans have under the First Amendment, which guarantees the right of freedom of conscience and religious liberty.

Here is what is at stake. Americans should not be forced to give up their religious freedom or their rights of conscience simply because they want to open a family business. American families should not be forced into choosing between their family business and complying with unlawful government mandates that infringe on the First Amendment to the Constitution, and that is why this case, which is being heard today by our Supreme Court, is so important to the American people.

A provision of President Obama's health care law includes a mandate that threatens penalties on private organizations unless they involuntarily agree to violate their deeply held religious beliefs. This is anathema to the First Amendment to our Constitution. If religious institutions and faith-based organizations are forced to comply with government mandates that violate the core principles of their faith, that is a violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution, and it is contrary to what we stand for as Americans.

I have heard from people in my State who are deeply concerned about this mandate and the issue that is being considered by the Supreme Court today. They are simply asking to have the same conscience rights they had before the President's health care law was passed—the same conscience rights that are enshrined in our Constitution that protect all Americans regardless of what our faith is and regardless of our background.

This is a fundamental matter of religious freedom and the proper role of our government. It is about who we are as Americans. If the government, through mandates, can take away our conscience rights, what does that say about other rights we have under our Constitution?

This debate comes down to the legacy left behind by our Founding Fathers and over 200 years of American history. We have a choice between being responsible stewards of this legacy or allowing the Federal Government to interfere with religious life in an unprecedented way.

Protecting religious freedom and conscience rights in the past has been a bipartisan issue. Congress has a long history of protecting religious liberty. I heard my colleague talk about the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that was signed into law by President Clinton to ensure that the government should be held to a very high level of proof before it interferes with someone's free exercise of religion. That is what is at stake in the Supreme Court decision and the mandates that are being rendered by the health care law against private companies such as Hobby Lobby and others.

This is what is at stake: Under the President's health care law, companies such as Hobby Lobby and Conestoga—and we are proud to have a Hobby Lobby in the State of New Hampshire—that want to help and provide health care coverage for their employees could be forced to pay over \$36,000 per employee unless they provide drugs and devices that violate their religious beliefs and conscience rights. Why should they be forced into this position? If the Federal Government is able to violate the First Amendment in this way, what is to stop other fundamental rights from being violated?

Protecting religious freedom was once an issue that bound Americans together. I believe this effort, which is so fundamental to our national character, must bring us together once more.

I look forward to seeing the Supreme Court's decision on this issue, but this is a case that never should have been filed. The Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare, should have never violated the rights of conscience of these companies or of religious organizations, and it is time to turn this around. I look forward to the Supreme Court vindicating their rights under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which should have been respected by this administration, but that is why we

have a Supreme Court. I look forward to the Supreme Court decision, which I hope will uphold the First Amendment rights of the parties to this litigation and to all Americans.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:35 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. BALDWIN).

COOPERATIVE AND SMALL EMPLOYER CHARITY PENSION FLEXIBILITY ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate has received H.R. 4275, the text of which is identical to S. 1302. The Senate will proceed to consideration of the measure, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4275) to amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for cooperative and small employer charity pension plans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, H.R. 4275 is read a third time and passed.

SUPPORT FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY, INTEGRITY, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMIC STABILITY OF UKRAINE—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask to speak as in morning business.

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

WASHINGTON LANDSLIDE

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I wish to take a moment to address an issue that has really been on the hearts and minds of those back home in my home State of Washington.

On Saturday, as I am sure many of my colleagues heard, the town of Oso, WA—a small, tightly knit town alongside the Stillaguamish River—was directly hit by a massive landslide. That landslide cut off the town of Darrington, which is just a few miles down State Road 530. Houses over a square mile were simply swept away. We already know we have lost several people, and yesterday we learned there could be well more than 100 who are still missing. So right now in Washington State there are dozens of families who simply don't know if their loved ones are even still alive.

Even though Oso and Darrington are 2,300 miles away from the Nation's Capital, our hearts and prayers are with them and their families. I want them to know that in the coming days and weeks and months—and even years, if that is what it takes—all of us will stand with the people of Oso and