

both attending Carroll College in Helena, MT. They have two children and one grandchild, all of whom they are very proud. JOHN WALSH received his master's degree at the U.S. Army War College in 2007.

JOHN WALSH possesses a true independent Western spirit and a commendable dedication to the people of Montana. I have no doubt he will continue to serve his State and the Nation with distinction as a U.S. Senator.

RESTORING EARNED PENSIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in addition to the swearing-in of Lieutenant Governor WALSH, I expect that this afternoon the Senate will adopt the motion to proceed to legislation to restore the earned pensions of military retirees. This measure restores cost-of-living adjustments for military retirees. Although no veterans will be affected until the end of next year, there is no reason to delay a solution. I will continue to work with my Republican colleagues to process what we need to do to pass this important measure. We know the Ayotte amendment is one Republican has indicated they want a vote on, and I see no reason why we shouldn't allow them to have a vote on it.

OBAMACARE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was surprised this morning to hear Republicans literally howling over President Obama's decision to ease the transition for medium-sized businesses to providing health insurance for all of their employees. Republicans have complained that health care reform is a burden to employers, but now they are complaining that President Obama is trying to ease that burden and smooth the transition to a new system. Think about that one.

But this Republican duplicity should come as no surprise. After all, Republicans are the ones who invented the individual mandate. It was their idea. It is a conservative idea that every American has a responsibility to seek insurance to cover their health care needs, and the government has a responsibility to make that coverage accessible and affordable. But now Republicans are attacking their own brain child—the individual mandate. The individual mandate was their idea, and Republicans are willfully ignoring the fact that the Affordable Care Act creates a transition period for individuals to obtain insurance as well.

It is time for Republicans to stop talking out of both sides of their mouths. If they have legitimate concerns about the Affordable Care Act, or ObamaCare, and not just political gripes, they should work with the President and the Democrats in Congress to fix and improve the law; otherwise, they should stop complaining and get out of the way.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

IRS REGULATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the two parties have engaged in a lot of big debates over the past several years, and no one, obviously, should be surprised by that. The President came into office vowing to fundamentally transform the country, and a lot of us have had big problems with the policies he has tried to implement in pursuit of that goal. But there are some things we should all agree on, and one of them is this: No President—no President of either party—should use the power of the Federal Government to punish his ideological opponents. That is why, when the targeting of conservative groups by the IRS came to light after the last Presidential election, just about everybody denounced the Nixonian tactics up and down and loudly declared that it should never be allowed to happen again. They knew that this kind of targeting represented a direct attack on our most fundamental freedoms—on our abilities to organize and educate and engage in the democratic process. And while the abuse may have been aimed at conservatives this time, it is easy to see how it could one day be used against organizations of any ideological hue.

So America's culture of civic engagement simply has to be defended—by all of us. Yet, with the passage of time, that is not what we have seen. Instead of putting safeguards in place to protect our civil liberties, the Obama administration is now dragging the IRS back in the opposite direction. It is now pushing a regulation that would actually entrench and encourage the harassment of groups who dare to speak up and engage in the conversation. It is trying to intimidate into silence those who send donations to civic groups too.

Predictably, the Obama administration has tried to spin these regulations as some sort of "good government" measure, as reforms initiated in response to the IRS scandal, but, of course, we know that is simply not true. In recent days we learned that these regulations—regulations designed to suppress free speech—have been in the works for years.

So let's be clear. All of this is simply unacceptable. After denouncing the abuse last year, I believe it is shortsighted of our friends on the other side not to oppose these rules forcefully today. The path this administration is embarking on is a dangerous one with the slipperiest of slopes. Left-leaning civic groups should be just as alarmed about what these regulations could mean for them in the future as what the rules almost certainly will mean for conservative groups today. That is why some, such as the ACLU, have

begun to speak out against these regulations.

Last week I joined several of my colleagues in sending a letter to the new Commissioner for the IRS that laid out these concerns. We reminded Commissioner Koskinen that he was confirmed with a mandate to reform the IRS and return the agency to its actual mission—processing tax returns, not suppressing speech. We expect him to fulfill that mandate—to prove his reformist credentials—by halting the regulations immediately and to enact new rules that would stop similar harassment from occurring in the future. This is something the Commissioner can and must do now. He needs to realize this isn't some issue to move past but a serious threat to be confronted.

Commissioner Koskinen could go down in history as a hero, as did the IRS Commissioner who stood up to Nixon and said no to harassment of political opponents. I want to believe that this is the choice he will make, that he wants to be remembered as a strong and independent public servant rather than some political pawn. But we can't be sure what he will do, and the American people need a backup plan in case he decides his fealty lies with the opponents of free speech rather than with them.

That is why today I, along with Senators FLAKE, ROBERTS, HATCH, and others, have introduced legislation that would prevent the IRS from enacting regulations that would permit the suppression of First Amendment rights. It aims to return the agency to its mission and get it out of the speech police business altogether—a goal that should be a bipartisan one.

This is something worth fighting for. It is something I hope Commissioner Koskinen will work with us to achieve. But if he does not—if he does not—he should know we are prepared to go to the mat to defend the First Amendment rights of our constituents and our neighbors—and that we will continue to do so until those rights are safe once again.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

REPEALING SECTION 403 OF THE BIPARTISAN BUDGET ACT OF 2013—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1963, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 298, S. 1963, a bill to repeal section 403 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

AYOTTE AMENDMENT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the Presiding Officer is new to the Senate, and we are glad to have him. He will find in the course of his senatorial experience that occasionally good legislative ideas come from unexpected places. Occasionally they come from phone calls to your office, emails, and letters, where people tell their stories, and from those stories you see the need for a new law, a change in policy.

That happened to me 13 years ago. A Korean-American mother called my office in Chicago with a problem. Her problem was that her daughter Tereza was about to graduate from high school and had an opportunity to go, on scholarship, to the Manhattan Conservatory of Music in New York.

This was a poor family. Mom worked at a dry cleaners. They barely got by. But her daughter had an extraordinary musical talent. She was an accomplished pianist, even as a senior in high school, and this was her chance.

As her daughter started to fill out the application form for the Manhattan Conservatory of Music, there was a box that asked her to identify her nationality, her citizenship. She turned to her mom and said: What should I put here? Her mother said: I'm not sure.

You see, Tereza Lee was brought to the United States at the age of 2 on a visitor's visa. When the visa expired, her mom, her dad, and she stayed in the United States and did nothing else. Technically Tereza, having lived about 16 years in this country, was just another undocumented kid.

So they called my office and said: What do we do about this? Well, we checked the law. The law is very clear. Tereza and those just like her were to be deported from the United States for a minimum of 10 years and then be allowed to petition to come back in.

That seemed to me fundamentally unfair. So I wrote a change for the law called the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act said if you are a child under the age of 16 brought to this country by parents, if you will finish high school, have no serious criminal record, and you are prepared to go to college or enlist in the military, we will put you on a path to citizenship.

I introduced that 13 years ago. As you can see, the wheels of justice grind exceedingly slow in the U.S. Senate. But over the years, this idea of the DREAM Act has really caught hold. The reason is not because of me; it is because of the DREAMers. Initially, they were frightened, afraid of deportation, raised as children in families where they were warned every day: Be careful. Do not get in a position where you are going to get arrested. You will get deported, and the whole family might get deported. We don't want to break up our family, so be careful. So they held back in the shadows, wondering, worrying about a knock on the door.

Over time, though, something happened, and I cannot explain it. The

same kids who used to stand outside my meetings, after I would talk about the DREAM Act in Chicago—waiting in the darkness, in the shadows, to tell me, in a whisper, they were DREAMers—decided to step up and speak to the United States, to identify themselves. It was an act of courage. Some people say: Well, they were kids, and kids do rash things. I think it was more courageous than rash.

I came to the floor on more than 50 different occasions to tell the story of the DREAMers: who they are, what they have done, what they hope to do—amazing stories, incredible stories, of young people across America just asking for a chance to be legalized, to be part of America's future. They felt they were Americans start to finish.

The Presiding Officer's colleague, Senator BOB MENENDEZ, used to talk about Hispanics, who are the largest group of DREAMers, standing in those classrooms, hand over their heart, pledging allegiance to the only flag they have ever known, who faced the cruel reality that they were not going to be American citizens unless we changed the law.

Here is the good news. Over time—a long time; 13 years—the sentiment not just of the American people but of Members of Congress started to change. It changed for the better. The House of Representatives enacted the DREAM Act. Even the Senate, in the comprehensive immigration reform bill this last year, enacted the strongest DREAM Act ever written.

In fact, just last week, when Speaker BOEHNER, in the midst of his examination, if you will, of the immigration issue, issued a statement of principles, smack-dab in the middle of it, in clear language, was an endorsement of the DREAM Act. So although the Speaker may have some misgivings—and I am sorry to say I disagree with him—but may have some misgivings about comprehensive immigration reform, he acknowledged that on a bipartisan basis the DREAM Act was something that both parties should embrace.

I still believe in comprehensive immigration reform. The DREAMers will be the first to say: Don't forget my mom and dad when you are talking about immigration reform. But the reason I give this preface to my remarks is to put in perspective an amendment which will be on the floor of the Senate this week offered by Senator KELLY AYOTTE of New Hampshire. It is an amendment which addresses a provision of the Tax Code.

Here is what our laws currently say when it comes to taxes and families working in America. If you are undocumented, you are not legally allowed to work in America. That is what the law says. But if you do work in America, even undocumented, you have a legal obligation to pay your taxes. So how would an undocumented worker pay their taxes? Well, they would have an ITIN, they call it, a basic identification number that they can use to file their tax returns; and so many do.

Undocumented workers here in the United States pay their income taxes, as required by law. One of the provisions in our Tax Code—for every taxpayer—says if you are in certain income categories, you are allowed to claim a credit for your children. It helps 38 million American families who take this credit on their tax returns because they are working families and have children and the Tax Code said: We will help you raise your children.

On its face, it is worth about \$1,000 a year in reduced taxes. But there are limitations. If your income reaches certain levels, you do not qualify for this tax credit.

Now comes Senator AYOTTE who makes a proposal that we basically change this child tax credit as it applies to the tax-paying undocumented workers—that we say to them their children can only be claimed for this child tax credit if the children can produce a Social Security number. Therein lies the problem, because many of these children, although they are legally claimed today, do not have a Social Security number.

Let's talk about DREAMers, because that is a group affected most directly by the Ayotte amendment. DREAMers—those who would qualify if the DREAM Act becomes law—have been given a special status because of President Obama. He created a deferred deportation, deferred action program so that DREAMers could step up, identify themselves to the government, register, be given a work permit, and be allowed to apply for a Social Security number—DACA it is called.

We estimate there are about 2.1 million eligible DREAMers in America for the law that I want to change. So far, a half a million of them have applied for DACA and therefore can obtain Social Security numbers. That leaves 1.6 million DREAMers who cannot, under the Ayotte amendment, be counted as children under the child tax credit.

So ultimately what Senator AYOTTE is doing is to deny those who are working in America and paying their income taxes that provision of the Tax Code which says: You get a special consideration for your children. I think that is just plain wrong.

Listen to these numbers: The child tax credit—a refundable credit for working families—of \$1,000 for each child under the age of 17 is limited, as I mentioned earlier. The most anyone can claim for the tax credit is 15 percent of family income minus \$3,000, regardless of the number of children. For example, a minimum-wage worker earning \$14,500 with two or more children would receive at most \$1,725 as a tax credit or refundable tax credit. The credit is only available for taxpayers who are working, earning income, and raising children.

The Ayotte amendment, though, has to be put in this perspective. Nearly 38 million families are expected to benefit from this child tax credit this year—I should say this year, filing for last

year's income. Sixty percent of those who claim this tax credit earn less than \$25,000 a year. Nearly half of the workers, members of families working in America claiming the child tax credit, earn \$10 an hour or less, and 90 percent of those who would be hurt by the Ayotte amendment are Hispanic.

The tax credit is legally available for qualified taxpayers who have children with ITINs—these are individual tax identification numbers—and not everyone who uses an ITIN is undocumented. This amendment, the Ayotte amendment, would also affect lawfully present children who use ITINs, including victims of human trafficking, DREAMers, as I mentioned, under DACA, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and those with a pending application for asylum.

The child tax credit, we estimate, lifts about 3 million people, including 1.5 million children, out of poverty every year. It is an incentive for these low-income families who are working and paying taxes but not earning enough to take care of their kids. The Ayotte amendment would eliminate the use of a tax credit for 1 million children, pushing many low- and moderate-income families with children deeper into poverty.

What Senator AYOTTE is trying to do is to use the proceeds from this amendment she is offering to pay for the cost-of-living adjustment under the military pensions. Those veterans have already paid for their pensions. They paid by volunteering to serve this country and risk their lives. Some of them have come home with visible and invisible wounds of war that will be with them for a lifetime.

I do not believe we should come up with a pay-for for something these veterans have already paid for, No. 1. And, No. 2, I think it is unfair for us to impoverish more children in America as a means of helping our veterans. What a cruel choice to put before the U.S. Senate.

Do not take my word for it. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the statement I am about to refer to be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the NETWORK, Feb. 10, 2014]

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES SHOULD NOT PAY THE PRICE

(By Simone Campbell)

For a while now, kids—particularly those in immigrant families—have been unfairly under attack in the Senate, and the only plausible explanation is unconscionable: to score political points.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., recently proposed variations of a plan to strip away the refundable Child Tax Credit that now goes to millions of children of taxpaying immigrant workers in low-wage jobs.

Ayotte alleges that immigrants are fleecing taxpayers by claiming children who do not live in the country or do not really exist. At one point, the senator said she wanted money gained by denying the tax credit to pay for extension of emergency unemploy-

ment insurance benefits. Then she switched her focus to helping restore earlier cuts to veterans' pension benefits. In fact, there are much fairer sources of funding for these goals. For example, New Hampshire's other senator, Jeanne Shaheen, said veterans' benefits could be paid for by closing offshore tax loopholes.

In the end, it doesn't really matter where the money would go since taking money away from children of low-wage, tax-paying families is indefensible. Ayotte's proposal is misguided and antithetical to the Gospel call to care for children and those at the margins of society. It violates our long-held values as a nation, and it should be rejected.

To set the record straight, children targeted by her plan do exist and they do live in the U.S. Four million of them are U.S. citizens and others are "little DREAMers," young children brought to this country by their families. Under existing tax laws, their families may apply for the child tax credit if they qualify financially. If fraud is suspected, the solution is not to deny all eligible children access to this critical anti-poverty program. That is cruel and ineffective.

The Child Tax Credit is a proven success in addressing poverty. Senators concerned about child poverty agree that funding for other programs can be found without targeting needy children.

Ayotte says she understands families' needs, yet wants to deny a child tax credit to taxpaying immigrant families. Actions speak louder than words, and her proposal hurts families.

Our political leaders should never place poor children in a position of competing with other vulnerable populations for funds that help pay for food and other basic needs.

Deliberately harming immigrant families goes against the fundamental goodwill of Americans, including thousands of people we met last year as our "Nuns on the Bus" traveled 6,500 miles across the U.S. to speak out for justice. Throughout our journey, we stood with, prayed with, and heard the stories of hundreds of immigrants who have long served the needs of our nation.

Responsible leaders in Congress should look into their hearts and reject proposals like this one pushed by Ayotte. This political tactic is not good for our economy or the wellbeing of our entire nation—especially children who are the future of our country. We are better than this.

Mr. DURBIN. Sister Simone Campbell is somebody whom I greatly respect. Sister Simone Campbell is executive director of NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby. She is also one of the organizers of Nuns on the Bus, Catholic nuns who have traveled all over the United States speaking out on issues of social justice.

She has sent us a statement opposing the Ayotte amendment. It is a lengthy statement. I will not read it all, but I do want to read several parts that I think are important. Sister Simone Campbell says:

To set the record straight, children targeted by [the Ayotte amendment] do exist and they do live in the U.S. Four million of them are U.S. citizens and others are "little DREAMers," young children brought to this country by their families. Under existing tax laws, their families may apply for the child tax credit if they qualify financially. If fraud is suspected, the solution is not to deny all eligible children access to this critical anti-poverty program. That is cruel and ineffective.

Those are the words of Sister Simone Campbell in reference to this proposed amendment. She concludes by saying:

Responsible leaders in Congress should look into their hearts and reject proposals like this one pushed by [Senator] Ayotte. This political tactic is not good for our economy or the wellbeing of our entire nation—especially children who are the future of our country. We are better than this.

I agree with Sister Campbell. Why is it, week after week, from the other side of the aisle, from the other side of the Rotunda, we hear proposal after proposal to make it harder for working families, and particularly lower income families, to get by in America?

When we talked about unemployment benefits for those who have lost their jobs so they can find additional work, only four Republican Senators would step up and join us in that effort. When we talk about extending the minimum wage so that those who get up and go to work every single day have a fighting chance, the opposition consistently comes from the other side of the aisle.

Now we have before us this proposal to change the Tax Code to the disadvantage of the poorest workers and the poorest families and the poorest children in America. We are better than this. Sister Campbell is right. I would say to my colleagues, if you believe in the DREAM Act—and many of you have said you do—you cannot vote for the Ayotte amendment without realizing what it does to these children. To impoverish these children on 1 day in the Senate, and before that say that we think they should be citizens some day—we have to have a consistent moral ethic when it comes to the way we treat children in America.

Denying children the most basics in life, whether it is food stamps or assistance on the tax returns of their parents, is just not what America should be about. This Ayotte amendment will really call into question our dedication to these kids and their families. These workers are stepping up, meeting their legal obligation to pay their taxes. All they are asking for is to be treated like everyone else under the Tax Code. The Ayotte amendment will deny that to millions of these children. That is absolutely unacceptable.

Now, let me address a very real issue. Senator AYOTTE has identified some instances—I do not know how many—of fraud in the use of this child tax credit. I stand with her in trying to fight back and end that fraud. But let's be honest. A person making barely minimum wage, filing their tax returns and claiming this credit, is not likely to set out to game the system.

The people who are gaming the system are the tax preparers. They are the ones who may be lying to the government and are guilty of fraud. I will join with Senator AYOTTE and any other colleague who wants to stop that perpetration of fraud. I do not stand for fraud in any program. I do not think any Senator would. But to take this out on the children and low-income taxpayers is just plain wrong.

I urge my colleagues, let's stand by the veterans and restore their pensions. Let's do it as quickly as we can. But please do not help our veterans at the expense of children in America. This is an important amendment. It is one that calls into question our values. I urge my colleagues to look at this very carefully.

This is the last point I will make before I yield the floor; I see other colleagues here. I support comprehensive immigration reform. If the Ayotte amendment is enacted into law, the cost of bringing the DREAMers into citizenship has just gone up by billions of dollars, which we will have to raise to undo the Ayotte amendment at a future time. Let's not put ourselves in that position.

For the good of these children and their families and to put this Nation in the right place by fixing our broken immigration system, I urge my colleagues to oppose the Ayotte amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with my colleagues.

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

IRS POLITICAL TARGETING

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I rise today to bring attention to the latest installment concerning political targeting by the IRS. Last spring we learned of the IRS's targeting of conservative groups that were applying for 501(c)(4) tax exempt status, thanks to a report by the IRS's inspector general. This report detailed how the IRS singled out conservative groups for excessive scrutiny, which caused some applications to lie pending for more than 3 years and another 28 organizations to actually give up on their unanswered application.

The President claimed the targeting was due solely to "boneheaded decisions." Unfortunately, with the head of the tax-exempt organizations unit at the agency, Lois Lerner, choosing to plead the Fifth and resigning rather than answer questions before Congress, we may find that the source of this problem is a little more troubling than that.

Thankfully, multiple investigations are taking place to answer lingering questions such as this one. I look forward to their findings wherever they may lead. Uncovering who directed and participated in the inappropriate targeting and why will allow us to bring justice to the groups affected and ensure that no such targeting like this occurs again.

So imagine my surprise when over the Thanksgiving holiday I learned that the IRS had diagnosed the problem and offered its regulatory solution, despite the fact that multiple investigations are far from complete. On Friday, November 29, without warning, the IRS published a proposed rule that

would restrict the activities of 501(c)(4) organizations, effectively limiting their speech and curtailing their civic participation.

This brings a whole new meaning to the term "Black Friday." This rule singles out the same conservative groups that were previously targeted by the IRS and threatens to shut them down. It further attempts to legitimize the targeting of organizations that hold ideological views that are inconsistent with the administration's views.

It should be no surprise, since critics of these conservative organizations have openly called for their extinction, that this is occurring. At the least, some would like to force 501(c)(4) organizations into ill-fitting structures devised more appropriately for political committees in order to require the disclosure of conservative supporters.

The IRS and the White House claim innocently that the proposed rule is meant to clear up confusion about the process of applications for 501(c)(4) organizations involved in political activities. Over the past several months, we have heard this administration tell the public multiple times how confusing the applications are. Yet 501(c)(4) applications have been processed for years without excessive complaints of confusion that has occurred in recent months.

In fact, before the IRS began flagging the applications of conservative groups in February 2010, these types of applications were being processed within 3 months. Email traffic between IRS employees shows that the applications of conservative organizations were not flagged out of confusion but, rather, because of media attention and potential interest to Washington.

So let's call this rule what it is. It is an attempt to silence the voices of conservative organizations. To be clear, 501(c)(4)s are permitted to engage in the political process and in political discourse, and they should continue to be allowed to do so. But this regulation seeks to limit their participation in a host of advocacy and education activities, even nonpartisan voter registration and education drives.

These activities have a clear role in promoting civic engagement and social welfare, the precise purpose of the 501(c)(4) structure. Unfortunately, the rule would suppress conservative voices by forcing organizations to quit these activities or to be shut down. In fact, according to evidence collected by the House Ways and Means Committee and Chairman DAVE CAMP, the administration has been working on this rule since 2011.

Not surprisingly, the Treasury Department kept quiet of its plans. In fact, it neglected to mention consideration of this rule in the agency's 2011 or 2012 policy guidance plan. These are usually the ones that detail upcoming projects. If it sounds suspicious, it is. Just 3 months after the IRS abuse surfaced, the Treasury Department listed

in its 2013 plan the development of guidance related to the political activities of 501(c)(4)s.

Conveniently, the publicity of the IRS abuse provided an opportunity to finally roll out the agency's rule as a solution to its "boneheaded decisions." But this administration is not fooling anyone. Over 20,000 people have already submitted comments to the proposed rule. According to the new IRS Commissioner, this is the largest number of comments ever received by any agency. Clearly, the public sees through the administration's veiled attempts to squash free speech and to shut down opposition to its priorities. This is not a way to win back trust.

Just this past December the IRS Commissioner, known for his ability to turn around organizations, was confirmed as the new IRS Commissioner. This is John Koskinen. He promised to work towards restoring trust to the scandal-ridden agency. But he has yet to turn things around and is allowing this politically charged rule to move ahead.

So I come to the floor today, along with my friend from Kansas, Senator ROBERTS, and with the support of 37 additional Members of this body, to introduce legislation to stop the rule's implementation. I see Senator HATCH from Utah and Senator CORNYN of Texas who will also speak to this in a moment.

The Stop Targeting of Political Beliefs by the IRS Act will prevent this rule or any other that seeks to continue the targeting of groups based on their ideology. It is time to end the intimidation and harassment. Let's preserve the First Amendment rights of all groups regardless of their ideology, especially those that commit themselves to improve our society. Let's restore the public's faith in the ability of the IRS to fairly administer our Nation's laws. I hope the rest of the Senate will join us in this effort. I look forward to coming back to the floor later in the week to ask unanimous consent to pass this legislation outright.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I would like first to thank my colleagues for working with Senator FLAKE and myself to bring this proposal forward. This is a critical issue, one that really gets straight to the heart of our American democracy.

The current investigations of the IRS clearly show it is not an overreaction to say that the Internal Revenue Service did suppress political opposition. Now, to Kansans, to Arizonans, to Texans, to Utahns all across the country, and to my colleagues, this is not only a scandal but one that is egregious.

There is a great deal more than a "smidgen" at stake here. It gets right to the heart of our system of government. The government must be held accountable for its actions and must

never be permitted to trample on the constitutional rights of our citizens. The behavior of the IRS in singling out select groups at their discretion for extra scrutiny and harassment just because they hold views that differ from the administration is simply outrageous.

Worse, the IRS continues to target groups whose politics it does not like even as we speak on the floor of the Senate. In fact, the proposed IRS 501(c)(4) regulations will even more directly prevent groups the IRS does not favor from really participating in the political process.

The proposed regulations would place much tougher controls on what would be considered political activity, effectively blocking the normal practice of a wide range of not-for-profit organizations, not only conservatives. Under the proposed rules, healthy debate and discussion of political issues, political candidates, and Congressional actions would be prohibited.

This is, in effect, suppression of free speech for these Americans. The proposed regulations would result in continued sanction, intimidation and harassment to these groups, and permit the Federal Government to be used as a partisan tool. We recently learned that the proposed regulations have been under development for some time. Senator FLAKE has just mentioned this. This is nothing new, and perhaps it is as far back as 2011. Some say even 2010.

These proposed regulations until recently have been considered off-line—my colleagues, pay attention to this—off-line. Off-line means that the regs are being considered outside the normal regulatory process, which, in my view, has been done in order to circumvent the Administrative Procedures Act. There is no transparency here.

I cannot help but think that all of this, the targeting, the slow walking of exemption applications, and the proposed regulations are part of a calculated plan to deny disfavored groups their First Amendment rights to participate in the political process of the Nation.

My colleagues, this is simple. What we are seeing is a deliberate effort to infringe the peoples' First Amendment rights. It is incredible. I never thought I would live to see the day that this would happen in the United States and we would have to be debating this. This is a copy of the Constitution of the United States—the First Amendment by James Madison. This was given to me by Robert C. Byrd, the institutional flame of the Senate, who sat right over there to the left of the distinguished ranking member from Utah, and I know who is our Republican lead in regards to the investigation of all of this in the Finance Committee.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof or abridging the freedom of speech.

The freedom of speech, my colleagues, or the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and/or to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

As former chair of the Intelligence Committee, I can say that the arrogant response of the administration to the IRS actions, the denials, the evasions, the attempts to downgrade the implications of the IRS efforts, and now counteraccusations—they look like they came from some counterespionage handbook.

The real problem is that the IRS has proposed these regulations before Congress has even completed, as the Senator from Arizona pointed out, its investigation of the agency's actions in these matters. The manner in which these regulations have come up raises questions about the integrity of the rulemaking process—the exact opposite direction the agency should be taking.

Even worse, the IRS proceeds with these rules when they have done as much as possible to slow down the Finance Committee's investigation—I am a member of that committee; Senator HATCH is leading the effort on the Republican side—by responding to document requests at a glacial pace at best and redacting large amounts of critical information.

Senator FLAKE and I have proposed a very straightforward, very common-sense approach to this entire mess. We simply halt further action on the proposed regulations until the Justice Department and the congressional investigations by the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee into the IRS actions are completed. The bill freezes further IRS action for 1 year and would make it clear that the IRS could only enforce the regulations that were in place before all this mess began.

It is no wonder, given the IRS's behavior, that Kansans and virtually every American—with very good reason—doubt that the agency can in good faith administer the Tax Code. Clearly, the IRS has no capacity to regulate any political activity without running roughshod over the people's fundamental constitutional rights.

I have said this many times, but the scandal also shows that the IRS is too big, too intrusive, and too involved in taxpayers' business. The time for us to scale it back is now. In fact, it is easily the most distrusted agency in the Federal Government. That is a shame. The IRS has become a four-letter word.

This growing lack of faith in the IRS is a very strong reason why Congress should consider a wholesale rewrite of the tax system by simplifying tax collection and reducing the government's intrusion into economic and other affairs of the public. This is the main reason I am supporting legislation to scrap the Tax Code and move to a simplified, single-rate tax system. We do not need the IRS regulating constitutionally guaranteed free speech and

muzzling lawful activity in regard to politics and taking part as a partner in government.

Will Rogers once said, "The difference between death and taxes is death doesn't get worse every time Congress meets." Today, Will Rogers is wrong. It is not Congress that is making things worse, it is the IRS.

So let's pass this bill and work to get the IRS out of Americans' lives and their freedom of speech.

I thank Senator FLAKE again for being a cosponsor of the legislation.

Mr. FLAKE. I thank the Senator from Kansas.

I yield to the Senator from Utah, the ranking minority member on the Finance Committee.

Mr. HATCH. I thank my colleague from Arizona and my colleague from Kansas as well.

I rise today in support of the Stop Targeting of Political Beliefs by the IRS Act, the bill introduced today by our Senator from Arizona and the senior Senator from Kansas. This is a Senate companion to the bill being marked up today in the House Ways and Means Committee. This is an important piece of legislation that will protect free speech and ensure—at least for the time being—that the Internal Revenue Service is not used as yet another political arm of this administration.

As we all know, last November the IRS unveiled proposed regulations that would fundamentally alter the nature of the activities tax-exempt 501(c)(4) organizations can engage in. Under current regulations, 501(c)(4) organizations—or social welfare groups—can engage in political activities on a limited basis so long as their primary activity is the promotion of social welfare. However, they remain free to educate the public on important issues—even those that may be politically charged—because that falls within the exempt purpose of promoting social welfare. They can also conduct voter registration drives and distribute voter guides outlining candidates' priorities on issues important to the organization.

Under the proposed regulation, virtually all of these activities would be considered political activity and would be considered inconsistent with various groups' exemptions under 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. As a practical matter, this would mean that grassroots organizations all over the country would be forced to shut down—or, to put it more bluntly, conservative grassroots organizations all over this country would be forced to shut down.

That is precisely the point. The Obama administration does not want grassroots organizations—even those that are legitimately nonpartisan—educating the public on the issues of the day. They don't want tax-exempt organizations to be able to tell voters where candidates and politicians stand on the issues. And they certainly don't want these types of groups participating in the political process in any

meaningful way. That is why we are seeing these regulations, that is why they were drafted in the first place, and that is why the administration seems set to finalize them right before the 2014 midterm elections or, at the very latest, before the 2016 Presidential election.

We need to call this what it is.

This is an affront to free speech and the right of all American citizens to participate in the democratic process. This is an attempt by the Obama administration to further marginalize its critics and keep them on the sidelines. It is a blatant attempt to continue the harassment and intimidation that has already been taking place at the IRS over the past few years.

This regulation is just one of many problems we see at the IRS. Indeed, the American people have ample reason to doubt the credibility of the IRS, particularly when it comes to dealing with organizations that might be critical of the President and his policies. The IRS is currently under investigation on three separate congressional committees for its targeting of conservative organizations during the run-up to the 2010 and 2012 elections.

On top of that, the agency recently came under widespread condemnation when, in the midst of these ongoing investigations, they announced they were reinstating bonuses that had been canceled in response to the targeting scandal. It is almost as if they believe there was no scandal at all. Of course, if you have been listening to other people in the Obama administration, that type of thinking appears to be the predominant view. Several weeks ago, for example, leaks from the Justice Department indicated that no criminal charges were likely to be filed in the targeting scandal, even though this scandal is still under investigation. Talk about politics. Talk about political control. Talk about ignoring what is going on.

On Super Bowl Sunday, President Obama said in an interview that there was not a "smidgen" of corruption at the IRS. Well, when it comes to suppressing free speech, there is far more than a smidgen of corruption at the IRS. If anything, these proposed regulations on 501(c)(4)s are additional proof. It is one side trying to one-up the other in all cases because they happen to control the Presidency and one House of Congress.

When the proposed rule was first made public, the IRS said it was drafted in response to the 2013 TIGTA report that revealed all the issues the agency was having with regard to 501(c)(4) applications. However, as we learned in a Ways and Means Committee hearing last week, those regulations were under consideration for 2 years before the report was issued—2 years.

On top of that, the regulations were pursued outside of the normal channels for IRS and Treasury Department regulatory efforts in a manner that some IRS officials labeled "off-plan." "Off-

plan" in this case means hidden—h-i-d-d-e-n—from the public. Why does the IRS need to hide a draft regulation from the public when a regulation project is normally listed on a public Treasury guidance plan? I suppose we can only speculate, but I think it is fair to assume they didn't want the public to know these regulations were in the works. And they expect the American people to believe there is no political motivation for these regulations? Give me a break.

The fact is that these proposed regulations demonstrate that the IRS is willing and able to carry the President's political water even when the agency is, by law, supposed to be an independent and nonpartisan agency. That is why this legislation that has been introduced today by the two distinguished Senators who preceded me in their remarks is so important. We need to send a message to the administration that it cannot tamper with the rules of free speech just because it doesn't like what is being said.

If enacted, this legislation would delay the implementation of these rules for a year. This is the least we can do to protect free speech. People from all across the political spectrum—from the ACLU, to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, to the unions—have recognized just how egregious this proposed rule is. It needs to be stopped, and our bill would stop it.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. Indeed, everyone who supports the right of American citizens to participate in the political process, whether they are Republican or Democrat, should support this bill.

I say to our new IRS Commissioner—whom I fought to get confirmed, who I believe is sincere, who I believe is a person who can clean up this mess over there, this nest of partisan people who are in the IRS, where there should not be any partisanship—Mr. Koskinen, you have the power to stop this regulation from becoming final.

The Commissioner should stop this. All he has to do is just not sign it.

I have to say that I will be watching very carefully because I am sick and tired of the IRS being used for political purposes. I don't want to be used for Republican purposes, Democratic purposes, liberal purposes, or conservative purposes. I want freedom in this country, and I want people to be able to express themselves freely.

What they are trying to do is outrageous, and it shows an administration that can't win fair and square with all of the advantages that it has.

We know that many of the 501(c)(4)s are basically organizations that have a conservative tilt. The 501(c)(5)s are the unions that we know almost 100 percent support Democrats, even though 40 percent of union members are Republicans. I know; I used to be a skilled tradesman. I learned a skilled trade, went through a formal apprenticeship, worked for 10 years in a building construction trade union, and I am proud

of that, and I was proud to be a union member. Forty percent of union members are Republicans. Yet almost 100 percent of their effort goes to elect Democrats. The uptick in 501(c)(5) applications was just as high as the uptick for conservative organizations in 501(c)(4)s. We didn't see any of this—neither the targeting nor the regulations—being used against 501(c)(5)s. The only conclusion is that there is a group of people who basically want to support only one side of the equation.

We have to get politics out of the IRS. I don't know what that means. It may mean—like other agencies where we don't want any politics involved—getting rid of any partisan controls. That might include the union. Because we have people who were partisan and did wrong things—our investigation is not complete, but it is a matter of great concern to us—and then to come up with this type of stuff, it is enough to just make you want to cry or, should I say, throw up.

I am a Republican. The Presiding Officer is a Democrat. We are friends. We don't agree on a lot of things. That is what makes this country great. But when one side tries to stifle the free speech of the other side, we both have to stand together. I hope Mr. Koskinen, the new Commissioner, will do what is right and get rid of these regulations. My gosh, let's not have regulations that give a tilt to one side or the other. Let's have the IRS be down the middle, straightforward, decent, and honest, which it has not been in the last number of years. We are going to show that.

All I can say is I commend my two colleagues for their leadership in introducing this bill. It is long overdue, and I hope every Senator in this Senate will support it.

I yield the floor.

Mr. FLAKE. I appreciate the comments of the Senator from Utah and his recitation of the chronology and how this happened.

These regulations are supposedly in response to the scandal that came up, although the President is not calling it a scandal. He says there is not any evidence there was any wrongdoing. But these plans were actually being developed a couple years ago—long before we knew the IRS was targeting conservative organizations. So the notion this is in response to what just occurred is wrong.

What is equally troubling—or more troubling—as the Senator from Utah noted, these plans were described, in an internal memo, as "offplan," around the process—that were hidden. So that is what we are asking for in this legislation. Let's not do any rulemaking until the results of the investigations that are going on come back to us. That is a prudent thing to do, and I hope we will follow through.

I now yield to the minority whip, Senator CORNYN.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I will be brief, but I just wanted to commend

the Senators from Arizona, Kansas, and my friend and colleague from Utah, Senator HATCH, for their comments and for their support for getting the IRS out of the speech police business.

As if the IRS doesn't have its hands full already with the addition of the implementation of ObamaCare, on top of all of its other problems. I don't know anybody who thinks they need more to do, particularly when it comes to discriminating against people based upon their political affiliations and their desire to engage in debate and advocate their views in the arena. This is a politically neutral issue because we know this legislation will protect people on the left as much as on the right.

I have to agree with my colleagues that it appears there has been a disproportionate amount of attention given to people on the right under this administration. I know my colleague from Arizona has heard of Catherine Engelbrecht of Houston, TX, with the King Street Patriots and True the Vote. She founded two organizations dedicated to improving elections and furthering the ideals of our Founding Fathers. She led a coalition of citizen volunteers to work as election monitors who provide resources for voter registration and to root out election fraud.

One would think those would be commendable actions, not a reason for government discrimination and investigation. But for 3 years the IRS denied her organization tax-exempt status while comparable organizations—as I think the Senator from Arizona pointed out—had received expedited or fairly routine treatment. In the meantime, she was subjected to over-the-top inquiries by the IRS and even by the ATF and other government organizations. The IRS wanted to subpoena every one of her tweets on her Twitter account as well as entries made on her Facebook account.

You can't make up this stuff. It is extraordinarily offensive.

What these proposed rules are going to do is to institutionalize the role of the IRS as the speech police, something we ought to avoid like the plague. We ought to make sure people of all ideological and political affiliations are free to engage in their constitutional rights of association and of political speech.

I wish to point out, in conclusion, that 60 years ago the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a very important decision. It is called the NAACP v. Alabama. The question there was whether the government could compel the disclosure of the membership list of the NAACP when the NAACP felt its members would then be targeted by the government in a negative sort of way. The Supreme Court said the Constitution of the United States and the First Amendment guarantees the right of free association in addition to a right of free speech and that was constitutionally protected ac-

tivity. Given the importance of that right under the Constitution and also given the likelihood of negative attention by the government, they said the NAACP could keep its membership list confidential.

So at a time when the American people have taxes on their minds—I know my wife and I have a deadline in our family that by the end of February we like to get everything to the people who help us prepare our tax returns—and with a midterm election looming, the last thing we need to do is to support the IRS becoming the speech police and suppressing the constitutionally protected rights of the American people.

I would particularly say to my friend from Arizona that I pulled out a Gallup poll report, dated January 15, 2014, where government was cited as the top problem. That report shows that 21 percent of people in the poll said they were dissatisfied with the government, Congress, politicians, poor leadership, corruption, and abuse of power. What greater abuse of power could there be than to confer upon the IRS the legitimacy to intimidate and suppress people exercising their constitutionally protected rights of free speech.

So I commend the Senator from Arizona and others who are working on this. They can count on me to lend my voice and support to their efforts.

Mr. FLAKE. I thank the Senator from Texas and my other colleagues who have participated in this colloquy. I hope we can speedily bring the Stop Targeting of Political Beliefs by the IRS Act to the floor. When the Senator from Texas talks about his constituents and what they endured at the hands of the IRS, how anybody can say there is nothing amiss there or there is nothing wrong, especially when somebody is asked, upon application for a 501(c)(4), to give up their Facebook posts and tweets and let the IRS review them to see if they are worthy of receiving such status, there is something wrong. I think Americans know that.

I appreciate the support of my colleagues on this legislation and I appreciate the Senator from Kansas, my partner in this effort.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATIONS

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I rise for the purpose of notifying my colleagues that later today or tomorrow I intend to ask unanimous consent for two of my judge nominees to be voted on this week. Both are noncontroversial, both have been heartily endorsed by Senator BOOZMAN, my colleague from Arkansas, and basically everybody else who has

looked at this. These two judges came out of the Judiciary Committee, one of them on October 31 and the other on November 14.

These two judges are completely noncontroversial, but we have a sense of urgency, not only because we have two vacancies on the Federal bench in Arkansas, which is in and of itself a problem, but we have a real sense of urgency because one of these judges is an elected judge. In Arkansas, those are nonpartisan elections. One of these judges is an elected judge and the filing period for his seat opens on February 24 and closes on March 3.

We find ourselves in a situation where we are here this week, then we will be in recess next week. We will then come back on the evening of February 24, presumably for 5:30 p.m. votes, if things work on that day as they typically do around here. We would presumably have a 5:30 p.m. vote, and at that point the filing would be open, with other lawyers and judges interested in that position, and there is a domino effect that happens in Arkansas because of that.

So I am not going to ask unanimous consent right now, but I wanted to put all my colleagues on notice that I intend to do that either later today or tomorrow.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. Mr. President, first, I wish to thank Senator PRYOR. Senator PRYOR and a group of us have introduced a piece of legislation that rights a wrong; that makes sure our military continues to receive their COLA in full course and in the full amount.

As the Presiding Officer knows, we had a budget issue we worked through, and in that process the COLA for our active retired military was reduced by 1 percent. We all knew we would take the time, because we had the time after the budget passed, to fix this problem. We have already done it for our disabled retired veterans and now we need to fulfill the final and full promise of their COLA in total.

I spoke last night about this issue, and then we had the vote on cloture, with the result being 94 to 0—94 to 0. If that isn't an indication of how much support there is to make sure the COLA comes back in full force, I don't know what is.

I do know starting right after that vote we began hearing from people already coming up with, well, I voted for cloture, but I have a caveat. I have some qualifications I want to add on that vote. I want to have these things in Washington that are called pay-fors.

Let me make it very clear to the veterans in my State—and there are 77,000 veterans who live in my State. The highest per capita in the Nation is in Alaska. They have paid the bill. They paid the bill time and time again.

This is a perfect photo to use as an example of our military who have served in combat, who served on the

frontlines. Think about those who have already paid the ultimate bill—almost 6,800 servicemembers have died in Iraq and Afghanistan; from Alaska alone, 22, and I will read some of those names in a second.

First, I wish to make it very clear we are going to hear these convoluted reasons as to why we should have this pay-for. I wasn't here when they paid for these wars—no, I am sorry, they didn't pay for these wars. They didn't pay the \$2 trillion-plus for the wars, but now that it is time to pay the bill for those who committed to serve our country, to go to the frontlines when called upon and ensure we have the freedom we enjoy in this country, some are saying: Well, yes, we want to give them that retirement COLA, but—there should be no “but” here. A promise made is a promise we need to keep.

My view is we should have their backs every single day, and this is the day to do it. Let me make it very clear to those who are going to have this convoluted reason for this pay-for: This is a vote for vets or a vote against vets. You can have all the gobbledygook, all the convoluted arguments, but at the end of the day if you vote against this bill, without all this stuff added to it—just a clean and simple giving the COLA back and then let's move on, give them their full COLA—you are voting against vets.

I don't care how they try to press-release it, spin it, or what amendments they want to add to create a political situation for other Members on other issues unrelated to vets. A promise made is a promise we need to keep. We need to have their backs. They have our backs every single day to make sure this country is safe, no matter where American citizens are in this country or in this world. It is our time to do what is right for veterans.

I shared some stories last night about Alaskans who are struggling with this issue and the commitment they thought they had. One gentleman served 18 years in the military and is close to retirement. He is wondering what did he sign up for. He has had enormous pressures on his family. He has moved six different times. He has two children, one disabled, and a variety of personal issues. But he continues to serve this country. And for us to play politics and start talking about immigration, child tax credits, forget it. It is time to do what is right for our veterans, to put this COLA back in full force.

Over 30 veterans organizations support this bill with no pay-for, clean and simple. Senator PRYOR and I were on a phone call last week and talked to many—the Air Force Association, Army Aviation Association, the Fleet Reserves, Gold Star Wives—I can go through the list of 30-plus organizations who work with our veterans every single day and want us to pass this bill—not an amended bill but this bill: Get it done and give peace of mind to our veterans and retirees and active military.

To some degree this puts our readiness at risk. If someone is thinking about joining the military, they are looking at the benefits. They know at some point they may be called to duty and put their life on the line. So they are looking at the benefits: What can they provide for themselves and their families? What is the retirement if they become a career officer or a career enlisted member? And now they are questioning if they should.

I received emails from some parents whose sons and daughters are currently enlisted and are now wondering, what did they get into when at a moment's notice the commitments, the promises we—Congress—made can change overnight.

Our readiness is at risk, and the promises and commitments we make to our military are in question. Today is the start to make sure our commitments are there. We cannot say to our veterans: Sign up; we will promise you these things, and tomorrow we might change them. That doesn't help our readiness and commitment.

I get that there is going to be a lot of policy wonk conversation by some Members because they want to confuse the issue and make it hard for people to understand what is really going on in Washington. But it is simple. The chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee knows this issue is simple. It is about our vets. If you vote yes, you are for our vets; if you vote no, you are against our vets. That is it. They can put in all the spin and all the amendments to make it sound good. But in reality, they are trying to cover an activity they are struggling with; that is, they don't necessarily like some of us who are sponsors. I get that. But let's put aside our politics. Let's do what is right for the vets, let's have their backs, let's keep the promise we made to them.

Again, this bill is simple. It is so simple it is 1 page. It just says: Repeal that action.

I hope my colleagues on the other side who are wondering about what they should do will vote for the vets. Vote yes. Don't mess with amendments, don't try to have this pay-for convoluted argument. The vets at home who will be watching don't care about that. They just want to make sure their COLA is there. Let's give them the peace of mind they deserve.

I will read a few of the names who have paid the ultimate sacrifice. I read some of these last night: GySgt Christopher Eastman, Marines, age 28, from Moose Pass, AK; SGT Joel Clarkson, Army, age 23, Fairbanks; LCpl Grant Fraser, Marine Reserves, age 22, Anchorage; SPC Shane Woods, Army, age 23, Palmer.

These are just a few of the 22 Alaskans who have lost their lives. I don't know if they would have been long-term career if they stayed in the Army or Air Force, but they sacrificed their lives. They put their lives on the line to make sure we do the right thing

here. It is time we do it. Today is the opportunity. Don't convolute it with all kinds of amendments. Vote up or down. You are either for vets or against vets.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I rise in full support of the legislation on the floor.

I think most Members understand, as part of the 2013 bipartisan budget agreement, language was included which cut COLAs for military retirees. I think most Members here in the Senate and the House understand that was a mistake, an oversight, and is something that should be rectified and it should be rectified now. Promises made to people in the military should be kept, and our job is to do that.

This morning, as the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I wish to say a word on broader issues impacting the veterans community.

Shortly after this legislation is disposed of, we are going to move on to a comprehensive piece of legislation which addresses many of the very serious problems facing our veterans community. I will give a brief overview of what the legislation does. The legislation is the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014—S. 1982.

The first point I will make is I honestly believe, in terms of the veterans issues, there is widespread bipartisan support. On the Veterans Committee, every Member of our committee—Democrat, Republican, or in my case Independent—believes very much that we owe our veterans more than we can provide them. Their sacrifices are too deep, the pains are great. But all Members of the committee in a bipartisan way are doing their best to protect the interests of our veterans, and I thank all of them for their hard work.

To as great a degree as possible, the bill which will be on the floor—the comprehensive veterans bill—is a bipartisan bill. It contains many provisions brought forth by my Republican colleagues. This bill consists of two omnibus bills unanimously passed by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, supported by Democrats and Republicans. It also includes other provisions which had strong bipartisan support.

This legislation also contains two new provisions, both of which have bipartisan support. The first new addition addresses the restoration of cuts made to military retiree COLAs as a result of the 2013 bipartisan agreement, the exact same issue being debated on the floor right now. We also have that language in our bill. Promises made to veterans have got to be kept. We have to restore those cuts to COLAs for military retirees.

The second new provision not discussed, frankly, by the committee also has widespread bipartisan support, and

authorizes the VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 States and Puerto Rico.

Interestingly, the legislation which will soon be on the floor contains two major provisions already passed by House Republicans. So to as great a degree as possible, in terms of language in the bill, in terms of working with our Republican colleagues in the House, this is a bipartisan bill and should have the support of every Member of the Senate who believes in protecting the interests of veterans. And I hope that is the vast majority of the people here.

As Senator BEGICH mentioned a moment ago, our veterans have paid a very heavy price. What I have learned in the little bit more than the year in which I have been chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee is I think most Americans, including myself, were not fully aware of what that sacrifice was. And what that sacrifice was in recent years was not just the loss of over 6,700 Americans who lost their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq but the impact of those wars on hundreds and hundreds of thousands of veterans who came home either wounded in body—loss of arms, loss of legs, loss of hearing, or loss of sight—or the more invisible wounds of war.

What most Americans don't know is a rather shocking number, but we are now dealing with hundreds of thousands of men and women who came home from Iraq and Afghanistan who are doing their best to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, which has a terrible impact on their lives, on their families' lives, and on their ability to get a job and keep a job; and traumatic brain injury, the result of being in the presence of IEDs and the explosions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We are also dealing in this rough economy, this struggling economy, this high unemployment economy, with many young veterans coming home unable to find jobs. Some in the National Guard left decent jobs and came home to find those jobs are not there.

I think virtually every Member in the Senate understands that at a time when the VA went from paper to digital and made the transformation which was necessary to deal with the claims process, the claims process today remains too long. The backlog is too great. We have to deal with that issue.

We are dealing with a situation where young men and women were wounded in war who had hopes and dreams of starting their own families, but as a result of injuries sustained in those wars, for whatever reason, lost their reproductive capabilities and they still want to have families.

We are dealing with issues of sexual assault—a scandal, an outrage I know every Member of the Senate feels strongly about. Women and men who were sexually assaulted are coming home in need of treatment and are unable to get that treatment.

We are dealing with a situation today above and beyond the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where there are people—often women, wives and sisters—who are under great stress taking care of disabled veterans who have no arms and no legs. They have devoted their lives to those people and they are hurting as well. As chairman of the veterans' committee, what I have done is listened as carefully as I could to what the veterans community—representing some 22 million veterans—had to say about the problems veterans are facing.

My very fine staff and I—along with my Republican colleagues and their very fine staffs—worked together. We said: These are the problems facing our veterans. We all know that on Veterans Day and Memorial Day every Member of the Senate goes out and gives a great speech about how much they love and respect veterans and how much they appreciate the sacrifices made by veterans.

Now is the time to stand and go beyond words and rhetoric. Now is the time to, in fact, address the real and serious problems facing those men and women whose families experienced the ultimate sacrifice and those men and women who came home wounded in body and spirit.

We cannot solve all of the problems facing veterans. We cannot bring back loved ones lost in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and the other wars. We cannot bring them back to their wives, their mothers, their dads, and their kids. We cannot do that. We cannot magically replace the arms and the legs or eyesight lost in war, but we do have the moral obligation to do everything humanly possible to protect and defend those men and women who protected and defended us. We can do that and that we must.

I am very proud the legislation that will soon be on the floor has the strong support of virtually every veteran and military organization in this country, and that includes all of the major organizations representing millions and millions of veterans.

I thank the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the VFW, the Disabled American Veterans, also known as DAV, Vietnam Veterans of America, the Military Officers Association of America, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Gold Star Wives, and dozens and dozens of other veterans and military organizations that are supporting this legislation.

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has received letters of support from virtually all of these organizations, and if Members want to check out why these organizations that are representing millions of veterans are supporting this bill, they will find those letters on our Web site.

I will quote from one of the letters. This letter is from the Disabled American Veterans, DAV.

This . . . bill, unprecedented in our modern experience, would create, expand, advance,

and extend a number of VA benefits, services and programs that are important to DAV and to our members.

They see it—as do many of the other veterans organizations—as one of the most comprehensive pieces of veterans legislation brought forth in the modern history of Congress. I am proud of it. I thank the veterans organizations not just for their support of this legislation but for the help they gave us in drafting this legislation.

This legislation did not come from BERNIE SANDERS or from anybody else on the committee. It came from the veterans community itself. It came from representatives of veterans organizations who came before us in hearings, who came before us in private meetings, and said: Senator, here are the problems facing our veterans. If you are serious about going beyond rhetoric and speeches and truly want to help veterans and their families, this is what needs to be done.

We listened. We could not do everything, but we did put many of the major concerns facing the veterans community in this bill. Again, I thank the veterans organizations for being our partner in drafting this legislation.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank those people who have currently cosponsored this legislation, and that includes Senator LANDRIEU, Senator BEGICH, the Presiding Officer Senator SCHATZ, Senator BROWN, Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator HIRONO, Senator BOXER, Senator CASEY, Senator GILLIBRAND, Senator HEINRICH, Senator HEITKAMP, Senator MERKLEY, Senator MURRAY, Senator REED, Senator SHAHEEN, Senator WHITEHOUSE, Senator ROCKEFELLER, Senator TESTER, and Senator CANTWELL. I thank all of them for their strong support.

I will take a few minutes to touch on some of the areas this comprehensive bill covers. As I return to the floor in the coming days, I will go into greater length about each of these provisions. Each of these provisions, unto themselves, is enormously important in terms of the needs of our veterans.

As I mentioned earlier, our comprehensive veterans bill—consistent with the Pryor bill—will restore the cuts made in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 to military retirees. We address that issue in our bill.

This comprehensive veterans legislation deals with another issue—not necessarily a sexy issue—that in fact impacts a large number of veterans in communities all over America, and that is that it will allow the VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 States and Puerto Rico. That means—for a variety of reasons too complicated to get into right now—we have CBOC, community-based outpatient clinics, and other veterans facilities that are ready to go. They are on the drawing board.

Actually, it is beyond the drawing board, but we have not been able to pull the plug on it. This is very important to veterans all over this country.

It is important to Republicans, it is important to Democrats, and it is time to get this done. By the way, this has been passed in the House of Representatives. We need to do it and that is part of this legislation.

This legislation includes groundbreaking provisions that would expand access to VA health care. In my view and in the view of veterans all over this country, the VA provides high-quality, cost-effective care to millions and millions of our veterans. There are approximately 6.2 million veterans accessing VA health care today. About 8 million are signed up for VA care.

This legislation expands access to VA health care, allows more veterans to come in, and ends a very complicated priority 8 eligibility. Priority 8 is a situation where there are hundreds and hundreds of different eligibility levels all over the country, and it makes it very confusing for priority 8 veterans to determine whether they are eligible. We ended that and simplified it. The result is that more veterans will be able to access VA health care. We have also expanded complementary and alternative medicine within the VA. The truth is the VA is now doing a good job in providing complementary and alternative medicine, and that means meditation, acupuncture, yoga, and other treatments to veterans who are concerned about not being dependent on medication. One of the great problems we have nationally and in the VA is overmedication of people who have problems associated with pain and other ailments. The VA has done a good job. We are going to expand that opportunity.

My experience—having gone around the country—is that both within the Department of Defense hospitals and the VA, more and more veterans are looking at these alternative-type treatments and want to break their dependence on overmedication.

What we also do in this legislation is something that is terribly important. It is my strong belief that dental care must be considered a part of health care. The fact is that in this country there are millions of people—above and beyond the veterans community—who cannot find affordable dental care. Right now within the VA, dental care—with the exception of service-connected problems and homeless veterans—is not open to veterans, and we begin the process to do a significant pilot program to bring dental care into the VA. That is extremely important for the veterans community.

I think all of us remember not so many months ago the Government of the United States was shut down and caused all kinds of problems for all kinds of people. What is not widely known is that disabled veterans and veterans receiving their pension were 7 to 10 days away from not getting their checks. We have disabled veterans all over this country who live from month to month through those checks, and they were 7 to 10 days away from not

getting those checks. This legislation provides for advanced appropriations for mandatory VA benefits. By passing that provision, we will never again put disabled vets or veterans who are dependent on their pensions in the position of not getting their checks when they need it.

One of the issues that has been discussed a great deal is the issue of benefits backlog. There is no disagreement in this Senate—whether one is a Republican, Democrat, Independent—that it is not acceptable for veterans who applied for benefits to have to wait for years to get those benefits. In my view, what the VA is now doing is undergoing a massive transformation of their benefit system, going from paper—which was incomprehensible to me. In 2008 their system was paper. They are going from paper to digital. They are making progress, but I want to see them make more progress. This legislation includes some important provisions to make sure we end this unacceptable backlog of VA benefits.

One of the issues that has also received some attention is the issue of in-state tuition assistance for post-9/11 veterans. A number of years ago we passed very significant legislation which enabled some 900,000 post-9/11 veterans and family members to get higher education throughout this country. This legislation would give our transitioning servicemembers a fair shot at attaining their educational goals without incurring an additional financial burden.

We deal with the issue of somebody from out of State moving into another State and making sure that veteran is paying no more than what the in-state tuition is for that State. This is a very important provision and, by the way, a provision that was passed in the House of Representatives. The language is pretty much the same in this bill.

We promised veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan that they would have 5 years of free VA health care when they came home. For a variety of reasons, people have not taken advantage of that. We think it is important to extend—from 5 to 10 years—unfettered access to VA health care for recently separated veterans, and that is what this legislation does.

I don't have to mention to anybody that our economy—while slowly improving—still has many challenges. Unemployment is much too high. What this legislation would do is reauthorize provisions from the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, including a 2-year extension for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, otherwise known as the VRAP program. In other words, what we are saying to our veterans is when they come home, we want a job to be there for them. We want them to get integrated back into civilian life, so we have some very important provisions in here for employment opportunities for our veterans.

As I mentioned earlier, sexual assault is a scandal. The numbers are ap-

pallingly high. What this legislation does is enable those women and men who were sexually assaulted to come into the VA to get the quality of care their situations require and deserve.

This provision was inspired by Ruth Moore, who struggled for 23 years to receive VA disability compensation. So we have language making sure those who suffered sexual assault will get the care within the VA they absolutely are entitled to.

I mentioned earlier, also, that several thousand men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan were wounded in ways that make it impossible for them to have babies. These are people who really want families, and some of them are now spending a very significant amount of money in the private sector through a number of approaches in order to be able to have babies. We have language, a provision in this bill, which would help female and male veterans who have suffered significant spinal cord, reproductive, and urinary tract injuries to start a family. I think that is absolutely the right thing to do.

Several years ago this Congress did the right thing by establishing a Caregivers Act, which said to those people who were caring for disabled vets that we understand how difficult—how difficult—that work is, that you are taking care of people who need constant attention, loved ones who need constant attention, and we are going to help you do what you have been doing.

The good news is we passed that legislation. The bad news is it only applied to post-9/11 veterans. I think there was a general understanding, an assumption, that we were going to expand that program to all veterans—Vietnam, World War II, Korea—so those people, mostly women who are staying home, taking care of veterans, get the support they need. So the extension of the Caregivers Act is also included in this legislation.

Those are some of the provisions. This is a 400-page bill, and I just touched on some of them. But let me end in the way I began. There is no way we can ever fully repay the debt we owe to the men and women who put their lives on the line defending this country. That is just the simple nature of things. We are not going to bring back the husbands who were lost in war, the wives who came back without any legs. We are not going to bring fathers and mothers back to children who lost their dad or their mom. We are not going to restore eyesight to people who are blind. We cannot do that.

But if this country means anything, it means that we have to keep the promises we made to veterans and their families; that while we cannot do everything, we have to do as much as we can to make the lives of our veterans and their families, their loved ones, as happy and productive as we possibly can.

So this legislation is from Senators who listened to our veterans, heard

their concerns, worked with them, and developed this comprehensive bill.

Let me conclude once again by thanking all of the veterans organizations. We have virtually every veterans organization in America—not all but almost all—supporting this legislation. We thank them for the work they do every day on behalf of our veterans. I thank them very much for all the help they have provided me and the committee in writing this legislation.

Speeches on Veterans Day or Memorial Day are great. That is good. It is important we all do it. But now is the time to go beyond speeches. Now is the time to address the problems facing the veterans community. This legislation does this in a very comprehensive way, and I ask for the support of all my colleagues in the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, before my colleague, the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, leaves the floor, I say thank you to him for his passion and advocacy. The legislation he spoke of this morning is incredibly important. I say to Senator SANDERS, if I am not yet on that bill, I need to be and will be. Please sign me up.

It is absolutely true we need to do more than just make speeches. We need to put our commitment, our resources, and keep our promises to our veterans. That is what this bill does, and we thank the Senator very much.

Mr. SANDERS. I thank the Senator.

Ms. STABENOW. We also, Mr. President, have a bill in front of us that is about our veterans. This bill is about our veterans, and the question is on a "yes" or "no" on this final bill. If we support our veterans, we vote yes. If we do not support our veterans, if we want to play political games with it, find some other excuse not to support veterans, then you vote no. It is very simple. To keep our promise, vote yes. If you do not care about keeping our promise, vote no.

We had a vote last night in the Senate to end the filibuster. I think it was embarrassing we had to have the vote. I thank our friend and colleague, the senior Senator from Arkansas Mr. PRYOR for putting this bill forward, along with a number of colleagues. But we should not even have had to have a vote to end a filibuster to move forward on this bill. This is something that everyone should want to do as quickly as possible. It should not be controversial.

Unfortunately, instead of moving it forward and getting this done, we are seeing Republican colleagues who are arguing about amendments, amazingly, that would increase taxes on families in order to "pay for" helping our veterans.

Now, I think every veteran in America should find this absolutely outrageous. I know I do. These men and women have sacrificed for our Nation. Some did not come home. Some came

home without an arm or a leg or a closed head injury. They have paid in full for this bill. "Paid in Full" is what we stamp on this piece of legislation.

I am proud to represent nearly 700,000 veterans who are living in Michigan—veterans and their families. That is my pay-for for this bill. They have paid in full to make sure they get their veterans benefits, their pensions, the health care we promised them.

I would like to read just a very few of the names of people in Michigan who are the pay-for I offer today on the floor of the Senate:

Richard Belisle from Saint Joseph, MI, who retired from the Coast Guard after 21 years of service—twenty-one years of service—has paid in full for this bill.

Bill Garlinghouse of Holland spent 22 years in the Navy—I am partial to the Navy; my dad was in the Navy—and then 5 years working for the Navy as a civilian. With twenty-two years in the Navy; 5 years working for the Navy as a civilian, he has paid in full for this bill.

Richard Eversole of Sumner spent 22 years in the Air Force and retired as a master sergeant. Richard has paid in full for this bill.

Frank Bell from Kalamazoo retired 10 years ago as a senior master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force. He is 51 years old, so he will see his pension cut by 1 percent every year for the next 11 years.

This needs to be fixed now—no games, no debating about amendments—yes or no on making sure Frank Bell gets his full pension because he has paid in full for this bill.

David Lord of Cheboygan retired from the Navy after 20 years of service. Again, he has paid in full.

John Frollo of Saint Charles spent 20 years in the Navy before retiring in 2006.

Joseph Boogren of Gwinn, MI, spent 32 years—32 years—in the Navy. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He flew 177 combat missions defending our country, putting himself in harm's way on behalf of all of us. I believe Joseph Boogren has paid in full for his pension and the other benefits we have promised him and his family.

Debbie Rasmussen from Sheridan, MI, wrote in on behalf of her military family. Debbie and her husband are both Navy veterans, and their son Matt is an Active Duty sailor with over 15 years of service, including service in Afghanistan. They believe—and I believe—the Rasmussens have paid in full for this benefit.

Karen Ruedisueli is the wife of an Active Duty Army major currently stationed at the Pentagon. Kurt and Karen have been a military family for 12 years. The Ruedisuelis have paid in full.

I could go on and on with so many similar letters. Every service is represented in these letters because veterans from every part of our armed services would be hurt by what has been put in place.

We know this needs to be addressed and needs to be fixed. We have all said that—that this needs to be fixed, we need to honor the commitment we have made to the men and women who have served us, and continue to serve us. This bill will restore the cost-of-living adjustments for all military retirees.

We need to act now so our veterans have the certainty and the peace of mind they need to move forward with their lives. We should not be involved in wrangling, in folks trying to find political advantage, and take political hostages, score points in some way. We need to just get this done—no amendments, no jockeying here, just vote for this bill and get this done.

This bill is about keeping our promise to the men and women who have served us and continue to serve us. A "yes" vote says we have your back. A "yes" vote says we honor and support you. A "no" vote or other votes that confuse the situation and play political games are really votes that turn your back on our veterans. Very simply, vote yes to get this done—no distractions, no extraneous issues. No matter how people feel about other things, bringing them into this is not right. It is not fair. This is about yes for veterans or no for veterans.

I hope we will all stand together and understand the "paid for" are the people who have served in our States and continue to serve us today. They have paid in full. We need to vote yes and get this done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). The Senator from South Dakota.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I come to the floor today to discuss the stagnant Obama economy and how ObamaCare is making it worse. This Monday marks the fifth anniversary of the day the President signed his trillion-dollar stimulus bill into law. In remarks he gave in Denver that very day he signed the bill, the President stated that the legislation marked "the beginning of the end" of the Nation's "economic troubles."

Five years later, however, the end of the Nation's economic troubles is nowhere in sight. The headlines of the jobs report released Friday say it all. The headlines from the Associated Press said, "U.S. Economy May Be Stuck in Slow Lane for Long Run."

The New York Times headline: "Weakness Continues as 113,000 Jobs Are Added in January."

From CBS News: "Another month of weak job growth raises slowdown fears."

From the Wall Street Journal: "U.S. Adds 113,000 Jobs, in Latest Worrying Sign on Growth."

From Reuters: "U.S. employment fails to rebound strongly from winter chill."

Well before passage of the stimulus, Presidential adviser Christina Romer predicted that the stimulus bill would reduce the unemployment rate to 5 percent by the year 2014. In fact, over the

past 5 years, the unemployment rate has never come close to falling that low. Last month's unemployment rate was 6.6 percent. If so many people had not dropped out of the labor force over the past several years, that number would be even higher.

If the labor force participation rate were the same as it was when President Obama took office, our current unemployment rate would be a staggering 10.5 percent. Despite the fact that the recession technically ended 55 months ago, we are still nowhere near where we need to be in terms of economic recovery.

CBS News reported on Friday that the economy would have to gain an average of 285,000 jobs per month for the next 3 years just to get us back to where we were before the recession. Yet job creation for the past year has not even come close to that. In fact, our economy has added just 180,000 new jobs per month, approximately, over the past year. If we continue at that same rate, it will take us over 5 years to return to where we were before the recession.

President Obama's economic policies have left our economy mired in stagnation. His health care law is making things even worse. Last week the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office released a new report on ObamaCare. It found that ObamaCare will result in the equivalent of 2.5 million fewer full-time jobs over the next 10 years—2.5 million fewer jobs. Our economy is millions of jobs away from where it needs to be.

Our labor force participation rate is near a 35-year low. The President's health care law is going to result in 2.5 million fewer full-time jobs. How will that work? Well, the CBO report made it clear that ObamaCare provides disincentives to work, particularly for those at the low income end of the spectrum.

An individual receiving ObamaCare subsidies to pay for his or her health insurance may decide not to accept more hours or a higher paying job so that she or he does not exceed the income caps for receiving subsidies. At the higher end of the wage spectrum, workers may decide not to rise too far up the ladder so their income does not reach the point at which it would be subject to ObamaCare taxes. Thus, ObamaCare essentially traps workers in lower paying jobs, putting a de facto limit on the prosperity of literally millions of Americans.

The CBO reinforces that notion, not just by projecting that 2.5 million people will drop out of the workforce but also by projecting that those who stay in the workforce will earn less.

According to one analysis of the CBO report, ObamaCare will reduce total wages by an estimated \$70 billion per year. Without question, most of this burden will be placed on lower and middle-income families who already are struggling to make ends meet. Furthermore, by providing Americans with

disincentives to work, ObamaCare will limit our economic growth.

As the editors of the National Review put it, "The depth of the Obamacare crater in the labor force isn't some abstract unemployment rate, but the lost value of the work those Americans would have done."

Americans working creates economic growth. It is as simple as that. Encouraging Americans to work less or quit work altogether will undermine American prosperity and American families' security. Those who find work and are willing and able to fulfill their jobs deserve wages that are unhindered by a government takeover of health care.

Combine the CBO report with our experience of ObamaCare so far and the future does not look promising: lower income Americans living off meager salaries and government health care subsidies just to get by; middle-income Americans struggling to pay higher health insurance premiums and deductibles; and upper income Americans and small business owners too reluctant to create jobs and wealth for fear that they will be subjected to ObamaCare's burdensome taxes and regulations.

That is not the kind of future any American desires, but that is exactly the future ObamaCare is bringing us. In fact, for too many Americans, that future is already here. With ObamaCare's full implementation this year, Americans are facing huge premium increases and steep hikes in their out-of-pocket costs. They are losing access to their doctors and hospitals. All too often they are facing fewer hours with fewer benefits at their jobs as their employers struggle to comply with ObamaCare's taxes and mandates.

Even the President has tacitly acknowledged the burdens his health care law places on employers by once again delaying one of the law's job-destroying mandates. While I am glad some businesses will get relief until 2016, Congress should go further, much further, and ensure that every single American is protected from this disastrous law.

We can do better than ObamaCare and the President's economic policies. The President has called for 2014 to be a year of action. Republicans could not agree more. It is past time to take action to start reversing ObamaCare's damage and finally get our economic recovery off the ground.

Almost 2 weeks ago, the Obama State Department released its fifth environmental review showing that the Keystone XL Pipeline would have no significant impact on global carbon emissions. There is strong bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress for approving that pipeline and the 42,000 jobs it will support. The President needs to stop pandering to far-left environmentalists and immediately approve the pipeline and the good-paying jobs it will open for Americans.

Next, the President should pick up that phone he keeps talking about to

call the Senate majority leader and tell him to bring the bipartisan trade promotion authority legislation to the floor. Passing trade promotion authority will help U.S. farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs, and job creators gain access to 1 billion consumers around the globe. The majority leader needs to stop obstructing the jobs this bill would create and join Members of both parties to pass this important legislation.

Finally, the President should throw his support behind a repeal of the medical device tax in his health care law. This tax on lifesaving medical technology such as pacemakers and insulin pumps is forcing medical device companies to send American jobs overseas. There is strong bipartisan support for repealing the tax, and the President should add his.

Far too many Americans have spent the past 5½ years of the Obama Presidency struggling to get by. Household income has fallen. Health care costs have risen. Jobs and opportunity have been few and far between. For many Americans, the possibility of a secure economic future seems further and further out of reach. It does not have to be this way. We can turn our economy around by abandoning the President's failed economic proposals and embracing the kind of legislation that will open up new jobs and opportunities for the American people.

The three proposals I have outlined above are a good place to start. I hope the President will join Republicans and Democrats to get these priorities done.

I yield the floor, and 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. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The VICE PRESIDENT. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Chair lays before the Senate a Certificate of Appointment to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Senator Max Baucus of Montana. The certificate, the Chair is advised, is in the form suggested by the Senate. If there is no objection, the reading of the certificate will be waived and it will be printed in full in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

STATE OF MONTANA

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT

To the President of the Senate of the United States:

This is to certify that, pursuant to the power vested in me by the Constitution of the United States and the laws of the State of Montana, I, Steve Bullock, the governor of said State, do hereby appoint John E. Walsh a Senator from said State to represent said