

grant, further small-dollar matching, and vouchers for purchasing television advertising. The candidate could continue to raise an unlimited amount of \$150 contributions, as well as contributions from small-donor People PACs.

Under the Fair Elections Now Act, candidates would have an incentive to seek small donations. And citizens would have an incentive to donate to the candidate of their choice, knowing that their small donation of \$150 would be converted to a \$900 donation through the 6 to 1 Fair Elections match.

Citizens would also be eligible for a modest, refundable tax credit. The Fair Elections Now Act establishes the “My Voice Tax Credit” to encourage individuals to make small donations to campaigns. Citizens could also make their voices heard by aggregating small contributions of \$150 or less into a type of small-donor political action committee, known as a “People PAC.” People PACs would then be permitted to make campaign contributions to qualified Fair Elections candidates. Coupled with the Fair Elections public financing system, People PACs would elevate the views and interests of a diverse spectrum of Americans, rather than those of the traditional, wealthy donor class.

Our country is facing major challenges. We need to continue to create more jobs and restore economic security for the middle class. We need to build and sustain our transportation infrastructure. We need to fix our broken immigration system. We need to ensure that the right to vote is protected and preserved.

But with high-powered, special interest lobbyists fighting every proposal to make our country stronger, it is incredibly difficult for members of Congress to make progress on behalf of their constituents. This bill would dramatically reduce the influence of these special interests and wealthy donors, because Fair Elections candidates would not need their money to run campaigns. As a result, the bill would enhance the voice of average Americans. Let me be clear: the overwhelming majority of people serving in American politics are good, honest people, and I believe that most members of Congress are guided by the best of intentions. But we are nonetheless stuck in a terrible, corrupting system.

A recent poll found bipartisan concerns about our current system. According to the poll, more than four out of five Americans say money plays too great a role in political campaigns. Two-thirds say that the wealthy have more of a chance to influence the electoral process than other Americans. The perception is that politicians are corrupted by big money interests . . . and whether that is true or not, that perception and the loss of trust that goes with it make it very difficult for Congress to solve tough issues.

This problem—the perception of pervasive corruption—is undermining our

democracy, and we must address it. Everyone is entitled to a seat at the table, but wealthy donors and big corporations shouldn't be able to buy every seat.

The Fair Elections Now Act will reform our campaign finance system so that members of Congress can focus on implementing policies in the best interest of the people who elected them—not just the wealthy donors and special interests that bankrolled their success. I urge my colleagues and the American people to support this important legislation.

#### RECOGNIZING THE 90TH BIRTHDAY OF LESTER CROWN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I recognize the 90th birthday of one of the outstanding business leaders of our time—Chicago businessman, Lester Crown.

Lester Crown was born on June 7, 1925, to Henry Crown, the son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, and his wife, Rebecca Kranz. Like many other Illinoisans, Lester came from a family of Lithuanian immigrants with humble beginnings who moved to America to pursue a better life for their children.

Lester's father worked hard with his two brothers to build their family construction supplies company, the Material Service Corporation. As a young man, Lester worked with his father at the Material Service's quarry over the summers to lend a hand. Through the hard work and dedication of the entire Crown family, the Material Service Corporation became one of the most successful companies in America. Several years later, that family business merged with General Dynamics Corporation to become America's largest defense contractor.

From the start, Lester saw his father's work and learned what it took to be a successful businessman. He used his experience to excel and quickly became the president of Marblehead Lime and Royal Crown (RC) Cola. After years of managing companies, Lester took over as chair of General Dynamics and as the head of the family investment firm.

One of Lester's many talents has been his ability to recognize great potential. His eye for promising investments has led him to grace the Forbes 400 list every year since 1982. With a quick glance at his impressive list of investments we can easily see why—he is a major shareholder in Maytag, Hilton Hotels, Alltel, Aspen Skiing Company, New York's Rockefeller Center, the New York Yankees, and Illinois' very own Chicago Bulls.

But Lester is not just a successful businessman, he is also a dedicated philanthropist, husband, and father. He has channeled his successes to provide generous contributions to a wide array of local and national projects. His charitable footprint can be seen in landmarks such as the famous Crown Fountain in Millennium Park, the Lyric

Opera of Chicago, Stroger Hospital, and in universities across the Nation.

Lester and his wife Renee have been happily married for more than 60 years and have seven children. Renee serves as a founding member and former president of the Women's Board of Northwestern University and a life director of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She also serves on the board of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago, the Field Museum, the Joffrey Ballet, and as an honorary chair of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

Lester and Renee are an inspiration for many in their family who have become successful investors and philanthropists. Their son Jim is continuing the legacy started by Lester's father nearly a century ago by now serving as the lead director of General Dynamics. Together, the Crown family works with roughly 600 groups a year and donates millions of dollars annually to support organizations that focus on education and community development.

In addition to the energy Lester has poured into his family and business life, he has been a pillar in the Jewish-American community in his support of Israel. Few can match his dedicated commitment to the survival and success of the nation of Israel.

While few share Lester's long list of business achievements, even fewer share his level of leadership and generosity. It is with great pride that I ask my colleagues to join me in celebrating the 90th birthday of Lester Crown and to congratulate him on his legendary career and his many contributions to the city of Chicago, the Nation, and the world. I offer my best wishes as he continues to provide visionary leadership through his business endeavors and family philanthropy for years to come.

#### CONFIRMATION OF ERIC MILLER TO BE VERMONT'S U.S. ATTORNEY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last night, the Senate confirmed Eric Miller to be Vermont's 37th U.S. attorney. I am confident that he will do an outstanding job as the top Federal law enforcement officer in the State. Before recommending Eric to the President, I consulted prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, law enforcement officials, and civic leaders throughout Vermont. They were unanimous in their support for Eric. I was particularly impressed with his thoughtfulness, vision, and depth of experience. Eric Miller is one of Vermont's leading trial attorneys. He is well regarded by State and local law enforcement and leaders in Vermont's legal community.

Eric Miller has worked since 1999 in the Burlington office of the law firm Sheehey Furlong & Behm PC, serving as partner since 2002. He has litigated a range of complex issues in Federal civil and criminal cases, including trials and appeals. As an appointee to the Criminal Justice Act panel of the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont,

Eric has also represented indigent defendants in serious felony cases involving narcotics, weapons, and immigration-related charges. He clerked for the Honorable Fred Parker on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in Burlington. He has a law degree from Yale University and an undergraduate degree from Duke University.

I thank Eric for his willingness to continue to serve Vermont and I congratulate him on his confirmation.

#### SENATE COMPETITIVE CAUCUS

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, the hallmark of our Nation's economy has long been the ability of anyone with creativity, ambition, and a good work ethic to realize their dreams and move America forward. From the lightbulb to the iPhone, the legacy of American invention has shone brightly throughout the world. Yet while our culture of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit remain strong, the policy framework that empowers that spirit to flourish is losing its competitive edge.

For years, enabling our Nation's innovative drive was an economic system unparalleled around the world—from competitive tax laws to public investments in research, infrastructure, and education. We have long understood something that many other countries haven't: for innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit to thrive, we need a strong, competitive economic ecosystem. There simply is no single silver bullet for economic growth.

While other nations catch up, our system is deteriorating in a number of ways. Federal investments in basic research and development are not keeping up with inflation and our tax code remains riddled with complexity, unable to spur growth and provide the certainty our businesses need. We also have to address the tough questions about how to fund our infrastructure, transportation, and education systems. In our dynamic market economy, the natural churn of businesses opening and closing keeps our Nation competitive, as long as we are creating more businesses than we are closing, of course. According to the Census Bureau, however, U.S. businesses are now failing faster than they are being created for the first time in 35 years—since the data began being recorded. Meanwhile, the 2014 Global Innovation Index saw the U.S. innovation ecosystem fall to 6th, while ranking 39th in ease of starting a business. These declines are coupled to a global R&D forecast that projects leading competitors—like China—will surpass the U.S. in total R&D investment by 2022.

Yet even with these challenges, we do retain a competitive edge. Americans' entrepreneurial drive still spurs our economy; manufacturing output continues to increase; our colleges and universities remain the envy of the world; innovations in the American energy industry have reduced our trade deficit and improved our energy secu-

rity; and private sector R&D has rebounded after several years of stagnation.

We now find ourselves at a competitive inflection point. We can either do more to nurture and take advantage of our strengths—only some of which we have mentioned—or we can fall behind in the 21st century. In order to support our competitive strengths, Senator JERRY MORAN and I are launching the bipartisan Senate Competitiveness Caucus, a forum to bring together Democrats and Republicans to address the most pressing issues facing our economy.

Rather than focus on just one issue or one bill, we have built the caucus with the understanding that it will take a whole range of policies working in concert to sustain our innovation ecosystem.

We will pursue ways to invest in our roads, bridges, ports, and highways so they meet the needs of a 21st century economy. We will work to make our tax code more competitive so the United States will remain the best country in which to do business and raise a family. We will seek to streamline regulations to protect consumers and make it easier to start and grow a business. We will look at our Federal budget and focus Federal resources on pro-growth policies that will create an environment for job creation now and into the future. We will work together to boost manufacturing because no country can support a strong middle class without a thriving manufacturing sector. That is just a start.

If the last century has taught us anything, it is that other countries will not slow down when it comes to chasing America's economic success. That means that even though the United States remains a world leader in innovation and competitiveness, it will only become more difficult to retain that position as the years go by. Members of the Competitiveness Caucus understand that we are now competing with every country, every government, every worker, and every business on the planet. Congress must come together to turn our economic challenges into opportunities for growth.

#### HEALTH INFORMATION EXCHANGE: A PATH TOWARDS IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND VALUE OF HEALTH CARE FOR PATIENTS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of my remarks at the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing earlier this week.

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

#### HEALTH INFORMATION EXCHANGE: A PATH TOWARDS IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND VALUE OF HEALTH CARE FOR PATIENTS

We're here today to outline our plans to conduct an intensive review of electronic health records.

There is a great deal of bipartisan interest in this on the committee. My staff and Sen. Murray's staff have been meeting with experts every day, the staff of each of our committee members have been meeting once a week, and Sen Murray and myself have been speaking with the administration regularly as well.

The administration understands our level of interest and is working with us to improve these records.

Here's what we're talking about:

The Meaningful Use Program began in 2009 to encourage the 491,000 physicians who serve Medicaid and Medicare patients and almost 4,500 hospitals who serve those patients to begin to adopt and use electronic health records systems.

Of those 491,000 physicians, 456,000 have received some sort of Medicare or Medicaid incentive payment from the Meaningful Use Program. All hospitals and most physicians that tried were able to meet the first stage requirements. For those who met the requirements, the government paid incentive payments in the form of higher Medicare reimbursements. It has so far paid out \$30 billion in incentive payments.

But the program's stage 2 requirements are so complex that only about 11 percent of eligible physicians have been able to comply so far, and just about 42 percent of eligible hospitals have been able to comply.

The next step in the program is penalties for doctors and hospitals that don't comply. This year, 257,000 physicians have already begun losing 1 percent of their Medicare reimbursements and 200 hospitals may be losing even more than that.

Our goal is to identify the 5 or 6 steps we can take to improve electronic health records—a technology that has great promise, but has, through bad policy and bad incentives, run off track.

To put it bluntly, physicians and doctors have said to me that they are literally "terrified" on the next implementation stage of electronic health records, called Meaningful Use Stage 3, because of its complexity and because of the fines that will be levied.

My goal is that before that phase is implemented, we can work with physicians and hospitals and the administration to get the system back on track and make it a tool that hospitals and physicians can look forward to using to help their patients instead of something they dread.

Today will mark the start of a series of hearings we will hold this summer to address various possible solutions.

Senator Murray and I are today announcing the next two hearings in the series, which will be chaired by different members of our committee to examine solutions to the problems we identify.

The first hearing is on the burden physicians face with these systems, and I have asked Senator Cassidy, who is a physician himself, to chair that hearing.

The second hearing is on the question of whether you and I control information about our health, and I have asked Senator Collins to chair that hearing.

On March 17, we held our first hearing to identify the problems with electronic health records, and the government's Meaningful Use Program.

At today's hearing, we will set the table for this series of hearings by discussing how we can solve those problems and improve electronic health records.

I was in Nashville at Vanderbilt University two weeks ago for a public workshop of the National Institutes of Health Precision Medicine Working Group, which is working out the details of the president's precision medicine initiative. That will involve creating a collection of 1 million sequenced genomes