

than it could and should have been, because those opponents have advocated and implemented dangerous laws that undermine and violate a woman's right to privacy and diminish her access to constitutionally guaranteed reproductive health care services. These restrictions fall disproportionately on minorities and many who live in rural or medically underserved areas. I have great respect for my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but we are jeopardizing the health care necessary for millions and millions of women and their right to privacy in this great country.

I have introduced a measure that would help prevent these violations of rights at the State level. The Women's Health Protection Act would invalidate not only extreme laws such as the Texas law that is now before the U.S. Supreme Court but dozens of other restrictive legislative steps that States have implemented and introduced to block women from accessing safe and legal health care.

I am happy to celebrate this anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, but I think it is a moment to rededicate ourselves to the continuing task, more urgent and difficult than ever, to enable every woman to have the right of privacy, the right to make decisions about her own body, about whether and when to have children, and that fundamental right can help make abortion safe, legal, and rare.

DEBT-FREE COLLEGE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I wish to speak now about what should be a right for young people and all people in this country, which is the goal of debt-free college.

Over the last months, I have held roundtables around the State of Connecticut—all around our State—with young people at the college as well as high school level who are in danger of losing the American dream—their dreams, their choices about where they want to go to school, because college for them has become unaffordable. For many who have already been to school, the debt is crushing—in fact, financially crippling. It is approaching \$1.3 trillion, which affects not only those students who have graduated and who may be seeking to go to college but also our entire economy. Someone graduating from college with \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$100,000 of debt and then from graduate school or law school or business school with that same kind of financial burden can't save for retirement, can't start a family, can't buy a home, can't begin a business that may employ people.

College affordability is essential to creating jobs and advancing and fueling economic growth. It is an engine of economic growth. It enhances the talents and the gifts that young people bring to the economy. It provides the skills that are needed now on the assembly line and in business. I encour-

ter businesses across Connecticut—and I am sure it is true across the country—that tell me: We have jobs, we can't fill them, and we can't find young people with the right skills. That is why our community colleges play such an important role in our educational system.

The agenda that we have announced today as a caucus will meet this need in a number of important ways. It will make 2 years of community college tuition-free. It will enable students to refinance their debt when interest rates are lower, as they can now with a loan for a car or a loan for a home, but not for a Federal loan. It will assure that people are enabled a more affordable education by holding colleges accountable and make them responsible for the levels of debt their students incur, because they should be held accountable when those debts default.

It will take those measures and others that are part of a comprehensive agenda that will advance the affordability of college and make debt less burdensome, but it will also expand the availability of Pell grants and take other measures that will make debt less necessary, because the goal should be debt-free college.

Our ultimate aspiration is debt-free college. We are beginning with community colleges that are tuition free, but the ultimate goal ought to be debt-free college. That will require expanding Pell grants and other scholarship aids and financial assistance programs that now are available but simply unacceptable in too small amounts.

I have two measures that I have offered on my own to be taken as part of this total program although they are not part of the act. One would recognize students for the public service they perform. If they become firefighters or police officers or work at the YMCA or in local government, their community service ought to be recognized by reducing the debt they owe, not just at the end of 10 years as happens now but year by year, pro rata; not just if they stay in the same job but if they move from one job to another or even have to move homes, go across State lines, expanding the availability of public service recognition and credit to reduce college debt. It is much in the spirit of the GI Bill. I hope we will move forward to expand the availability of debt recognition and reduction for public service.

I also hope that when our needier students receive assistance for room and board when they go to college, they will not be taxed on that assistance. That happens now. Why should they be taxed on the room and board they need and that assistance to go to college? That is wrong. And scandalously and outrageously, it is wrong that the U.S. Government makes money off the backs of our students. We should be investing in one of the greatest assets in a democracy—people who want to raise their skills and talents and education so they can better

serve not just in the public sector but in the business world, so they can help create jobs themselves and become the entrepreneurs and the job creators. They can't do it if they are burdened with tens of thousands—some hundreds of thousands—in debt. The present levels of debt are a disservice to our Nation. They inhibit freedom, they undercut opportunity, and they destroy dreams.

Some of the most moving moments of my roundtables with young people are to hear them describe how they could not attend their dream school. They called their first choice their dream school and the reason it was their dream school is because they could pursue engineering or nursing or marketing or other kinds of vitally important skills at that place in the best way possible. That was their dream school not because the weather was good or because their friends were there but because the skill levels and the education offered was exactly the right fit for their aspirations. Some cried as they described the unbridgeable gap between what they could afford and what the school charged. With what they could afford—even with financial aid, even with help from their families, and even with debt—they still faced an unbridgeable gap. And those dreams dashed, deferred, destroyed for those students are a national tragedy. For them, it will shape their futures, although I have great confidence that their drive and perseverance will enable them to achieve great things. But for our Nation, it means a deferring and diminishing of our economy and our national quality of life.

We are the strongest, greatest Nation in the history of the world because we provide more opportunity and more freedom than any other country. We are stronger because of our diversity and because we create and we reward the dreamers who have the strength and the ability to set high standards, to aspire to be the best, and to want an education that enables them to achieve those goals.

The current levels of college debt are inconsistent with who we are as a Nation. That is why I am proud today to join my colleagues on this side of the aisle and to say to our friends across the way: Join us. Let's make it bipartisan. If you have a plan, if you have ideas, if you think there are other ways to accomplish things, let's work together, because those students, their families, our Nation, the businesses that are creating jobs and want these young people to fill them so we can drive the economy forward all depend on us working together, reaching across the aisle and making sure that we enable every person, every student who wants to go to college to fulfill that dream without the financially crushing burden of current levels of debt.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Ms. WARREN. Madam President, we have a problem—money. Six years ago today, the U.S. Supreme Court made the problem worse, a lot worse. Thanks to the Supreme Court, our system of elections is riddled with corruption. Money floods our political system—money that lets a handful of billionaires shape who gets into Congress and may decide who sits in the White House.

As Congress has become more beholden to billionaires and less worried about the American people, look at what has happened in Washington. Armies of lawyers and lobbyists flood the hallways of Congress and regulatory agencies, urging just a little tilt for every law and every rule—a sentence here, an exception there, and always tilted in favor of the rich and powerful. Corporate executives and government officials spin through the revolving door, making sure the interests of powerful corporations are always carefully protected. Powerful Wall Street businesses pay barely disguised bribes, offering millions of dollars to trusted employees to go to Washington for a few years to make policies that will benefit exactly those same Wall Street businesses. Corporations and trade groups fund study after study that just so happen to support the special rule or the exception that the industry is looking for.

Washington works great for a handful of wealthy individuals and powerful corporations that manipulate the system to benefit themselves. It works great for the lobbyists and the lawyers who slither around Washington day in and day out, handsomely paid to troll for special deals for those who pay them. But for everyone else, Washington is not working so well, and if we don't change that, this rigged political game will break our country.

Change is needed in many areas, but we can start with how we fund elections. In 2012, about 3.7 million Americans gave modest donations—under \$200—to President Obama and Mitt Romney. Those donations added up to \$313 million. In the same election, 32 people gave monster donations to super PACs. Thirty-two people spent slightly more on the 2012 elections than the 3.7 million people who sent modest dollar donations to their preferred Presidential candidates. When 32 people can outspend 3.7 million citizens, it is pretty obvious that democracy is in real danger.

We are headed into another Presidential election, and I speak out today

because I am genuinely alarmed for our democracy. I am genuinely alarmed because 6 years ago today the U.S. Supreme Court said that the privileged few are entitled under the Constitution to spend billions of dollars to swing elections and buy off legislators. Six years ago today the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a century of established law and in doing so unleashed a flood of secret corporate money into our political system.

The Supreme Court created a big problem, but that does not mean that anyone with any integrity must just roll over and play dead. No, it is time to fight back. Sure, the Supreme Court has a lot of power, and, yes, they have used it to do a huge amount of damage. But even under the Supreme Court ruling there is room to fight back against the complete capture of our government by the rich and powerful.

Let's start right here with three examples of what this Congress could do right now today—what this Congress could do if we had the political courage to stand up to the superwealthy few and a handful of corporations.

No. 1, pass Senator DURBIN's Fair Elections Now Act. This legislation would create public funding for congressional elections. Imagine the contributions of small donors so working families would have a louder voice and could begin to compete with the rich and powerful. This is a bipartisan solution—well, at least bipartisan outside Washington. According to a recent poll, Democrats and Republicans both agreed strongly with the idea of citizen-funded elections; 72 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of Republicans said yes.

No. 2, pass the DISCLOSE Act, Senator WHITEHOUSE's bill to force super PACs out of the shadows and make them tell where the money comes from. According to that same poll, 91 percent of Democrats and 91 percent of Republicans agree that super PACs and other special interests should have to disclose the source of their funding.

No. 3, pass the Shareholder Protection Act, Senator MENENDEZ's bill to force companies to tell their shareholders how much money they are giving to politicians and which politicians they are giving it to. This is the shareholders' money, and they have a right to know how it is spent. If they don't like how the money is being spent, they can put somebody else in charge.

Those are three things Congress could do right now, but there is even more.

No. 4, the President could finalize an Executive order requiring government contractors to disclose their political spending. Why should companies that do business with the government be allowed to give money in secret to benefit elected officials? Seventy-eight percent of Democrats and 66 percent of Republicans want to see this done.

No. 5, the SEC has the authority right now to begin to put together rules that would require opinion cor-

porations to disclose the money they spent in elections. Despite Republican efforts to try to block this rule through a rider in the recent government funding bill, legal experts agree that the agency still has all the authority it needs to prepare a disclosure rule.

The public demands action. The SEC has received more than a million comments from the people across this country urging the agency to issue this rule—88 percent of Democrats and 88 percent of Republicans. That is right, 88 percent of both sides support public disclosure of political spending.

Three former SEC Commissioners, one Republican, two Democrats, wrote a public letter to Chair Mary Jo White urging her to adopt this rule. It is time for the agency to stop making excuses and start doing its job.

No. 6, the FEC has the authority right now to require ads run by super PACs include disclosure of the main people or corporations that paid for them. If they want to run the country, then the billionaires shouldn't be allowed to hide in the shadows. Make them step out in the open where the American people can see who is calling the shots.

There is one more step we can take, a full-blown constitutional amendment, such as the one pushed forward by my colleague Senator UDALL to restore authority to Congress and to the States.

I have to say, I am reluctant to take on a constitutional amendment, but we need to defend our great democracy against those who would see it perverted into one more rigged game where the rich and the powerful always win, and that means taking every step possible, including amending the Constitution.

These are six ideas that would help bring an end to a corrupt political system; six ideas that Congress, the administration, the SEC, and the FCC could put together right now.

A seventh idea is a constitutional amendment that we could begin working on today. This Congress doesn't lack for workable ideas for how to root out the influence of money in politics. This Congress just lacks a spine to do it.

Six years ago the U.S. Supreme Court turned loose a flood of hidden money that is about to drown our democracy. We can blame the Supreme Court—heck, we should blame the Supreme Court, but that is no excuse for doing nothing.

A new Presidential election is upon us. The first votes will be cast in Iowa in just 11 days. Anyone who shrugs and claims that change is just too hard has crawled into bed with the billionaires who want to run this country like some private club. All of us were sent here to do our best to make government work—to make it work not just for those at the top but to make government work for all people, and it is time we start acting like it.