

2018 that cuts Perkins State grants by 15 percent. That is more than \$168 million across the country. In Rhode Island, that Perkins funding cut would mean a cut of more than \$800,000. If enacted, the President's budget would not only slash a crucial investment in our students, but it would deeply hurt businesses.

If we want businesses to come back to the country from overseas, if we want to relocate those jobs here, we need to make sure that we have the workforce that can actually do the jobs that would be available and that are, in fact, available right now.

This is the time to invest in workforce development, not undermine it. Demand for CTE is growing from students and industry, and our economy desperately needs it.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let me just say that I encourage my colleagues to prioritize CTE. It matters for your constituents, and it yields big returns for our States' economies and for our Nation's economy as a whole. Put simply, providing workers with the skills necessary to thrive in the economy is essential to our economic prosperity. It is the right thing to do, giving our workers the skills they need for jobs that pay.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative LANGEVIN. His points are very good. We appreciate his leadership as co-chair of the CTE Caucus and for the work that he has done in bringing this bill to the point where it is now.

He is right. It was passed unanimously out of the Education and the Workforce Committee. We thank the chair of the committee for making that a priority. We hope it passes the floor of the House—it did, of course, last session—and then we hope it becomes a priority for the Senate as well. It is important.

He has mentioned some of the schools, the institutions, in his district. I have talked about some in mine. I have heard from all of them. Not only have they given input into the bill itself and how we can improve the entire system across the country, but they have also talked about the importance of the grants that are provided to them through the Perkins Act. Reauthorization will be very beneficial in keeping those grants going, in providing the help that we can from the Federal level. So I thank him.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude with my remarks, I would first, again, like to thank all of my colleagues who have participated in this bipartisan Special Order. It is really, as we have seen, a bipartisan issue here.

I thank Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHY for helping to colead this and for cosponsoring the bill, along with Congressman THOMPSON.

In my own background, I was someone with a nontraditional education. I recognize the importance of providing our constituents with educational pathways that provide them the skills

necessary to launch successful careers. In my experience, I know firsthand what it is like to work a full-time job while attending school, and I believe that it is important that we accommodate the needs of many different types of students that are ready to learn and willing to work.

So, again, I am excited and very happy to cosponsor and support the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act. This bill empowers State and local community leaders. It improves alignment with in-demand jobs, those jobs that we have been talking about. It increases transparency and accountability, and it ensures a limited Federal role, putting the decisionmaking where it should be.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned before, but, in closing, I thank my Pennsylvania colleague, Representative G.T. THOMPSON, for his leadership on this critically important legislation. The level of support for strengthening career and technical education among my colleagues in the House and on a bipartisan basis is absolutely outstanding, and I am very eager to continue finding new ways in which we can grow CTE and apprenticeship programs and expand access for Pennsylvania's working people to allow them to help achieve the American Dream.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, I am delighted to be here on behalf of the Progressive Caucus. This is our Special Order hour. We have decided to devote our remarks this evening to the testimony of former FBI Director Comey, who testified in the U.S. Senate today.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, today, America watched former FBI Director Comey offer his testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. It was a dramatic and serious moment in the history of our country and in the unfolding of the crisis related to the investigation of Russia's involvement in the U.S. election and then the firing of General Flynn by President Trump.

□ 1745

This was the first time that Director Comey spoke publicly about his firing

by President Trump and the investigation since he left the FBI, and his testimony confirmed much of what has been reported about the matter.

Now, what any reasonable-minded observer would have to conclude after watching the testimony today, after reading Mr. Comey's testimony, is that President Trump was trying mightily to use his office and his influence to get Director Comey to drop the investigation of General Flynn, his former National Security Advisor. Indeed, President Trump as much as said so when he said that he had fired Director Comey because he was unhappy about the Russian investigation and, presumably, the Russian investigation into General Flynn.

Now, Madam Speaker, distinguished colleagues, look how far we have come over the last several months. The President of the United States hired a National Security Advisor after being warned not to by the former President of the United States, by then-President Obama. That National Security Advisor lasted a total of 24 days in office, when it was determined that he had lied to Vice President PENCE about his dealings with Russia. And then later we learned that he was a registered foreign agent, or he registered retroactively as a foreign agent, an agent for a foreign government. Now, think how dramatic this sequence of events is.

Imagine, if you will, if President Barack Obama had met with Attorney General Eric Holder and Vice President Joe Biden and FBI Director Comey in his office and then asked Vice President Biden and Attorney General Holder to leave his office, saying that he wanted to speak alone to the FBI Director, and then proceeded, essentially, to tell FBI Director Comey that he wanted him to drop the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, saying, you know, "Hillary Clinton's a good woman. She's a good person, and I hope you can just let the investigation into her emails go. Just let it go," and to demand repeatedly for absolute personal loyalty.

Now, as it happened, Director Comey refused to take a vow of absolute loyalty to the President. After all, he takes an oath of office to the Constitution of the United States and the people of the country, so he couldn't say that he would give absolute loyalty to the President of the United States. That is not consistent with our constitutional form of government.

But imagine that this had happened under the Obama administration. Obama had made a similar demand of FBI Director Comey who was investigating, after all, Hillary Clinton's emails, had dismissed the Vice President and the Attorney General to have a one-on-one conversation, and then said, "I really hope that you let this go," using the full trappings of his office and his influence to try to get the FBI Director to drop the investigation.

If that happened, I dare say that every Member of this body, every Member would have recognized that as an attempt to obstruct justice by the President of the United States, and lots of Members certainly would have been calling for impeachment of President Obama for interfering with an ongoing investigation by the FBI.

Well, what is happening now in Congress?

Well, lots of our colleagues are murmuring a defense of President Trump saying: Well, it doesn't look good and maybe he shouldn't have done it, but he is new to government. Trump is new to Washington. He is not schooled in the ways of Washington, it is being said. He is actually a breath of fresh air that he doesn't know how Washington operates.

I think that that completely confuses the question. Dear colleagues, Madam Speaker, the law against obstruction of justice in the United States, which is a felony criminal offense, 18 U.S.C. 1503, applies against experienced government officials and inexperienced government officials. It applies to all citizens of the United States. It applies to people who have worked in Washington their whole life and people who have worked in Washington for several months. In fact, it applies to people across the country.

It is not a law that applies just in the District of Columbia. It applies in New York. It applies in Mar-a-Lago. It applies in California. It applies everywhere.

No American citizen can interfere with the due administration of justice, whether it is trying to persuade a juror to do a certain thing, whether it is trying to influence a judge in a particular case, or whether it is trying to get a prosecutor to drop an investigation into a particular person or into an entire subject matter.

No one has the right to interfere with the due administration of justice in America. That is both a criminal statutory principle in 18 U.S. Code. It is also a constitutional principle, which is well recognized because democracy, our constitutional democracy, depends upon the rule of law; and there is no rule of law if there is no evenhandedness and no impartiality in the administration of justice. No one has the right to interfere with justice.

Now what should be done about this?

Nobody quite knows what to do at this point. We do have a special counsel, Mr. Mueller, who has been appointed, and that is good, but what he is looking for is counterintelligence information, and he is looking for possible criminal activity.

But if we take a step back, what is all of this really about?

I was very pleased that former Director Comey talked about this in his testimony today. What this is about was a concerted, deliberate, comprehensive effort, orchestrated from the very top of the Russian Government, to interfere with the U.S. election. That is

something now that former FBI Director Comey has spoken about publicly, and it is something that 18 of our intelligence agencies have reported to Congress and the American people in a public report with a high degree of certainty that there was an orchestrated campaign to undermine and subvert our campaign, starting at the highest levels of the Russian Government. That took place, okay?

So the criminal or counterintelligence investigation doesn't go to the question that has got to concern us in Congress, which is the threat to our democratic form of government. As FBI Director Comey restated today, 2016 could just be a dress rehearsal for what is coming at us in 2018 and 2020. The intelligence agencies said that they would try to do it again.

Russia is no match for the military might of the United States of America. Russia is no match for the economic might of the United States of America. Russia's autocratic, kleptocratic, dictatorial-style government is no match for the constitutional democracy that we have built up in the United States of America. But the Russians have figured out a way to use the internet to try to penetrate the democracies of the world on the cheap. It is not that expensive to have paid trolls to orchestrate fake news and propaganda and to try to distort the electoral process in the United States of America—or in the Netherlands, or in France, or in other countries around the world.

Now, we don't have all of the facts. That is why what we need is an independent, outside investigation by a commission that we set up outside of Congress—no Democratic Members of Congress, no Republican Members of Congress, no elected officials. What we will put on there are statesmen and stateswomen who are experienced in questions of democracy and foreign policy, who are trusted, and we will ask them to give us the kind of report that the 9/11 Commission gave to us but about what happened in the 2016 election and how do we prepare to stop it from happening again to us in the future.

Now, notice that you can support this, and I think you should support this, whether or not there was any collusion by anybody within the Trump administration. You can be completely convinced that there was collusion between particular members of the Trump administration or Trump campaign and Russia or you could be completely convinced that there was no collusion at all, that they knew nothing about those efforts. It doesn't make any difference. There was still a massive assault on American democracy, and we have got to respond to it.

That is why I think the pathway forward for us now is for both sides in Congress, both parties, to come together and to act in a patriotic way, not in a partisan way, to say let's create an objective, disinterested, outside commission to get to the bottom of

what happened to us in this election. And we will let, for the time being, the Department of Justice and Special Counselor Mueller deal with the question of criminal culpability and criminal deeds, but that is of less importance, in truth, than the integrity of our political institution and the future of American democracy.

There is the question which remains unresolved and, at this point, still relatively untouched, about what is so special about Michael Flynn.

We have a President who is unafraid to offend anybody. He told our best allies in the world in NATO that NATO is obsolete. I think he has changed course on that, but he was very willing to basically wave off the importance of NATO.

He was willing to tell one of our biggest trade partners in the world, Mexico, that he was going to force them to build a wall on the border, force them to pay for it. And again, I think he seems to have backtracked from that. I don't know where he stands on that now.

He was willing to insult and affront the Government of Australia, which has been a great ally of America.

He had a TV show called "You're Fired," so he is not afraid of offending people, and we see him offend people all of the time and pick fights with people all of the time. He picked a fight with Meryl Streep. He is willing to tweet at anybody.

But suddenly, with Michael Flynn, this disgraced National Security Advisor whom he fired, President Trump goes to great lengths to try to interfere in an ongoing investigation which I think everybody can recognize is obstruction or attempted an obstruction of justice. He interferes with the FBI Director in a really astonishing and unprecedented way to try to get Flynn carved out of the investigation.

Why? What does Flynn know? What is the nature of their relationship such that the President goes to such extraordinary lengths to carve him out from the investigation?

That is something that we are going to need to get to the bottom of because democracies operate on the truth. Truth is built into our system. That is why we have judges and we have juries. That is why we have due process. That is why we have congressional oversight over the President of the United States. That is why all of us in public service swear an oath to the Constitution. The truth means something in a democracy, so we are going to have to get to the bottom of that.

But, in the meantime, Congress can act effectively and in a unified way. And I was encouraged by what both Republican and Democratic Senators on the Senate committee today were saying, which is that everybody agreed, or at least a lot of them agreed, that there had been this unacceptable assault on the electoral institution of our political democracy in 2016, and we have got to prevent it from happening again.

We need to have a bipartisan, or non-partisan, independent commission outside of Congress to study exactly what happened and to report back to us about what we need to do to build up our defenses so our democracy is as strong as our economy and as our military. So our democratic institutions need to be fortified against subversion, against hacking, against cyber propaganda and fake news and so on.

Madam Speaker, I am going to call up and invite the very distinguished Congresswoman from Seattle, Washington, PRAMILA JAYAPAL, who has been a terrific leader for human rights and for democracy in the U.S. House of Representatives since her arrival in January.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1800

FORMER FBI DIRECTOR COMEY'S TESTIMONY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HOLLINGSWORTH). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, I thank Representative RASKIN for his leadership in the House. It has been a great honor to co-chair the CPC Special Order hour here every week on the floor.

Since I have just been elected the first vice chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, I, unfortunately, won't be continuing to do that. But I am still going to be right here for these Special Order hours, because I do think that they are an important opportunity for Members to talk about issues all at once, and to kind of pick an issue, and then to focus on it.

Obviously, today, we are talking about the testimony from former FBI Director James Comey. This was highly anticipated testimony, and I would be willing to guess that a lot more people, perhaps, even watched the testimony than watched the inauguration. But I think we learned a great deal from former Director Comey. I appreciate that he was willing to come and testify, and he said some very important things.

In that testimony, Mr. Comey confirmed that President Trump sought to influence the FBI investigation into his campaign's ties to Russia, including that of Michael Flynn.

While the President had claimed that he did not ask former Director Comey to drop the investigation, Mr. Comey actually testified under oath that Trump's directive was clear, and that this was apparently so off-putting that he began to memorialize their meetings. Every single meeting he had with President Trump, he would have the meeting and then go back to the car and immediately take notes on the meeting, and that is troubling.

That was something that former Director Comey never did with previous administrations. And one of the things that stuck out to me in his testimony is that he had actually asked—he felt so uncomfortable with the interactions that he was having with the President, because I think the American people need to understand, the FBI is built to be an independent organization.

The reason that the term of the FBI Director is 10 years is because it was a signal from Congress that even though the FBI Director does serve at the pleasure of the President—and Mr. Comey was clear about that in his testimony today—the President has the ability to hire and fire the FBI Director.

But the reason Congress signaled through legislation that the term of the FBI Director should be 10 years was because they wanted to send a signal that this body is incredibly important, and the independence of this body is incredibly important.

The fact that Mr. Comey, as FBI Director, felt so uncomfortable about these interactions with the President—nine interactions with the President. I think he had only two interactions with President Obama during his entire term, and yet, in just the first few months, he had nine interactions with President Trump. He actually asked Attorney General Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein not to leave him alone with the President.

That is really a remarkable, scary thing that he would have to ask for that, and it certainly should have raised some red flags and should have triggered some action from the Attorney General, or the Deputy Attorney General. It did not. He never received an answer to that.

Mr. Comey also said that he expects the special counsel's investigation to look into the possibility that Trump's actions were an obstruction of justice. He said that this did fall within the investigation scope. So while he didn't directly say that Trump was directly under investigation, he did say that the President's behavior does fall within the investigation's scope.

That, frankly, does nothing to dispel any concerns that are out there amongst the American people, and many of us in Congress, that President Trump's campaign did not collude with Russia.

Apparently, he did not seem particularly concerned about whether or not Russia did interfere in the elections but was more interested in whether or not his circle of friends, Michael Flynn, was under threat.

Former Director Comey also confirmed that Michael Flynn is under criminal investigation, and he raised more questions about Attorney General Jeff Sessions. As I have spoken about on the floor before, Attorney General Sessions should not have been involved in the firing of James Comey in the first place.

He had recused himself from all things related to the investigation into

the campaign's ties to Russia because of his involvement with the Trump campaign, and so that was good. We thought that was a very good move that he made to recuse himself, but then he immediately went and was directly involved in the decisionmaking around the person who was leading the investigation, in fact, involved in the decision to fire the person who was leading the investigation.

Mr. Comey also hinted that Jeff Sessions had more contact with the Russians than maybe we even knew about. He could not speak to that in a public setting. He said that is for a classified setting, but, obviously, that raises a lot more questions, and the American people certainly deserve the truth.

One of the biggest takeaways from the testimony was this: President Trump gave many changing reasons as to why former Director Comey was fired. And former Director Comey spoke to this today. He said, at first, it was because it was the handling—it was because of Comey's handling of the Clinton emails. Then it was that he had lost the support of the FBI agents, something that James Comey responded to, and said: "Those were lies, plain and simple."

Actually, Mr. Comey spent quite some time really acknowledging the work of the organization, the FBI organization, and the agents, and everything that he has done. I certainly got the impression that he felt very deeply upset by any indication that perhaps it was because his agents didn't want him to be there.

What Mr. Comey pointed to is that eventually the President, in his own words, admitted that he fired James Comey over the Russian investigation, and then, right after that, actually said to the Russians that the pressure has now been taken off now that Comey has been fired. Those are all incredibly disturbing.

And I am sad, Mr. Speaker, that the Republicans—some Republican colleagues, not all, but some—have tried to dismiss the President's actions as "mistakes made by a new President who is learning how to do his job." Speaker PAUL RYAN went so far as to say: "He is new at government. Therefore, I think he is learning as he goes."

This is just 1 day after the Speaker said that it is obviously—that was his word—not appropriate for the President to ask for Mr. Comey's loyalty. So which one is it, Mr. Speaker? It is unacceptable to excuse the President's actions simply because he is not a career professional, especially when we are talking about something of this magnitude—the magnitude of interference in our election process in the United States of America by a foreign government.

We do not have any information still about all of the ways in which a President of the United States, this President of the United States, may be indebted to some foreign government because of their actions with the election.