AUTHENTICATED U.S. GOVERNMENT INFORMATION GPO

United States of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 115th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 163 WASHINGTON, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2017 No. 25

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, who sends showers to soften the Earth, You are the source of life and joy. You have challenged us to number our days, not our weeks, months, or years. Give us wisdom to comprehend the brevity and uncertainty of our life's journey. Forgive us when we boast about tomorrow, forgetting that our times are in Your hands.

Today, bless our lawmakers and their staffs. Remind them that they belong to You and that You will order their steps. As they wrestle with complex issues, help them seek Your wisdom and guidance. Lord, empower them as stewards of Your bounty, making them faithful in the vocation to which You have called them.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

> I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the nomination of Steven T. Mnuchin, of California, to be Secretary of the Treasury, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Steven T. Mnuchin, of California, to be Secretary of the Treasury.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I yield my postcloture debate time to Senator WYDEN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Ms. HASSAN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, candidate Trump ran a populist campaign that promised so much to working America. Many of those themes were actually echoed in his inaugural address, but ever since President Trump took the oath of office, he has gone about breaking promise after promise to the working people of this country.

A predictable pattern is beginning to emerge. This President uses populist rhetoric to cover up a hard-right agenda. We still hear the remnants of candidate Trump's populism in his speeches, but his actions as President don't match up. Just an hour after he had delivered populist words on the steps of the Capitol in his inaugural address, the President signed an Executive order—his first, I believe—that jacked up the price on Americans trying to afford a mortgage.

Ever since, we here in the Senate have been working through the President's Cabinet, which is filled not with champions of the working class, not with people who came from the working class but with a slew of superrich nominees, Washington insiders, and corporate types who have spent their whole careers sticking it to the working man.

A President's Cabinet provides insight into how they will govern and what their priorities will be. The President has shown his hand by selecting the most anti-working class Cabinet we have ever seen.

The slate of nominees we will soon consider, including Steve Mnuchin for Treasury, Andrew Pudzer for Labor, and RICK MULVANEY for OMB, show the yawning gap between the President's audacious promises to working America and the practical reality of his administration, which is steadily stacking the deck against them.

This evening we will debate the nomination of Steve Mnuchin for Treasury, a Cabinet post that will have oversight over Wall Street.

Candidate Trump spent the campaign lambasting elites and criticizing Wall Street. He said:

> I'm not going to let Wall Street get away with murder. Wall Street has caused tremendous problems for us.

Those are his words, but what does President Trump do? With one of his first Executive orders, he started the process to try to roll back Wall Street reform, undoing protections we put in place after the financial crisis to prevent another one from occurring. He wants to eviscerate the one agency that sticks up for consumers when they are being ripped off by payday lenders or debt collectors—the CFPB. That is a broken promise.

Candidate Trump said at his rallies: ''When you cast that ballot, just picture a Wall Street board room filled with the special interests . . . and imagine the look on their faces when you tell . . . them: 'You're fired!' ''

But President Trump told Steve Mnuchin, a Wall Street insider with

● This ''bullet'' symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

decades of experience in that board room he described, ''You're hired,'' as his Treasury Secretary, no less. That is a broken promise.

A President who is a true champion for working America would never consider unwinding protections that were designed to make our financial system more secure and protect hard-working Americans from the risky practices too often seen on Wall Street.

For the Secretary of Labor, the President picked Andrew Puzder, a man who once said he prefers robots to human employees because, in his words, they are always polite, they always upsell, they never take a vacation, they never show up late, there is never a slip and fall, or an age, sex, or race discrimination case.

Secretary Nominee Puzder, the guy who is supposed to be protecting laborers—working people—actually said that.

I want to read it again. It galls me that this man is nominated for Labor Secretary. Why does he prefer robots to human employees? Secretary Puzder: They are always polite, they always upsell, they never take a vacation, they never show up late, there is never a slip and fall, or an age, sex, or race discrimination case.

This is a man who has such disdain for workers that he said the minimum wage is a big mistake, and while at CKE Restaurants, his company, he continually outsourced American jobs.

A President who is a true champion of working America would never even consider selecting a nominee like Andrew Puzder to run the Labor Department. It is another broken promise to the working men and women of America. Amazing.

What President Trump did during the campaign and said during the campaign and in his inaugural address is almost the exact opposite of what he is doing now. You could not find a more anti-labor nominee for Labor Secretary than Mr. Puzder.

Now, what about OMB? The President selected Representative MIKE MULVANEY, whose congressional career is a direct rebuke to key promises Candidate Trump made to working America. Candidate Trump promised that he was ''not going to cut Social Security like every other Republican and I'm not going to cut Medicare or Medicaid.''

That is a quote from Candidate Trump.

But who does he choose for OMB? A pick who has relentlessly argued to cut both of these programs, including bill after bill that would end both Medicare and Social Security as we know it.

Our new Health and Human Services Secretary—who, unfortunately, passed this Chamber because our Republican colleagues are just marching in lockstep to the President—is in exactly the same vein.

A true champion of senior citizens, of the working man and woman, wouldn't hire someone like Representative MULVANEY or Representative Price to take an ax to the programs they have relied on for generations.

Just 3 weeks in, the administration is stretching the boundaries of cognitive dissonance. The President still speaks like a populist but governs like a hard-right conservative. He promises to stick up for working families, but every decision he has made is rigging the system further against them.

Every American who works hard for their paycheck, who desperately deserves fairer overtime pay, who is counting on Social Security and Medicare to be there when they retire should look at this Cabinet and be very worried.

I know many working people voted for President Trump in hopes that they would change the power structure in Washington, as he promised so many times. His Cabinet is the first way to see if he really meant it. His Cabinet is the first way to measure: Is President Trump measuring up in his Presidency to what he promised in his campaign?

It turns out President Trump was using populist rhetoric to cover up a hard-right agenda, which will be carried out by this bevy of billionaires and bankers and hard-right idealogues—broken promise after broken promise.

Candidate Trump said that Washington was a place where ''the hedge fund managers, the Wall Street investors . . . and the powerful [protect] the powerful.''

''But I'm fighting for you,'' he said to working Americans.

If these first 3 weeks are any indication, that is a broken promise.

The nominations of Steve Mnuchin, Representative MULVANEY, and Andrew Puzder represent broken promise after broken promise after broken promise. We Democrats, over the next several weeks, will make clear to the American people, as we continue to debate these nominations, that what President Trump said on the campaign trail is not what he is doing as President. He is breaking his promises to the working people of America.

Many working people who voted for Mr. Trump are depending on him to do what he said in the campaign. Reading the tea leaves of the first 3 weeks, working Americans are going to be deeply, deeply disappointed over the course of his Presidency.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, when you serve as the Secretary of Treasury, you are charged with a variety of responsibilities, and right at the center of your duties is to address taxes. This is an area that the nominee to head the Treasury Department, Mr. Steven Mnuchin, waded into very early on after his nomination became public.

News leaked on November 29 of last year that Mr. Mnuchin was the President-elect's choice for Secretary of the Treasury. The very next day, Mr. Mnuchin appeared on a CNBC program and confirmed his selection. During an extended interview with CNBC, he introduced what I have come to call the Mnuchin rule. I will quote Mr. Mnuchin directly with respect to what he said: ''Any reductions we have in upper income taxes would be offset by less deductions, so there would be no absolute tax cut for the upper class.''

I will repeat that last part of the Mnuchin rule: ''no absolute tax cut for the upper class.''

Mr. Mnuchin is the President's nominee for Treasury Secretary. This is a position that has been held by American economic giants like Alexander Hamilton, Albert Gallatin, Salmon Chase, Henry Morgenthau and Lloyd Bentsen. When a nominee for Treasury Secretary makes a pledge like Mr. Mnuchin's, it really ought to mean something. It ought to stand for something.

Unfortunately, it already looks as though the Mnuchin rule is on the ropes. The very first act of the 115th Congress and a unified Republican government, repealing the Affordable Care Act, shatters the Mnuchin rule.

The Affordable Care Act repeal scheme that Republicans kicked off months ago, in my view, is a Trojan horse of tax breaks for the most fortunate. Nobody outside the top 4 or 5 percent of earners would get any of that break. Most of it would go to households in the top 1 percent of earners—even then, the top one-tenth of 1 percent—and it is paid for by taking insurance coverage and tax cuts for health care literally out of the hands of millions of working people.

Then it is back for another whack at the Mnuchin rule later this year. Last week, the New York Times published a story talking about Mr. Mnuchin, which said that ''his guarantee appears impossible to fulfill either under the tax overhaul that the House Republicans are pushing or similar, sketchier proposals that Mr. Trump has offered.''

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the article titled ''Treasury Nominee Vows No Tax Cut for Rich. Math Says the Opposite.''

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

[Feb. 9, 2017]

TREASURY NOMINEE VOWS NO TAX CUT FOR RICH. MATH SAYS THE OPPOSITE.

(By Patricia Cohen)

The newly christened ''Mnuchin rule''—the assurance given by the Treasury nominee Steven T. Mnuchin that ''there would be no absolute tax cut for the upper class''—seems as if it was made to be broken.

Mr. Mnuchin initially made the statement during an interview on CNBC in November, after President Trump chose him for the cabinet. At Mr. Mnuchin's confirmation hearing, Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, rebranded the comment as a "rule," transforming a throwaway line into a formal pledge.

Whether it will be kept may become clearer in two or three weeks—the timing Mr. Trump mentioned Thursday for delivering a "phenomenal" tax plan.

Although Mr. Mnuchin said any rate reductions at the top would be offset by the closing of fat loopholes, his guarantee appears impossible to fulfill either under the tax overhaul that the House Republicans are pushing or similar, sketchier proposals that Mr. Trump has offered.

Redesigning the tax code with an eye fixed on lower rates has been a Republican mission for decades, and one that Mr. Trump adopted. That prospect, combined with a promised regulatory retreat, has pumped up the stock market and fueled optimism among business leaders.

At the same time, the president has raised expectations among his working-class supporters that "the rich will pay their fair share," and that "special-interest loopholes that have been so good for Wall Street investors, and for people like me, but unfair to American workers" will be eliminated. Mr. Mnuchin, soon to be one of the administration's top economic policy officials, promised "a big tax cut for the middle class."

Yet analyses of the president's and the House Republicans' plans consistently conclude that the wealthy will receive the largest tax cuts by far.

Start with the House blueprint, which at the moment is the closest thing to a working draft that exists. The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, a joint project of the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution, found "high-income taxpayers would receive the biggest cuts, both in dollar terms and as a percentage of income."

How big? "Three-quarters of the tax cuts would benefit the top 1 percent of taxpayers," if the plan were put into effect this year, it said. The highest-income households—the top 0.1 percent—would get "an average tax cut of about $1.3 million, 16.9 percent of after-tax income."

Those in the middle fifth of incomes would get a tax cut of almost $260, or 0.5 percent, while the poorest would get about $50.

That split would worsen down the road, the Tax Policy Center says: "In 2025 the top 1 percent of households would receive nearly 100 percent of the total tax reduction."

Those wary of any potential liberal bias could turn to the conservative-leaning Tax Foundation. Its analysis found a smaller gap between the wealthy and everyone else, but a gap nonetheless. The foundation concluded that four out of five taxpayers would see only a 0.2 to 0.5 percent increase in after-tax income, while those in the top 1 percent of the income scale would save at least 10 times as much, or 5.3 percent. That's nearly $40,000 extra for those at the top, compared to $67 for those smack dab in the middle of the income scale.

"The Mnuchin rule is already being broken as Republicans look to strip away hundreds of billions of dollars in Affordable Care Act tax credits for working Americans to pay for a giant tax break for the wealthy," Senator Wyden said. "Bottom line is it's unfair to cut benefits that the middle class depends on, all so the wealthy pay a lower rate."

Mr. Mnuchin did not respond to a request for comment.

Republicans argue their plan makes everyone a winner—that lower taxes will unleash an enormous swell of economic growth, raising wages, incomes and tax revenue all around.

The historical record does not offer much support for the claim that slashing taxes for the most affluent creates growth. Yet even assuming the rosiest of forecasts, the top 1 percent, according to the Tax Foundation, would still receive close to a $100,000 tax cut—32 times as much as a middle-income family.

Mr. Mnuchin has offered his own formula for adhering to the standard he laid down, explaining that "any reductions we have in upper-income taxes would be offset by less deductions."

That would require some otherworldly mathematical magic, however.

Consider the list of proposals that would reduce taxes on the rich:

Cut the top income to 33 percent, from 39.6 percent.

Cut taxes on capital gains, 70 percent of which flow to the top 1 percent.

Eliminate the estate tax, which applies to a tiny number of people, couples that have estates bigger than $10.8 million.

Eliminate the 3.8 percent surtax on high earners' investment income that has been used to subsidize health care for poorer Americans.

End the alternative minimum tax, which currently limits deductions for high earners.

Lower taxes on cash flow and income that passes from small businesses to their owners, which also primarily benefits wealthier Americans.

Now, what deductions could be eliminated that would offset all those cuts at the top? There aren't many, said Alan Viard, an economist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. If Republicans insist on lowering taxes on top wages, capital gains, estates and cash-flow and pass-through income as advertised, "there's not a lot of latitude to limit itemized deductions further," Mr. Viard said.

Any plan to curb itemized deductions would be partly offset by Mr. Trump's plan to increase the standard deduction. Curtailing mortgage deductions for the most expensive homes is probably a good idea, Mr. Viard said, but that isn't going to do much to raise revenue from those at the top of the income pyramid, and the deduction is already roughly limited to the interest paid on $1 million in mortgage debt.

Such alternative ideas, however, assume that the Mnuchin rule will have a meaningful impact on what the White House will propose or Congress will debate. Not everyone is convinced that it will. As Mr. Viard said, "I don't know how much interest there is in fulfilling that statement by Mnuchin, however it's interpreted."

Mr. WYDEN. After breaking the Mnuchin rule once, the majority is now planning to fast-track a second tax break for the wealthy. This one will be even larger; in fact, it could be 10 times bigger or more. My guess is that a lot of Americans are wondering what has happened to all the campaign talk about fixing the Tax Code and really going out there and standing up for the working people. As the Republican nominee, the President said he was the guy to repair the country's broken tax system. The particulars of the Trump plan were buried deep in the business pages and on his Web site, but the broad strokes of the message were pitched in rallies across the Nation: Donald Trump alone knew how to do the job because he had taken advantage of the rules himself, and he was ready to crack down on those who weren't paying their fair share.

One of the few specifics Donald Trump offered on the stump was that he would close the carried interest loophole. That, of course, has been a favorite of investment fund managers. It would be great if it were actually true. In reality, the promise turned out to be pretty much just a head fake. Rather than closing the loophole and asking investment fund managers to pay their fair share, the Trump plan actually gives them a 25-percent tax cut. In fact, the Trump plan slashes tax rates for corporations and the wealthy across the board at a cost of trillions of dollars.

The President and Mr. Mnuchin might defend this plan by claiming it is a tax cut for the middle class, so I want to spend just a few minutes checking in with that part of the plan. If we read the fine print, we will notice that one of the Trump tax plan's big casualties is something called head of household status. That is a particularly important benefit for a lot of middle-income taxpayers because it reduces their bills. What would it mean for head of household status to go away? Millions of working Americans, mostly single parents, would get hit with tax increases.

Furthermore, the Trump plan eliminates key personal exemptions for millions of other middle-income families. It pushes a lot of families into higher tax brackets than they are in today. The administration touts its proposals for a larger standard deduction and a new child care tax credit as the cure-all for its tax increases on the middle class and on working people, but the math just doesn't add up. Families who are struggling to get ahead today are going to pay higher taxes tomorrow.

So let's recap the Trump tax plan: a multitrillion-dollar tax break for the wealthy and corporations and a gut punch of higher taxes for working families.

At this point, it would be generous to say that the Mnuchin rule is now on life support. If we wanted to design a tax plan to push more Americans out of the economic winners circle, the Trump plan is what you would come up with. When I look at the Trump tax plan that Mr. Mnuchin would be in charge of spearheading, it looks to me as though the administration has zero interest in cleaning out the rot that is right at the heart of America's tax system.

Here is what it is all about, in my view. The Tax Code today is a tale of two systems. If you are a wage earner—a welder in Portland or a nurse in Louisiana—your taxes come straight out of your paycheck. They are compulsory—no special deals. You can even see the numbers right on your pay stub. Once or twice a month, out it comes. There are no special tax-dodging strategies or loopholes to winnow down the tax bill for the welder in Portland or the nurse in Louisiana. You can't set up a John Doe, Inc., in a Cayman Islands P.O. box to shield your income from taxes.

But the rules are different for the powerful and the well connected. At their disposal are huge armies of lawyers and accountants who specialize in tax games. They specialize in tax tricks. With the right advice, the most fortunate individuals and corporations in the country can decide how much tax to pay and when to pay it. If anybody wonders why people in America feel the tax system is rigged and the rules are stacked against them, this is a big part of the answer. I intend to talk more about that, but I want to come back to highlight the difference between the welder in Portland and the nurse in Louisiana.

When those hard-working Americans are out there working for a wage and once or twice a month have their taxes taken right out of their paycheck, they know they aren't getting anything special. It is compulsory. It is mandatory. They see it on their paychecks. Yet they get lots of news coverage and articles and the like, and they will see that for those who are fortunate, instead of paying taxes in a mandatory and compulsory way, they pretty much get to decide what they are going to pay, when they are going to pay it, and maybe nothing at all. It seems to me that as we look at the nominee for Treasury Secretary, we get a pretty good example of how it does play out in terms of taxes for those fortunate few and how his taxes stand in sharp contrast to that welder in Portland or that nurse in Louisiana.

Not long after ending a 17-year run at Goldman Sachs, Mr. Mnuchin opened a hedge fund called Dune Capital in 2004. He set up an outpost in Anguilla and the Cayman Islands. That is not a move you make for the infrastructure or the ease of the commute. It is about a zero-percent tax rate.

During Mr. Mnuchin's hearing, he claimed that having those overseas funds benefited American nonprofits. When he testified in front of the Finance Committee, he said: You know, the main thing we are doing with these overseas funds is we are helping churches and pension funds. But documents from the Securities and Exchange Commission show something quite different. In some cases, 100 percent of his investors were from outside of the United States, and setting up overseas allowed Mr. Mnuchin to help them avoid paying taxes. What was the end effect? Dune Capital was heavily invested in movies. So millions of dollars in profits from Hollywood exports, like the movie ''Avatar,'' were funneled to an offshore web of entities and investors, giving him the chance to skirt a U.S. tax bill.

At a more recent point in his career, Mr. Mnuchin's bank was up for a merger. The deal had the potential to be a personal windfall for him and a small circle of others. A foundation Mr. Mnuchin chaired reportedly used tax-exempt dollars to fund a write-in campaign pushing for the deal's approval. During the public comment period on a potential merger, this is pretty much the equivalent of stuffing the ballot box.

Now, as a nominee for a Cabinet position, Mr. Mnuchin could be in line for a special elective Federal tax deferral on money made by selling stocks and bonds. That is the very definition of getting to pay what you want, when you want. We hear a frequent and common defense when these kinds of tax tricks are brought into public view. It is true that the people who use them are following the laws on the books, but the outrage in our tax system, as I have said on this Senate floor, is what is legal. That is the real outrage with the American tax system, and it is outrageous that the Senate has allowed obvious gamesmanship to stay legal. It is outrageous that the administration and its chosen nominee for Treasury have shown no interest in changing it.

When you are the Treasury Secretary, one of your paramount obligations is overseeing taxes. The last time the United States overhauled its Tax Code—this was in 1986—the Reagan Treasury Department played a huge role in that effort, and one of the core principles of that reform was treating wages and wealth the same way. Democrats and Republicans came together to pass a tax reform bill based on fairness. It said that the wage earner—that nurse in Louisiana or welder in Portland—their income and the income of those who made their money in finance and on Wall Street and the like would be treated the same. I see no indication that this administration is prepared to repeat that formula.

The campaign promise to fix the broken, dysfunctional Tax Code—Donald Trump's campaign promise—lured in a lot of voters. When I heard that Mnuchin rule the first time, I said that sounds pretty good—no net tax break for those who are the most fortunate. That sounds pretty appealing. The tax plans that the administration and Republicans in Congress have on offer now will not undo the disgusting unfairness that is right at the heart of the American Tax Code. In fact, it is only going to get worse.

This issue has to be at the center of the debate on Mr. Mnuchin's nomination. I am particularly troubled by the fact that the evidence shows that the Mnuchin rule is already on the ropes.

I intend to oppose this nominee. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF DAVID SHULKIN

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise to express my strong support for the nomination of Dr. David Shulkin to be the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I believe his impressive record of service in both the public and private health care sectors as well as his firm grasp of VA health care issues make him extraordinarily well qualified to lead the Department through the coming period of major reforms and continuing transformation.

Dr. Shulkin has served in numerous executive roles at hospitals across the country, including Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, the University of Pennsylvania Health System, and the Atlantic Rehabilitation Institute. In fact, he has been named one of the top 100 Physician Leaders of Hospitals and Health Systems and one of the 50 Most Influential Physician Executives in the country.

In 2015, Dr. Shulkin brought his extensive experience in the private sector to the Department of Veterans Affairs and served as the VA Under Secretary for Health. Last year, I had the opportunity to host Dr. Shulkin in my hometown of Caribou, ME, as he toured the community-based outpatient clinic and our local hospital, Cary Medical Center, to see the innovative work being done there to provide veterans with top-quality health care closer to where they live.

Cary Medical Center partners with the VA through the Access Received Closer to Home or ARCH Program to provide veterans in Northern Maine with high-quality care, including specialty care close to home and close to their families, rather than forcing them to drive 250 or more miles to receive their care at the Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta, the location of Maine's only VA hospital.

This partnership between Cary Medical Center and the VA has been a huge success, with an approval rating from our veterans exceeding 90 percent. Last spring, when we were faced with the potential expiration of the ARCH Program, Dr. Shulkin, at my invitation, came to Maine and announced his commitment to ensure that veterans using this innovative program in our State would maintain seamless community care. He has kept his word.

During his visit to Maine, Dr. Shulkin also toured the Togus VA Medical Center, the oldest VA facility in the Nation and the community-based outpatient clinic in Bangor. I would note that he drove the 4 hours from Augusta, where the VA hospital is located, to Caribou to get a better sense of the distances in our State. Right now, when we are in the midst of a fierce blizzard, you can imagine how important it is for veterans in need of care to be able to access that care close to home in an emergency.

I was truly impressed, and remain truly impressed, with Dr. Shulkin's understanding of the needs of rural veterans and the challenges of providing health care in rural settings. While in Maine, Dr. Shulkin listened to veterans health care providers, VSO advocates, and the VA staff alike to ensure that our veterans received the care they