

that, just as I do. As Senators, every one of us should. Certainly every one of us who has had the privilege to be a prosecutor should have a commitment to the rule of law. Well, Attorney General Sessions' commitment is now being tested.

Whether we apply the Justice Department's recusal standard, which is very, very clear, or use the Jeff Sessions' 39-minute recusal standard, it is clear that Attorney General Sessions must step aside. In fact, nothing less than the integrity of our democracy is at stake with this investigation. And I do not say that lightly. Nothing less than the integrity of our democracy is at stake with this investigation. What did everybody know? When did they know it?

It is essential that the investigation be led by someone who—in both appearance and in reality—is impartial and removed from politics. That does not describe someone who was in the trenches of a political campaign with the subjects of the investigation while they were allegedly engaged in the activity under investigation, or somebody who has been described by Steve Bannon as a “clearinghouse for policy and philosophy” for President Trump.

For the good of the country, for the good of all of us—Republicans, Democrats, Independents—the Attorney General really has just one thing to do: Appoint a special counsel and let the public have the answers. What did everybody know? When did they know it? It is pretty simple. The people of Vermont, and I suspect throughout the country, would like to have those answers that go to the bedrock of our democracy.

In my 42 years here, I have never seen anything that has concerned me so much as another country that does not have the best interests of the United States at heart trying to interfere in our election, another country trying to determine what the United States does. This is a country that does not have the United States' best interests at heart but a country that wants to manipulate the United States. This U.S. Senator, for the time I have in office, will continue to speak out against it.

Mr. DURBIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. LEAHY. Yes, of course, I will yield to the distinguished Senator.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank my colleague from the State of Vermont and, for many years, my fellow colleague on the Senate Judiciary Committee for his statement. I couldn't agree with him more that we need an independent, transparent investigation of this Russian invasion into the body politic of America in an effort to subvert our sovereignty. It was made by a country that is not our friend and was made at a time when they were trying to influence the outcome of an election.

I just want to note to my colleague and friend from Vermont that during the break I visited Poland, Lithuania,

and Ukraine. It was interesting. In Poland, they put up with the notion of Putin's interference on a daily basis. The most frightening prospect, of course, is the movement of military forces, which we hope never occurs, but they look at it as a very real threat. They have what they call the hybrid war. They said it isn't just the military; it is also his cyber attacks on our country, and it is also his propaganda on our country.

One of the Polish leaders asked me a question: We have been wondering, Senator, if the United States is not willing to confront Russia with its invasion of your sovereignty in your Presidential election, would you be willing to stand up for your NATO allies if there is an effort of aggression by Putin? Would you be willing to stand up against Russia in those times?

I think that is a legitimate issue. If we don't take what the Senator has raised very seriously about putting independence in the investigation of this matter, and we don't do it with dispatch, shame on us. But it is also going to say to the world that we did not respond in a positive and forceful way when it came to this aggression against the United States.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, if I might respond to my good friend and senior Senator from Illinois, he has been a friend and colleague for decades. The Judiciary Committee and the whole Senate has benefited from his knowledge.

What the leader of Poland said to the distinguished Senator is a very chilling thing, Madam President. He knows from his own family ancestors how bad an area can be if it is under the domination of something like the then-Soviet Union and now Russia. He also knows from his own experience as an American how important it is that we have the freedoms we have.

I was privileged, along with my wife Marcelle and several others—Senator COCHRAN, Senator UDALL, and Senator BENNET and Congressman MCGOVERN—to visit Cuba and have long discussions with people who would like to see real democracy come, and then to go to Colombia where they have fought for over 50 years a terrible internal civil war with countless deaths and atrocities and to see how they were trying to bring back the rule of law and the rule of democracy. And we just sit there, and it is so easy for us who grew up in an era in which we believe in our democracy and we believe in our voices being heard, where sometimes we win elections and sometimes we lose them, but we believe in the fairness of it. It is so easy to sit there and think: But we do it right.

This makes me wonder. Can we continue to say that? Can we be the beacon to the rest of the world? Can we say: Do as the United States does because we are open, we are transparent, we are honest.

Well, this has not been open, transparent, or honest. Let's make it so.

Let's not let it drag on. Let's go to it now so people can then start debating issues. I expect there will be areas where I will agree with the new administration and there are areas where I disagree with the new administration. But I want to know I am agreeing and disagreeing with an American administration, not with Vladimir Putin's administration.

So I am moved by what my friend from Illinois has said. I hope the rest of the country listens because we are supposed to be the example. We pride ourselves on being the example. We are the oldest existing democracy in the world. Let's not do anything that will come back to haunt us.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF RYAN ZINKE

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I am very pleased to see the majority of the Senate move forward and vote on the nomination of a fellow westerner, Montana's Congressman, and the next Secretary of the Interior, RYAN ZINKE. I appreciate RYAN's willingness to serve in this very important post. The Department of the Interior is vital to Montana's economy, and I am glad to see someone from the West selected to lead it.

The job of the Interior Secretary is critically important, especially today as America's public lands come under attack by way too many folks who want to see them transferred to the States or outright sold off. Selling them off to the States is the first step in selling our public lands to the highest bidder, and we can't let that happen.

Congressman ZINKE has publicly said that he will not sell off our public lands nor transfer them to the States, and in Montana, your word is your bond. For that, I am pleased to support his nomination.

Congressman ZINKE's to-do list is no doubt long, and I look forward to working with him to check that list off for the people of Montana.

Montana is home to some of the world's most prized public lands, including Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks and the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The fact is, our public lands are huge economic drivers, creating and sustaining more than 64,000 jobs in Montana alone through our outdoor recreation economy and thereby pumping billions of dollars back into our local economies.

That is why, when a foreign mining company threatened the gateway to Yellowstone National Park, I was pleased that Congressman ZINKE expressed interest in joining me and local

businesses and community leaders to protect it. I look forward to working with him to permanently safeguard the doorstep of Yellowstone National Park because Montanans know there are some places more valuable than gold, and Yellowstone is one of those places.

I feel confident that Congressman ZINKE will handle the issues before him with Montana common sense—issues like our national parks, and coming up with a responsible solution to the deferred maintenance backlog that is wreaking havoc on our national park system; the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and how to work with Congress and work in this administration to ensure full and devoted funding to initiatives like LWCF, the visionary Land and Water Conservation Fund; in Indian country, living up to our trust responsibilities that we owe to America's sovereign Indian nations; and in resource development, how to responsibly manage our public lands for energy and resource development, and how to balance that with respect to clean water and clean air and wildlife.

Of course, there are always some issues where Congressman ZINKE and I don't see eye-to-eye, but he has publicly committed to working with Congress to try and address some of the most important issues of this Nation's economy as it applies to our public lands. Montana's economy is no exception, and I will take him at his word.

As a Montanan, I know how important the Department of the Interior is to our way of life, and I am optimistic that Congressman ZINKE will do right by Montana and the country in his new role. Montana will be watching. For that matter, the country will be watching, and I know Congressman ZINKE will make us proud.

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.

Mr. MURPHY. 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. MURPHY. Mr. President, believe it or not, there are some smart people out there in America who are not billionaires. I know it doesn't seem like it as we debate yet another megarich Wall Street titan to head another department in the Federal Government, but billionaires do not actually have a monopoly on wisdom in this country.

But it doesn't seem that this is what our new President thinks. If they all get confirmed, Donald Trump's Cabinet will have a net wealth that is greater than one-third of all Americans. Think about that for a second. The Cabinet of the United States will have a net wealth all together that is greater than one-third of every single American—the poorest third of Americans—if you put them all together.

He has nominated millionaires and billionaires to head the Department of

Education, the Department of Labor, the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Commerce—the nominee we are now debating—and the Department of Health and Human Services. He even nominated two of his rich friends to head the Army and the Navy.

I heard President Trump talk over and over the past 2 years about how he was going to drain the swamp once he got here. As far as I can tell, all he has done thus far is just sell the swamp to his rich friends.

I am not saying that billionaires like Wilbur Ross aren't smart. You have to be pretty savvy in order to make all of that money for yourself or for your investors. There is honor in making money. That is the American dream—to have the opportunity, if you want it, to become very rich, to become very affluent, to create a business that makes you, your family, and maybe those who invested in it very well off. I have a lot of friends who have made a lot of money in and around Wall Street. I don't begrudge the fact that they did it. But making a lot of money for yourself doesn't automatically equate to the ability to run an agency or to run a country.

President Trump made a whole bunch of money for himself, but his first month on the job as President has been a series of not just domestic embarrassments but international embarrassments—writing Executive orders without even checking with the Cabinet to see if what he is doing is legal or illegal; not being able to fill positions in the White House or in Federal agencies—the number of foreign diplomats who tell me they have no idea whom to call right now in the Federal Government is as embarrassing as it is maddening—getting into public spats with even our most reliable allies like Germany and Australia; spending most of his time in pitch battles with the media and his own staff, rather than working with us on trying to solve the problems of this country.

Donald Trump is good at making money for himself, but those skills, as we have found, do not translate very well to running a country. Maybe that is because when the entire focus of your entire life is making as much money as humanly possible for yourself, you cannot pivot on a dime all of a sudden and start putting all of your energy into helping other people. Maybe life doesn't work like that. So that is what really worries me about these billionaire nominees.

A few weeks ago, I was on the floor talking about the now-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. He spent his career at Exxon helping to build a very successful business, but in doing so, he hurt a lot of people. Exxon deals with horrible dictators who used those oil revenues in order to help murder thousands of their people. That was good for business, but it was awful for humanity.

Andy Puzder, who is no longer a nominee for the Department of Labor,

openly mocked his workers. He suggested they just got in the way of the efficient operation of his business, and he pined for the day when robots would replace them.

Now we are debating Wilbur Ross to be Secretary of Commerce. Wilbur Ross made a lot of money for himself, but he has taken advantage of the very bad trade deals that this body has passed in order to offshore thousands of U.S. jobs. One such company that he owned, a textile company, employed 4,700 workers in factories in North Carolina and South Carolina. That was inefficient in Wilbur Ross's desire to make as much money for himself as he could. So he took those 4,700 jobs and he shipped them to Guatemala. He said: This project will benefit from Guatemala's realistic wages.

When Mr. Ross acquired an auto parts factory in Carlisle, PA, a decade ago, in order to make more money for himself, he took a hard line with the workers, demanding cuts in wages and benefits that were worth between 25 and 30 percent of the workers' earnings. That is what he needed to do in order to squeeze as much money out of that company to make himself a few extra million dollars. When the union rejected the demands of Mr. Ross and when the workers rejected those demands, he shut the plant down and moved their work to North Carolina, to Canada, and to Mexico.

Wilbur Ross, Rex Tillerson, Steve Mnuchin, and Andy Puzder spent their entire lives obsessed with making as much money for themselves as possible and not letting anyone's good fortune get in their way. They fired workers, they foreclosed on people's homes, they shipped jobs overseas, and they supported brutal dictators—all of it justifiable as long as it meant they would make more money for themselves and for their investors. How on Earth has that become a qualification to serve the public, to serve at the highest level of the U.S. Government?

I am on the floor today to oppose the nomination of Wilbur Ross to be Secretary of Commerce—not because he didn't do a good job enriching himself through the myriad of businesses that he owned and operated during his time in the private sector but because during that time he trampled on the rights of workers, he offshored jobs, and he eliminated people's livelihoods in order to make more money for himself. All of the things that Candidate Trump talked about taking on were the things that Wilbur Ross was doing as he took advantage of these trade agreements to kill jobs in the United States and offshore them to other places.

President Trump said he was going to fight for the working guy. He isn't. He is doing the exact opposite. He is turning the keys of this government over to his wealthy friends so that they can potentially profit off of taxpayer dollars, so that they can deregulate the industries that, by the way, they are going to return to when their term is

up. They will get richer, just like they have through their entire lives, while the rest of us pay for it.

It is time for us to recognize that billionaires in this country do not have a monopoly on wisdom. Sometimes the very skills that allow you to make a fortune for yourself don't equate to the skills necessary to fight for everybody else through public service. I would urge my colleagues to oppose the nomination of Wilbur Ross to be Secretary of Commerce.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. 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. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise to voice my strong support for the nomination of Wilbur Ross to be Secretary of Commerce. We held a hearing on his nomination on January 18, 2017. Mr. Ross has also completed the required paperwork and responded to all of the committee questions for the record. Five weeks ago, on January 24, the Commerce Committee acted by voice vote to favorably report his nomination to the floor. We invoked cloture on Mr. Ross's nomination by a vote margin of 66 to 31 on February 17, with 15 Democratic Senators voting to invoke cloture.

I am glad the Senate will finally confirm his nomination today after a long and unnecessary delay. When he is confirmed, Mr. Ross will bring decades of business, entrepreneurial, and civic experience to this important position.

Mr. Ross is perhaps best known for his expertise in revitalizing distressed businesses, such as those in the U.S. steel industry. At a time when most investors had abandoned the industry, he organized the International Steel Group in 2002, and through acquisitions, he made it the largest integrated steel company in North America. Later, it merged with Mittal Steel to form the largest steel company in the world. It is for this reason that all of the major steel-industry labor unions also support his confirmation.

I ask unanimous consent that the letter of support for the confirmation of Wilbur Ross from the United Steelworkers, dated January 9, 2017, be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

Mr. Ross's nomination is also supported by a bipartisan group of former Secretaries of Commerce, including Secretary William M. Daley, who served as Commerce Secretary under President Clinton, and later as Chief of Staff to President Barack Obama.

Mr. Ross's strong record of achievement in business led Bloomberg Businessweek to name him one of the "50 Most Influential People in Global Finance" in 2011. It is also why he is

the only person elected to both the Turnaround Management Hall of Fame and the Private Equity Hall of Fame.

Mr. Ross's nomination comes at an important time in our Nation's economic recovery. I believe his extensive management experience in the private sector and his understanding of the challenges faced by workers and businesses alike will equip him well for the job of leading the Department of Commerce.

This large Department, which has 12 different bureaus and nearly 47,000 employees located in all 50 States and around the world, oversees a diverse array of issues, from trade to fishery management and from weather forecasting to the Census Bureau. Mr. Ross's experience turning around businesses should help them anticipate and mitigate the risk of major programs like FirstNet, the independent authority charged with creating a nationwide broadband network for first responders and the acquisition of critical weather satellites by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

I would also like to underscore that the collaboration between the public and private sectors is one of the hallmarks of the Department's work, as exemplified by the ongoing development of cyber security best practices and standards, which the Commerce Committee has strongly endorsed. I look forward to Mr. Ross continuing his collaboration and strengthening it where necessary.

I believe Mr. Ross's business know-how and intelligence make him an excellent candidate to serve as the next Secretary of Commerce. I strongly support his nomination. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will support his nomination as well. It is high time we got this position filled and got this experienced person—someone who has a wide range of know-how all across the business sector and our economy—into a position where he can make a difference in helping to create jobs and grow this economy for our country.

I see that my colleague from Florida, Senator NELSON, the ranking Democrat on the Commerce Committee, is here as well. I would love to yield the floor to him and hear what he has to say about this nomination.

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

UNITED STEELWORKERS,
Pittsburgh, PA, January 9, 2017.

UNITED STATES SENATE,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR: On behalf of the United Steelworkers (USW) representing hundreds of thousands of American workers, we urge you to support Wilbur Ross, Chairman and Chief Strategy Officer of WL Ross & Co., LLC, to serve as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Mr. Ross has shown a deep commitment to the future of our domestic manufacturing sector. Many of us have seen firsthand how he has worked to keep production and manufacturing jobs here in the U.S. The USW worked directly with Mr. Ross to save thou-

sands of jobs in the steel industry at a time of crisis. In fact, there are now thousands of our members in the steel and auto parts sectors that are working because of our ability to work together to save a critical piece of America's industrial base.

He knows what it takes to get the economy back on track, create jobs, and keep jobs from leaving the United States and build a framework so that American workers and companies are competitive and innovative in the 21st Century. There is much work to be done to restore America's manufacturing base and the good jobs it supports. As Secretary, Wilbur Ross will be someone who has a deep understanding of the challenges this vital sector faces.

We urge the Senate to move swiftly on his nomination and look forward to working with him to create more jobs for American workers.

Sincerely,

LEO W. GERARD,
USW International President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I, too, support Wilbur Ross. I know him. He lives in Palm Beach. I think he is a very good selection to be our next Secretary of Commerce. He is certainly qualified to do this job. He gave extensive answers during his confirmation hearing before the Commerce Committee. He has accumulated significant experience in dealing with the international business community, and he has detailed to the committee—in our examination of him, he detailed many of his ideas.

There have been some questions that have been raised about some of his business ties, particularly involving some of his foreign activities. One example is the Bank of Cyprus, which has significant levels of Russian investment. In the wake of the former National Security Advisor, General Flynn's resignation and under the overhanging question of the unlawful Russian involvement in a U.S. election, I certainly thought that it was prudent to get Mr. Ross's assurances on this matter in his dealings with the Bank of Cyprus and certain Russians who were involved in the Bank of Cyprus, so on February 16, I sent him a letter, along with four other members of the Commerce Committee, requesting information on any contact Russian investors in the Bank of Cyprus may have with officials from the Trump campaign or the Trump organization. I have spoken with Mr. Ross on at least two occasions since sending him the letter, one of those being today. He has verbally reiterated to me that he only had one meeting, approximately an hour, with one of the bank's Russian investors and that it occurred in 2014. The timing is important—2014—because that was before the Presidential campaign. He also assured me that he knows of no loans or interaction between the bank and anyone affiliated with the Trump campaign or organization.

Mr. Ross has been forthcoming with me, and I believe him in what he has told me, that it is true to his belief. But I want to say that at the same

time, the White House and the way they have handled this matter is not doing Wilbur Ross any favors. There are a number of Senators on the Commerce Committee who are extremely troubled and frustrated that the White House has chosen to sit on Mr. Ross's written response to the questions I and other Senators have posed, and they have refused to provide them to the Senate prior to tonight's vote. This is despite repeated phone calls to the White House—repeated phone calls. It is also despite repeated phone calls from me to Mr. Ross to ask him to get the White House off the dime since he has told me he has already filled out the answers in writing—they are just sitting in the White House. So there is someone in the White House who is making the decision that they don't want the Senate to have, in writing, what Mr. Ross has told me verbally in a private conversation.

If that is any indication of the level of transparency Congress and the American people can expect from this White House, then it appears that there is going to be a lot left on the floor and there is going to be the appearance of being in the dark on a lot of important matters. That is not the way you do confirmations. You do it in a collaborative fashion, especially when you have a good nominee like Wilbur Ross. The President proposes, the Congress disposes. The President nominates, the Congress confirms.

Not only is this lack of transparency unsettling, it is behavior that everyone in this Senate should agree is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. I do not want this to be taken out on Wilbur Ross because of the administration's secretive behavior. Instead, as I said at the outset, following my colleague, the chairman of the committee, I am going to urge our colleagues to support his nomination, but the problem is that Wilbur Ross is going to get fewer "yes" votes than if the White House would release his written statements to all of those Senators' questions.

As I said, I know Wilbur Ross. He is a good man. One of the reasons, aside from this problem of communication with the White House, is that Wilbur Ross brought forth candid answers about the work of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA. That agency, which is a part of the Department of Commerce, impacts the daily lives of every single American. NOAA provides the satellite data that is critical to observing hurricanes and severe weather and everyday forecasts that we have now come to rely on, that we pull up on our smartphones to find out what the weather is going to be. Where do you think that comes from? A lot of it comes from data from NOAA satellites.

Through the National Weather Service, NOAA provides the weather forecasts that drive this economy, answering questions like whether a farmer's crops are going to get rain today or

warning of dangerous tornadoes, particularly plaguing the State of the Presiding Officer. Of course, we remember the ones that just devastated parts of Georgia and Florida just a few weeks ago.

The National Ocean Service tells us if ships will have enough clearance to get their cargo into a port on time because it often depends on the tide as to how much depth there is with that heavy load of cargo, if they can get in the channel.

NOAA also provides world-class science regarding atmospheric conditions, including climate change and its impacts. My State of Florida, the impacts of climate change—we are ground zero. It is not unusual now that at seasonal monthly high tides, the streets of Miami Beach are flooded, and city wellfields have now had to be moved further to the west away from the Atlantic Ocean because of the rise of sea level and therefore the saltwater intrusion into the freshwater aquifer. Since 2006, Miami Beach has flooded significantly more often than it used to. Rain-related flooding events in southeast Florida have increased by 33 percent, and tide-related flooding has increased by a whopping 400 percent. That is not good for business.

We simply cannot afford to deny what is happening. The impacts of climate change are affecting Florida. They are also affecting a lot of other places around the world, read: Bangladesh.

NOAA quite literally saves lives and property, so naturally I fully expect any nominee for Secretary of Commerce to unequivocally support the ability of the experts at NOAA to do what they do best: collect the data, do the research, and provide critical products and services to the public free from political interference and free from censorship.

The Department of Commerce has three Nobel laureate scientists who are employees. While some of the nominees for other key administration posts have either been less than forthright, less than committal, or less than knowledgeable about the very real threat posed by climate change, Wilbur Ross candidly and explicitly assured me during his nomination hearing in our Commerce Committee that he believes—and I will quote him—that "science should be left to the scientists." I urge his fellow Cabinet nominees to follow suit. Don't do what we have seen—the intimidation techniques of saying that you can't use the term "climate change" or "sea level rise." Let the scientists do their work. Wilbur Ross also assured me that he would work collaboratively "to address the impacts of changes in sea level and ocean temperatures on coastal communities and fisheries."

So I want to say to the Senate that I appreciate Wilbur Ross's candor, his commitment, and his recognition that the important weather and climate work being done in NOAA directly ben-

efits commerce. I am confident he is going to follow through.

I also want to thank him, at his age, for offering himself for public service. This is a very schooled, experienced individual.

I hope this hiccup with the White House not being transparent and not returning what he has already written as answers to the Senator's questions—this problem—is going to disappear and, that rather than hinder him, as they have, they will instead support him, as they should.

For that reason, I am here to ask my colleagues to vote yes on Wilbur Ross's nomination.

I yield the floor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, creating jobs, fostering economic growth, maintaining sustainable development, and improving standards of living of all Americans are central tasks for any administration, and they are the mission of the Commerce Department.

Congress created the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903, and then renamed the Department of Commerce in 1913 as the offices working on labor were transferred to the Department of Labor. Through 12 bureaus and nearly 47,000 employees, the Department runs programs that affect broad swaths of the American economy.

The Department includes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which warns of dangerous weather, charts seas, and protects ocean and coastal resources. The Department includes the Patent and Trademark Office, which fosters technology and innovation, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, headquartered in Gaithersburg, MD, which promotes innovation and industrial competitiveness. The Department includes the Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis, which provide economic data to help business and policymakers make intelligent decisions. The Department includes the International Trade Administration, which ensures that Americans have access to international markets and safeguards Americans from unfair competition. And the Department includes the Economic Development Administration to promote job growth in economically distressed communities.

To run the Commerce Department, President Trump has nominated Wilbur Ross, Jr., a 79-year-old private-equity billionaire with extensive holdings and extensive potential conflicts of interest. I have real questions about whether Mr. Ross is out of touch with ordinary Americans. And I have real questions about whether Mr. Ross's personal interests will conflict with his job as Commerce Secretary, if he is confirmed.

The Commerce Secretary enforces our trade laws, including against major trade competitors like China. Last year, Mr. Ross told Bloomberg TV that he had extensive holdings in China. Mr. Ross said, "We have—various portfolio

companies have almost 20 factories doing one thing or another over there.” And the New York Times reported that Mr. Ross is vice chairman of the Bank of Cyprus, making him a de facto business partner with Viktor F. Vekselberg, one of Russia’s most prominent businesspeople and a person with ties to the Kremlin. Several newspapers have reported that Mr. Ross plans to keep millions of dollars invested in offshore entities whose values could be affected by policies that he implements as Commerce Secretary. Mr. Ross reported plans to hold on to investments in an oil-tanker company and 10 other entities that invest in shipping and real estate financing, according to Federal financial-disclosure and ethics filings cited in the reports.

I have questions about Mr. Ross’s ability to work for Americans. Starting in the 1990s, Mr. Ross ran an investment firm that specialized in distressed assets. The Securities and Exchange Commission said that Mr. Ross’s firm had failed to disclose how it calculates its fees for some funds, which led to investors to pay roughly \$10.4 million of management fees that they should not have in the decade leading up to 2011.

The Commerce Secretary is a part of the President’s economic team; yet Mr. Ross appears all too willing to play fast and loose with fiscal showdowns. When, in April 2011, Bloomberg’s Mark Crumpton asked Mr. Ross whether S&P’s downgrade of America’s credit rating is “a step in the right direction,” Mr. Ross said it was. Ross said: “Well I think it’s a step in the right direction in that it will put pressure on the Democrats in the Senate and on the President to go along with some of the Republican reviews about really cutting the budget deficit and ultimately cutting the total indebtedness of the United States. So in that limited sense I think it is a step in the right direction.”

Mr. Ross was all too quick to dismiss the strain that a furlough put on Federal Government workers. In October 2013, CNBC’s Betty Liu had this exchange with Mr. Ross:

Ross: I think shutting down the government—so-called shutting down the government, which it’s not really shut down—

Liu: What do you mean?

Ross: Well, many parts of it are still quite open. And it’s just at the fringe that it—that it really matters.

Liu: Yeah, but tell that to the government workers though who are furloughed, right?

Ross: Yeah, but they’re going to get their pay. They know they’ll get their back pay. So I don’t see that that’s a permanent damage.

Mr. Ross was all too quick to dismiss the pain of homeowners who lost their homes in the financial crisis. Bloomberg TV’s Betty Liu had this exchange with Mr. Ross:

Ross: I think you have to look far and wide to find a home owner who’s an actual victim. These are all theoretical things. They’re mostly technical problems that the banks did wrong. To the best of my knowledge—

Liu: I think it’d be really hard to find, to pinpoint down to individuals, right?

Ross: Well there’s never been a case that I know of where someone was dispossessed who didn’t have a mortgage and wasn’t in default.

Liu: What do you mean?

Ross: Well all these claims that there was robo signing and all these imperfections, that’s true. Those were not what should be. But the real question is was anyone actually dispossessed wrongly.

Liu: Of their property.

Ross: Yeah, incorrectly. And I don’t think you find a single case.

The Commerce Secretary oversees the NOAA and the National Weather Service. But in a conversation with Fox Business’s Neil Cavuto, Mr. Ross was dismissive of the reality of climate change. Mr. Ross said: “Well, I think unless the weatherman can tell me if it will rain tomorrow why would I believe you can make a 100 year forecast. So, I’m skeptical about the underlying basis.”

And so President Trump has nominated to be Commerce Secretary a person who has so much wealth and so many foreign interests that it appears that it will be difficult for him to work in the interests of middle-class Americans. His extensive foreign business interests call into question his ability to fight to enforce America’s trade laws. Mr. Ross has expressed cavalier attitudes toward economic brinksmanship and shown little concern for the people laid off or who lose their homes as a result. And Mr. Ross has expressed an open skepticism toward the reality of climate change that calls into question his ability to run the agency that does research into global climate. For these reasons, I cannot support his nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

ENDING GLOBAL HUNGER

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I am here on the floor tonight to speak about our Nation’s efforts to end global hunger. It is an undertaking that countless individuals, foundations, and government agencies have devoted a significant amount of time, resources, and effort attempting to solve.

Those who have dedicated their lives to feeding the hungry deserve our deepest gratitude and respect. They made the decision to improve the lives of others less fortunate than themselves, and they often have done that at their own loss of comfort and their own well-being. There is no nobler a calling than trying to do something for someone else, especially when it costs you something as well.

Regardless of our faith, our creed, or our religion, almost all of us are taught early in life that it is our duty to help those in need. Americans consistently have taken that moral responsibility to heart. As individuals,

we help our neighbors through our churches and other local organizations. We help feed our hometowns. As a country, we lead the world in providing food aid to millions of people who are in need of that assistance.

In 1983, at a signing of a World Food Day proclamation, President Reagan cited 450 million people in developing countries who were undernourished. Our global population has risen by 3 billion people since that time, and today there are nearly 800 million undernourished people in the world who do not have enough food to lead healthy, normal lives.

While strides are being made in the fight against food insecurity, it is clear that our commitment cannot waiver, and ending hunger must remain a priority.

At that same White House ceremony, President Reagan chided the Soviet Union for failing to provide humanitarian relief to those in need. President Reagan offered a direct challenge to the Kremlin to explain why the Soviet Union only provided weapons but not food assistance to the underdeveloped world.

While the threats in the world today are different than those faced during the Cold War, American food assistance remains a powerful foreign policy tool. American food aid elevates our country’s moral standing and leadership in the world, as realized by President Reagan, but our efforts to reduce food insecurity also serve our own national interests by promoting political, economic, and social stability in the world.

Food-related hardships and hunger—either due to price increases or food shortages—act as a catalyst for protests and armed conflicts. We have witnessed regions of the world that are critical to America’s strategic interests descend into chaos due to people not having access to affordable food.

From 2007 to 2011, spikes in global food prices led to increased food insecurity and unrest in the world. In the Middle East and North Africa, food-related challenges were one of the major drivers of the mass uprising that we call the Arab Spring.

In Syria, Islamic State rebels use the promise of food and basic necessities to recruit soldiers. Food shortages have led refugees to leave camps and return to an active war zone in search of food for themselves and their families.

Closer to home, food prices contributed to rioting in Haiti in 2007 and 2008. As food prices increased and economic conditions deteriorated, U.S. Coast Guard interceptions of people from Haiti attempting to immigrate to our country rose by 20 percent, straining Coast Guard resources.

The National Intelligence Council warns that a continuation of the fundamental contributors to food insecurity—such as expanding populations, slowing of agricultural yields, and gaps in infrastructure and distribution systems—will result in increased food insecurity, hunger, and instability in the