funding. Rather, overturning the rule merely empowers States over a Washington-knows-best mentality and assures that States have the ability to identify the best eligible title X subgrantees. It restores local control and ensures that States aren't forced by the Federal Government to provide abortion providers like Planned Parenthood with taxpayer dollars.

I appreciate my colleagues' support of this legislation, and I look forward to President Trump signing it and scrapping the Obama administration's overreaching eleventh-hour rule.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, on January 18, 2017, two days before President Obama left office, he finalized a rule and put it in place to require States—regardless of their decisions in their State—to have to use Planned Parenthood, removing the decision making from each State.

In the past, it had been very straightforward. States were allowed the opportunity to be able to examine who was the best decision maker to be able to help and the best provider of care in their community for title X funding. For that family planning funding, when it occurs and when it goes through the process, the States made the decision, looked at the providers, found out who the most comprehensive provider was, who could provide the best healthcare, and they made that final decision.

President Obama, two days before he left office, finalized a rule to remove that right from States and to compel each State to be able to use Planned Parenthood.

States like mine and many other States said: We want to do family planning in our State. We want to have comprehensive healthcare in our State, but we do not want to provide Federal funds to the single largest provider of abortion in the country. That was a reasonable decision that our State lawmakers could make to be able to protect the lives of women in our State and to protect the lives of children for the future. That reasonable, commonsense method was removed two days before President Obama left office.

I am proud to say that the House of Representatives and the Senate today voted to strike that rule from the last two days of President Obama's term to compel States to be able to use Planned Parenthood in their States, to be able to give the option back to the States again.

I look forward to President Trump signing it. I would remind the President of this one simple thing, though. This does not strike funding away from women's care. This doesn't take funding away from any of the family planning. This doesn't even force States to not use Planned Parenthood. It is a simple statement of where we used to be: States could choose to have Planned Parenthood as a part of their title X funding, or not. It is their choice. If some States want to do that, they may continue to do that. Other States should not be compelled to do that with taxpayer funds, though.

That is the new status quo as soon as President Trump signs it—to be able to return to a basic doctrine: States should not be compelled to have taxpayer funds used toward Planned Parenthood title X funding.

I am proud that this Senate just passed this resolution. It is a reasonable act for us to be able to do, and I look forward to the President's signature.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, when his nomination comes to the floor next week, I will vote to confirm Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. This is my first time voting on a Supreme Court nominee, and I don't take the decision lightly. It is a lifetime appointment, after all, and the Court's rulings have shaped our country's history—for good and for ill—and will continue to shape our future. But after reading Judge Gorsuch's writings, meeting with him in person, and listening to his testimony, I can say with confidence that it is not a hard call. I believe Judge Gorsuch will be a fine addition to the Supreme Court.

There is no denying Judge Gorsuch's distinctive qualifications. We all know his credentials: Columbia, Harvard law, and an Oxford doctorate to boot. He clerked for an appellate judge and two Supreme Court Justices. He had many years of experience in both private practice and in public service and, of course, over 10 years as an appellate judge. He possesses fine judicial temperament: highly erudite, highly accomplished, and highly regarded by those who know him best. It is no surprise, then, that the American Bar Association, in a unanimous vote, declared him ''well qualified'' for the job.

While I wouldn't outsource our responsibilities to any advocacy organization, I would note that the minority leader himself once said the ABA rating is ''the gold standard by which judicial candidates are judged.''

But, of course, Judge Gorsuch is not just filling any seat, but the seat once held by the late Justice Antonin Scalia. Justice Scalia was a giant of American jurisprudence. Most Justices earn their place in history by writing opinions, giving voice to their colleagues, and speaking for the Court as a whole. Justice Scalia did that many times throughout his career, of course, but he did something more. He changed the way judges—both conservative and liberal—think about the law and defend their decisions. He reminded us all that a judge's job is to apply the law—including the Constitution, our most fundamental law—as written, to the case before him, not to rewrite it all together.

Adhering to the law, even when the judge doesn't like the result, is the greatest public service that a judge can render, because to respect the rule of law is ultimately to respect the rule of the people.

This is what Justice Scalia taught and what he inspired a whole generation of judges and lawyers to understand. As we prepare to fill his seat on the Supreme Court, let us also acknowledge that no man can fill his shoes. We honor the memory of Justice Scalia and we thank his wife, Maureen, and his whole family for sharing this great man with our country for so long.

Judge Gorsuch is a child of the Scalia generation. He has long advocated for and followed the originalist judicial craft—one rooted in the text, structure, and history of our Constitution, which is to say that he respects the rule of law and he respects the people. Whether defending the religious liberty of the Little Sisters of the Poor or the Fourth Amendment rights of a regular household, he has shown a profound respect for the Constitution. I also think he has demonstrated throughout his career a firm independence of thought. He has had his influences and his mentors, his promoters and his critics, but I believe he will be his own man—as he should be.

So I am pleased to announce my support for the next Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge Neil Gorsuch. I look forward to his confirmation next week.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I wish to initially speak about the bipartisan Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act, but first 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. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, distance or delays should never be the reason that veterans don't get the healthcare they need, but that is exactly what is happening to veterans across the country. That is why the Veterans Choice

Program was started—so that thousands of veterans and their families can get the care they deserve when and where they need it. Instead of traveling long distances or waiting months on a list, veterans can use the Choice Program to get the healthcare they need in their own communities.

As the ranking member of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, I want to give a little perspective on what would happen to our veterans if we don't pass the bipartisan Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act.

Now, I know that the Choice Program is not funded through my subcommittee, but what we do today has an impact on the VA as a whole. If the Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act does not pass, the funding we appropriated to the VA will expire before it has all been used. It is not a small amount of funding. It is $1 billion, and the VA does not have $1 billion elsewhere in the budget to make up for this loss.

In other words, if we don't pass this bill, it is going to be a disaster for veterans because all of the veterans who use this program for their healthcare are going to have to go back to the VA. That means the wait times that everybody was complaining about over the last couple of years will grow longer and longer and longer, and especially in rural America, where access to care is such a challenge, it will get worse and worse.

To manage the increase in patient load, the VA will have to scramble to find funding that can take away from other VA programs, including hospital maintenance and medical equipment. That is what is going to happen if we don't pass this bill. This is an urgent matter for veterans across the country. Whether you are a participant in the VA Choice Program or you go to a traditional VA clinic or hospital, one way or another, this is going to impact you.

Now, I know the Choice Program isn't perfect, but this temporary extension, coupled with the improvements in the system contained in the bill, gives Congress the time we need to develop a long-term, comprehensive solution. And while we are working on a solution, let's not punish veterans by cutting off $1 billion toward a program that is designed to improve services for people who have served our country.

So I hope we can come together to find a way to pass this bill. Our veterans are counting on us.

I yield the floor.

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

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

RUSSIA AND TRUMP CAMPAIGN INVESTIGATION

Mr. UDALL. Mr. President, I know several Members are ready to come here and talk on a veterans issue, and they will let me know when they are ready to start. I thought there might be a good chance to get this in.

Our democracy is under attack. U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that the Russian Government interfered in the U.S. Presidential election and intervened to help Candidate Trump. Around the same time, Candidate Trump began making flattering statements about Russian President Putin and proposing pro-Russia policy changes while criticizing longstanding U.S. allies, including in Europe.

President Trump continues to defend Putin and offend Western allies. Now we have come to learn that there are unexplained ties between the President, his campaign staff, his associates, and Russia; that many close to the President had meetings and telephone calls with Russian officials during the campaign and the transition; most critically, that the FBI and the Department of Justice are investigating whether the President and his associates coordinated or conspired with the Russian Government to interfere with the Presidential election—an investigation that began last July and is likely to continue for months.

The President and his associates keep giving the American people reason for worry—inaccurate denials, evasive answers, explosive attacks they can't back up, scheming with the chair of the House Intelligence Committee on the committee's investigation of the White House. New, very disturbing information comes to light every day.

A recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll showed that two thirds of Americans believe a special prosecutor should be appointed. The American people want answers. What was the scope of the interference? Who knew what, and when? How can we protect ourselves and our allies, who are facing similar cyber attacks? What is the appropriate government response to such an attack?

I appreciate the work the Senate Intelligence Committee is doing. I believe that is the first step, but I believe we must go further. That is why I am again calling for an independent, bipartisan national commission modeled on the 9/11 Commission to fully investigate Russia's interference with our election and our election processes and to investigate the ties between the President, his family businesses, and his close associates and Russia that may threaten our national security. I am also again calling on the Department of Justice to appoint a special counsel to investigate potential criminal conduct that may jeopardize our security.

Questions about the President's ties to Russia will divide the country, undermine his Presidency, and distract Congress, unless we take these steps. The American people are right to be concerned. The President's stance on Russia is perplexing, starting when he first denounced the role of NATO last spring, calling it ''obsolete,'' suggesting that it would be OK if NATO broke up. Then, he publicly asked Russia to hack Hillary Clinton's emails.

Then, Mr. Trump's campaign manager, Paul Manafort, was forced to resign because of his close political and financial ties to Ukraine's former pro-Russian President. He became the subject of a multi-agency investigation. We don't have the full story, but we do know that he failed to register as a foreign agent while he lobbied for pro-Russian Ukrainian interests in the United States. It appears that Manafort has a $10 million contract with a Russian oligarch who is very close to Putin that would ''greatly benefit the Putin Government'' and that he had at least 15 offshore bank accounts in Cyprus that even Cypriot bank officials thought were suspicious. Once those bank officials began asking about money laundering activities, Manafort closed the accounts rather than answer questions.

During his campaign, Mr. Trump stated that he would ''be looking at'' whether to recognize Crimea as Russian and to lift sanctions. President Trump and his team apparently took little or no interest in the debate over the party platform in the Republican National Convention, except for one thing—Ukraine. They intervened with delegates to get more Russia-friendly language in the Republican Party platform. Candidate Trump's national security policy staffer J.D. Gordon told CNN: ''This was the language Donald Trump himself wanted . . . and advocated for . . . back in March.'' Now Gordon is reportedly under investigation for his ties to Russia.

We have all heard the President compliment President Putin, calling him a strong leader. Why is the President so enamored, when Putin's actions are authoritarian, violent, and anti-democratic? Putin seeks to weaken NATO and the European Council. He annexed Crimea in violation of international law and treaties. He interfered with our national election. Putin has crushed free press in the Russian Federation, placing restriction upon restriction on the press, quashing independent news organizations, and harassing and jailing journalists. The President's outspoken admiration is inexplicable.

So we are still left with a President who has expressed policy views toward Russia that run counter to U.S. ideals and treaty obligations, as well as global norms of international affairs. While we don't know the full extent of the President's financial, personal, and political ties to Russia and Putin, we have plenty of reason to seek an impartial investigation. The President still has not released his tax returns, unlike any previous modern President. His son Donald Junior volunteered, as far as