

force modernization. Part of the training provided to Saudi Arabia will be on subjects such as avoiding civilian casualties.

More important, as the counter-ISIL coalition continues to make gains in Mosul and Raqqa, Iranian-supported militias in Iraq are posturing to create a land bridge through Iraq and into Syria. This land bridge could ultimately extend to Lebanon and improve Iran's support for Hezbollah. So now is not the time to undermine one of our critical allies in the Arab world by disapproving part of an arms sales package that will improve Saudi capabilities.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now, on another matter, the House of Representatives will vote later today on the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017, which would give the Department of Veterans Affairs more of the tools it needs to hold bad actors accountable. Last week, the Senate passed this bipartisan legislation on a voice vote, and once the House weighs in, the bill will go to the President's desk for his signature.

Throughout our country, VA facilities have been plagued by widespread dysfunction. Our veterans deserve the timely and effective care they were promised, and I am committed to continue working with colleagues in Congress and in the administration to make sure they get it. This sensible approach has been a top priority of this Congress, and I am proud that we came together to continue addressing the problems in our VA system.

Representing Kentucky veterans is one of the greatest privileges I have had as a Senator. Through their selfless service, America's veterans have earned our admiration and our gratitude. This legislation is just one example of how Congress and the administration are working to keep our commitments to our Nation's veterans.

I would like to thank Senator RUBIO and Chairman ISAKSON for their work on this measure on behalf of our Nation's veterans. I look forward to the House voting later today to send this bill to the President.

THE ECONOMY AND TAX REFORM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now, on one final matter, after 8 years of sluggish economic growth under the Obama administration, I was pleased to see some positive numbers out of last month's jobs report. Now, following so many years of failed leftwing policies that held Americans back, a new administration and a pro-growth Congress have been working together to move our economy and job creation in a positive direction. We have already

undertaken what has been described as the most ambitious regulatory rollback since Reagan, and we are working hard in a number of other areas as well.

In fact, this month the administration is redoubling those efforts on the economy, kicking off with an emphasis on workforce development. These initiatives are a top priority for many States like mine, who are proud to have a Governor who has been a staunch advocate for expanding apprenticeship programs and preparing a workforce that can fill current employment gaps while also attracting new businesses and job opportunities to our State.

I have also been proud to play a role in supporting these efforts, and I have worked to secure Federal funds for workforce development programs in Kentucky. Specifically, I have been proud to help secure funding for training and employment services for laid-off coal miners in an effort to help them find new job opportunities.

Efforts like these are critical in preparing American workers for success in today's global economy, but we know there is more we can do to help. One way the Republican Senate is working to do that is through tax reform. It has been more than 30 years since we last passed comprehensive tax reform legislation, and since then, the international economy has only grown more competitive. That is why it is imperative that we do what we can to modernize our tax structure, as we also better prepare America's workforce for the many challenges and the global competition that face us in today's economy.

Over the past three decades, our tax system has grown increasingly convoluted and punitive, making it harder for individuals and businesses to succeed. In fact, according to the National Taxpayer Advocate's annual report to Congress, "if tax compliance were an industry, it would be one of the largest in the United States." It is not hard to see why, considering that our Internal Revenue Code is made up of about 4 million words, which, to give some context, is nearly seven times longer than Leo Tolstoy's notoriously lengthy "War and Peace."

It goes on to say that "a simpler, more transparent tax code will substantially reduce the estimated six billion hours and \$195 billion that taxpayers spend on income tax return preparation; reduce the disparity in tax liabilities between sophisticated or well advised taxpayers and other taxpayers; enable taxpayers to understand how their tax liabilities are computed and prepare their own returns; improve taxpayer morale and tax compliance . . . and enable the IRS to administer the tax system more effectively and better meet taxpayer needs."

In short, as that report observed, when it comes to our Tax Code, there is no doubt simpler is better.

So how do we get a simpler Tax Code? With tax reform. But that is just

one of the numerous benefits that would come from a revised tax system.

For instance, instead of inadvertently incentivizing companies to go overseas, as our current Tax Code does, a revised system would encourage businesses to keep jobs right here in the United States. Instead of restricting businesses' ability to expand, create jobs, and increase wages, as our current Tax Code does, a revised system would open up more opportunities for workers. Instead of deterring the type of growth that boosts the economy and puts more people back to work, as our current Tax Code does, a revised system would actually promote American investment.

These are just the types of solutions middle-class families need right now, and they are the types of policies that the Republican Senate will continue to pursue as we work to reform our tax system. Fortunately, we now have an administration that is actually interested in making our Tax Code simpler for families and American businesses alike, without demanding \$1 trillion in tax hikes for more government spending.

Respective committees in the House and Senate have been working for some time to move our tax reform efforts forward, and the Speaker and I recently had a productive meeting with the President about this very issue. I appreciate the good work my colleagues are doing on this matter, especially the Finance Committee chairman, Senator HATCH, who has long been an advocate for simplifying our Tax Code. He has been working closely with committee members and Chairman BRADY to advance the tax reform our economy simply demands.

This is not an easy process. There are difficult issues that must be navigated, particularly with respect to business reform, but I am confident we can arrive at solutions that will be good for American workers and the businesses that employ them. We have made progress already, and we will keep moving forward as Members offer their input for consideration.

I hope our friends across the aisle will come together in support of these bipartisan objectives as well, but either way, we have to keep working on this issue because we know the benefits tax reform can have for the American people who, after 8 long years of sluggish economic growth under the Obama administration, deserve a lot more.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night Senators reached a bipartisan agreement on a package of Russia sanctions for the Senate to vote on as an amendment to the pending Iran sanctions.

It was the result of several days of negotiations and hard work. The Republican leader and I spent a lot of time on this, and I thank him for that, as did Senators CRAPO, BROWN, CARDIN, CORKER, SHAHEEN, DURBIN, and MENENDEZ. I thank each of them for their efforts and their expertise in getting this done.

In particular, I thank Senator CARDIN, ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, who is one of the most trusted voices in our caucus on this issue. He did an excellent job of forging a bipartisan consensus on this committee with little regard for the credit he would receive. I also want to thank Senator BROWN, our ranking member on Banking, who has been steadfast in making sure we would get a good, effective sanctions bill done. We wouldn't have done this also without Senators SHAHEEN, DURBIN, MENENDEZ, and their staffs. I thank all of them.

The final result of these negotiations is a good result for our country. By codifying the existing sanctions and requiring congressional review of any decision to weaken or lift them, we are ensuring that the United States continues to punish President Putin for his reckless and destabilizing actions. I believe it is particularly significant that a bipartisan coalition is seeking to reestablish Congress as a final arbiter of sanctions relief, no matter what the administration does, particularly, considering that this administration has been too eager to put sanctions relief on the table. These additional sanctions will also send a powerful and bipartisan statement to Russia and any other country that might try to interfere in our elections that they will be punished, and Congress will stand firm in making sure they are punished, Democrats and Republicans.

Again, I thank my Republican and Democratic colleagues for putting party aside, for doing what is best for the country. I hope this agreement quickly passes both the House and Senate, and we hope the President will sign this legislation as well, even though it cedes the power to Congress.

SPECIAL COUNSEL MUELLER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am frankly disturbed by the new strategy on the hard right to discredit Special Counsel Mueller and sully his reputation. Their strategy is clear. They know or suspect that facts might not be good for the President so they are trying to vilify the man who is in charge of finding them, but they have chosen the wrong man. Anyone who engages in these baseless attacks about Mr. Mueller's character is only heaping dishonor upon themselves.

Mr. Mueller is known for his service to America and for his integrity. He is a straight arrow. He is a Republican. Only a few weeks ago, these same hard-right commentators and pundits were praising Mr. Mueller. They were

lauding his qualities. Even Attorney General Jeff Sessions has unequivocally praised Mr. Mueller in the past for his service and credibility. Sessions said, Mueller's "integrity is undoubted . . . his experience and love of country is undoubted."

To these hard-right commentators who are attacking this honorable man who is trying to do a job for our country and see that the rule of law is obeyed, read what Attorney General Sessions has said.

Now, because Director Comey's testimony has made President Trump's actions less and less defensible, these hard-right commentators have turned tail. They have started an ad hominem, nasty assault on a career public servant and a very fine man.

A close associate of the President, Mr. Christopher Ruddy, has even insinuated that the President might fire Special Counsel Mueller. I can't think of a worse move for the President at this time. I would have him look back in history and see what happened to a President who tried to do the same thing.

I have one question. What are these people who are attacking Mueller afraid of? Are they afraid of what Mr. Mueller is going to find? Is the White House afraid of what Mr. Mueller is going to uncover?

It seems pretty obvious that if they were not worried, they would let Mueller proceed because they would be confident he would find nothing. I find no other legitimate reason why the critics would flip so quickly to attack a man of integrity unless they were worried about what he might find. Again, if the White House truly has nothing to hide, they ought to encourage Special Counsel Mueller to investigate. They should let him do his job.

When people say "where there is smoke, there is fire," they are pointing to actions like this, and it makes the American people distrustful of the White House and their allies.

I know these attacks probably don't bother Mr. Mueller. He has a very strong spine, and he will go after the facts regardless of the noise around him, but they are bothersome, they are wrong, and they are nasty.

One of the most important things in our democracy is a bedrock faith in the rule of law; that no person is above the rule of law. The President's allies are going to attack every single law enforcement agent involved in the Russia investigation. If the White House ever joins in those attacks, it will greatly erode the American people's faith in the rule of law and do significant damage to our democracy at a time when it seems somewhat more fragile than it has in the past. This is not a game. This is not fun.

This is a very serious investigation that is headed by one of the most trusted men in Washington. It is about foreign interference in our elections, something that eats at—that corrodes the very roots of our democracy, the

very wellspring of our being, and pride as a nation. I would urge that these attacks on Mr. Mueller be ceased and that my friends on the other side join me in defending his reputation. They have gone a little too far.

HEALTHCARE LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally on healthcare, there are only 11 calendar days of Senate business left before the July 4th recess, and yet Republicans are looking to vote on a final healthcare bill before the deadline, and not a soul outside the Republican caucus has seen the bill. I am not sure that every Member of the Republican caucus inside has seen it.

To everyone in America, this should be a red alert. This should be a red alert for doctors, hospital administrators, and patient groups, groups that represent older Americans, groups that fight for children's healthcare, groups that fight for better treatment for substance abuse and mental health. This should be a red alert for working families across this country whose lives depend on affordable healthcare and yet have no earthly idea what their representatives in Congress might pass in just 2 short weeks.

They might never know. The Republicans have not scheduled a single committee hearing—not one—not a single committee hearing on a bill that would reorganize one-sixth of the American economy, touch the lives of millions of Americans—a life-and-death issue for some—not a single committee hearing or public debate on a bill that would potentially change drastically the way Medicaid is funded, the way women are treated in our healthcare system, the way we treat older Americans and those with preexisting conditions.

Why on Earth haven't we had a single committee hearing on a bill of this magnitude? Why on Earth is this bill being hidden from public view?

There is only one reason. The Republican majority is afraid of the American people learning what is in their healthcare bill. They don't want the American people to know how much they cut and destroy Medicaid or how fat of a tax break they give to the wealthiest few because they know the backlash would be severe. In short, by their actions, it seems our Republican colleagues are ashamed of this bill, and they know their chances of passing the Republican healthcare bill would plummet if they release a bill that looks anything like the House healthcare bill, which only a tiny sliver of Americans support—17 percent in the last poll. The majority of Republicans and the majority of Trump voters are opposed to TrumpCare.

So our Republican colleagues have made a calculation, which is ultimately self-defeating, to keep their healthcare bill hidden from view under lock and key until the last possible moment. Maybe this is the only strategy to pass a bill as unpopular as this