

our financial institutions and the dollar, the world's currency. Roughly 43 percent of international financial transactions and more than 60 percent of total allocated global floor exchange reserves are denominated in U.S. dollars.

We have tremendous leverage over other countries, even if we are acting just as the United States, with regard to accessing the U.S. financial system. When you have these kinds of sanctions, when other countries are not allowed to access our financial system, it puts a real strong bite on their economy.

We wanted to bring this down to the floor. Again, there is bipartisan support for this amendment. Unfortunately, not many but just a few of my colleagues wouldn't want to accept this. They didn't even want to vote on the amendment. They believed, incorrectly, that somehow this would undermine the JCPOA. Well, it wouldn't. As a matter of fact, former Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew stated that under the JCPOA, the Treasury Department was still going to prohibit Iranian banks from being able to use U.S. dollars through New York or to hold correspondent account relationships with U.S. financial institutions. He testified that the JCPOA would continue to bar Iranian financial institutions from using our financial system. So that is happening right now.

What we wanted to do with this amendment was to say that we are going to make that legislation; we are going to make that a statutory prohibition, and the biggest sponsor of terrorism in the world shouldn't be able to use our financial system until they are no longer a sponsor of terrorism—very simple. But we couldn't get that through the Senate. If we voted on it, I believe there would be a strong bipartisan majority of Senators who would agree with us, but there are a few who don't.

The JCPOA was sold in many ways as helping to ensure that Iran would moderate its behavior, that Iran would become part of the "community of nations" again.

Well, of course, despite claims by the former President and the former Secretary of State that this is what the agreement would do, that hasn't happened. To the contrary, the opposite has happened. Iran has undertaken activities to undermine U.S. interests, the interests of Israel—our sacred ally in the Middle East—and the interests of our gulf Arab allies in the Middle East on almost a daily basis.

Look at what has happened since that agreement was signed. Moderating behavior did not happen; much more aggressive behavior did. It is really important for people to remember that this isn't just the largest state sponsor of terrorism. This is a country whose activities have led to the deaths and wounding of thousands of American soldiers and marines. The Iranian regime was supplying very sophisticated

IEDs to Iraqi Shia militias that were killing, maiming, and wounding our troops in Iraq. That is a fact. This is a regime with the blood of U.S. soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen on its hands. This is not a regime we should trust. This is a regime about which we should do everything we have in our power to use our leverage to help undermine their nefarious activities around the world that they have been conducting for decades.

So again, my congratulations and I am going to vote for the bill. My congratulations go to Senators Corker and Cardin for this important bill, but it could be stronger. We need to look at ways to make this stronger. This was a missed opportunity, simply bringing an amendment like this to the floor for a vote. Let's see where people stand. It would be strongly supported by the American people, strongly supported by our allies, strongly supported by Members of the Senate on both sides of the aisle.

Unfortunately, there are a few in the Senate who seem more interested in protecting the legacy of the JCPOA than in really putting the screws to Iran and really limiting their ability to fund terrorism or their illicit businesses around the world. That is disappointing. These Senators will not say they are doing that, but that is what is going on here. The legacy of the JCPOA is not worth safeguarding if it means missing the opportunity to further leverage and undermine Iranian terrorist activities around the world. So that is a disappointment we have seen today.

I am going to continue to keep pushing to do more to make sure we take every action, every bit of leverage that the United States of America has to push back against the nefarious activities of the biggest sponsor of terrorism in the world—the Iranian regime and its leadership. I know that most of my colleagues—Democrats and Republicans—are interested in doing so today. We made a good start with this bill that hopefully is going to pass the Senate floor, but we can do much more. We need to do much more. I am going to continue to press my colleagues to do so.

I yield the floor.

(Mr. DAINES assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent, notwithstanding rule XXII, to withdraw the cloture motions on the committee-reported substitute and S. 722; that the only further amendment in order be the Gardner amendment No. 250, as modified with the changes at the desk; further, that following leader remarks on Thursday, June 15, the time until 11 a.m. be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, and that at 11 a.m. the Senate vote in relation to the Gardner amendment No. 250, then vote in relation to the amendment No. 240; finally, following disposition of that

amendment, the committee-reported substitute amendment, as amended, be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 250, AS MODIFIED

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 250, as modified.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Colorado [Mr. GARDNER] proposes an amendment numbered 250, as modified.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment, as modified, is as follows:

(Purpose: To provide an exception for activities of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.)

In Section 236, at the appropriate place, insert the following:

**SEC. \_\_\_\_ . EXCEPTION RELATING TO ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—This Act and the amendments made by this Act shall not apply with respect to activities of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

(b) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this Act or the amendments made by this Act shall be construed to authorize the imposition of any sanction or other condition, limitation, restriction, or prohibition, that directly or indirectly impedes the supply by any entity of the Russian Federation of any product or service, or the procurement of such product or service by any contractor or subcontractor of the United States or any other entity, relating to or in connection with any space launch conducted for—

(1) the National Aeronautics and Space Administration;

or

(2) any other non-Department of Defense customer.

#### VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, today I was unavoidably detained and missed rollcall vote No. 144 on Senate amendment No. 232 to S. 722. Had I been present, I would have voted yes.

#### VA ACCOUNTABILITY AND VACANCIES

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, last week the Senate passed the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, but this legislation does nothing to address one of the most critical problems at the VA. To improve the healthcare our returning heroes receive, we need a VA that is fully staffed with the best healthcare professionals we can find, and in many VA facilities throughout the Nation, including in Ohio, that is far from the case.

Across the U.S., there are more than 49,000 VA vacancies that this administration has yet to fill. In Ohio, as of

April of this year, there were more than 1,700 VA vacancies, and more than 1,500 of those positions were considered critical to public health and safety.

That is a massive problem that needs immediate attention by the administration. These vacancies are not just numbers; they have serious consequences for our veterans who need care.

When the VA is understaffed, it means longer wait times. It means veterans unable to see the specialists they need. It means overstretched doctors.

Overworked doctors means mistakes are more likely and veterans are not getting the quality care they deserve.

Imagine a doctor tells an Ohio veteran she needs an MRI. Well, if there is no MRI tech at that facility because they have not hired one, she has to wait longer for the test and diagnosis. She might have to find someone to drive her to another town.

The last thing we ought to be doing is making it harder for these men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country to get the care they need. We owe all of our veterans—and the families who support them—our gratitude, our respect, and the best healthcare in the world. That means recruiting talented doctors, nurses, and other staff members has to be a priority for the VA.

The agency must improve outreach to prospective employees to show that it is a desirable place to work. It needs to demonstrate that employee's voices, including those of whistleblowers, will be heard and protected when necessary. Future VA employees need to know that all efforts by VA workers to improve the quality of services provided to our veterans will be encouraged, appreciated, and acted on.

We absolutely need to ensure that we are holding the workers who care for our veterans and servicemembers to the highest standards—but that is not enough.

We can improve the quality of care by the VA by making sure it is properly and fully staffed. That is currently not the case, and I will continue to press the VA to provide answers as to why more than 1,700 positions in Ohio—positions that should be filled by Americans dedicated to serving our veterans—are vacant.

When our servicemembers return home, they should be able to focus on spending time with loved ones and rejoining their communities, not worrying about whether they will be able to get the quality healthcare they deserve.

#### TRIBUTE TO STEPHEN SCHLEY

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, for centuries, families and communities throughout Maine were sustained by healthy working forests. During his 32 years with Pingree Associates, including 28 as president, Stephen Schley has exemplified the stewardship that defines Maine's forest products industry.

His retirement provides an opportunity to celebrate his many contributions to the economy, environment, and the communities that make up the great State of Maine.

It can truly be said that Steve's commitment to Maine and our forests is in his DNA. In 1820, the year Maine became a State, Massachusetts shipping businessman David Pingree began investing in Maine forestlands. Nearly two centuries later, as a descendant of that visionary leader, Steve has helped to make Pingree Associates a model of sustainable forestry, environmental responsibility, economic development, and public access.

Today Pingree Associates' lands in Maine approach 1 million acres. Steve has always recognized that with those great holdings comes great responsibility, and he has always measured every initiative by its benefit to the communities and people of Maine. He has devoted time and effort to engaging with organizations statewide that seek to provide support for these communities and their development, both inside and outside his role in forest management.

Just a few examples from a long career demonstrate his commitment. In the 1990s, under Steve's leadership, the Pingree lands in Maine became the largest forest in North America to earn certification for sustainable forestry practices. In 2001, he guided the agreement that established a 750,000-acre conservation easement, also the largest on our continent, to ensure continued public recreational access to undeveloped woodlands. In recent years, as the industry has sought to address the challenges of a changing economy, Steve has been a leader in supporting research into forest bioproducts and developing new economic opportunities for the entire forest products industry. He has always recognized the value in engaging with all stakeholders and has worked in cooperation with the University of Maine to foster the next generation of foresters. Indeed, he worked to establish the endowment of the University's Forestry School, recognizing the unique perspective and unparalleled training that comes with working in the forests of Maine.

The people of Maine have always been faithful stewards of our forests because we appreciate their tremendous value to our way of life. As president of Pingree Associates, Steve Schley has honored our heritage and helped to shape the economic, environmental, and recreational future of our entire State. I commend him for his dedication to Maine's natural treasures and our way of life and thank him for his years of stewardship.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Steve Schley who is stepping down as president of Pingree Associates after nearly three decades of leadership later this month. Eight generations after his descendant initiated this effort, Steve Schley has, in his 32 years of service both to Pingree

Associates, of which he was president for 28 years, and to the State of Maine, continued a tradition of leadership in the development and fiscal health of Maine's forest products industry as well as the sustainability of Maine's forests. Steve's retirement provides an opportunity to honor his wide array of accomplishments and contributions to the State of Maine—all achieved in the spirit and essence of his lineage.

In the year 1820, Maine, as included in the the Missouri Compromise, was ushered into the Union as a new State. That same year, a prominent Massachusetts shipping merchant named David Pingree initiated what would become a historic and indispensable string of investments in Maine forestlands. Over the next nearly 200 years, sudden growth and advancement of Maine's forest product industry, and thus statewide economic development, blossomed from the easement agreements signed and purchases made of Maine forest land by the Pingree family.

Today Pingree Associates is in possession of close to 1 million acres of Maine forest land, bringing a great burden of responsibility upon the president of the association. In every respect, Steve has thrived under this burden. During his tenure as president, he has undertaken initiatives to revitalize Maine's struggling wood-products industry by collaborating with the University of Maine's Forest Bio-products Research Institute to help nurture the next generation of innovators and leaders in the bioproducts industry, setting the stage for the development and integration of sustainable, forward-thinking forest products. By "paying it forward" through the youth of Maine, he is ensuring that his integrity and hard work will continue to live on through these kids for generations to come. Steve's sustainability and conservation efforts were not limited to just ensuring a bright future. Back in 2001, when I was Governor, I announced Steve's success in closing the largest forestland conservation easement in the history of the United States between Pingree Associates and the New England Forestry Foundation, which independently protected 762,192 acres from development and opened up the land to recreation for Mainers and all U.S. citizens for time immemorial.

Because of Steve's hard work and leadership as president of Pingree Associates, Mainers of all ages will continue to benefit from his successes in Maine's forest industry, as well as in conserving land for their recreation. Steve has honored our collective heritage as well as his own, and I thank him for his friendship and his many contributions towards bettering our State.