

supports public charter schools. No. 3, she spent her money helping low-income children have a better school, instead of denying them a better school. And No. 4, she has disclosed everything there is to disclose, and she has divested herself of every conflict that the independent Office of Government Ethics has said there is. In addition, I rescheduled a mark-up this week until next Tuesday so that members of the committee would have a chance to review all of this information.

Next Tuesday, we will vote on whether to approve Betsy DeVos's nomination to the Office of the Secretary of Education, and we will send that to the floor of the full Senate. I am confident we will do that, and I am confident the Senate will approve her.

Even though they may disagree with her, Democrats should give the new President a chance to have his own Education Secretary, just as we did—just as we Republicans did for President Obama.

Few Americans have done as much as Betsy DeVos has to help low-income children have a choice of a better school. The Democrats' opposition to her says more about them than it does about her.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter which I have written to my distinguished ranking member, Senator MURRAY, declining to have a second hearing on Mrs. DeVos.

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

JANUARY 23, 2017.

Hon. PATTY MURRAY.
Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you for your letter today requesting a second hearing for Betsy DeVos.

I have carefully considered the request and decided not to schedule a second hearing, and here is why: Already Mrs. DeVos has spent considerably more time answering questions of committee members than either of President Obama's education secretaries, and I do not know why our committee should treat a Republican nominee so differently than the nominee of a Democratic president.

First, she has met with each committee member in his or her office for the purpose of answering questions.

Then, her confirmation hearing lasted nearly an hour and a half longer than those for either of President Obama's nominees for education secretary.

Now she is answering 837 written follow-up questions from Democratic committee members—1,397 if you include all the questions within a question. By comparison, Republicans asked President Obama's first education secretary 53 written follow-up questions and his second education secretary 56 written follow-up questions, including questions within a question. In other words, Democrats have asked Mrs. DeVos 25 times as many follow-up questions as Republicans asked of either of President Obama's education secretaries.

On January 4, two weeks before her nomination hearing on January 17, committee members received Mrs. DeVos' completed financial disclosure and committee questionnaire. Also on January 4, committee mem-

bers received the same information that she submitted to the Office of Government Ethics on December 12, 2016, about all of her financial holdings.

Many of the 837 written follow-up questions have to do with this financial information that has been before the committee members since January 4, two weeks before her nomination hearing.

Last Thursday, January 19, Mrs. DeVos and the independent Office of Government Ethics agreed that within 90 days of her confirmation, she would divest herself of 102 holdings "to avoid conflicts of interest." When she completes this, according to the letter from the Office of Government Ethics—done in consultation with the department's own Ethics Division—she will be "in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest."

I delayed the committee vote which was scheduled for tomorrow, Tuesday, January 24, for one week to allow committee members to review all of this information before they cast a vote next Tuesday, January 31, at 10:00 a.m. on whether or not to recommend Mrs. DeVos to the full Senate.

One year ago, because I believed presidents should have their Cabinet members in place in order to govern, I worked to confirm promptly President Obama's nomination of John King to be education secretary, even though I disagreed with him. Even though you may disagree with Betsy DeVos, I would respectfully ask you to confirm her. Few Americans have done more to help children of low-income families have a choice of better schools.

Sincerely,

LAMAR ALEXANDER,
Chairman, Senate
Committee on
Health, Education,
Labor, and Pen-
sions.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I will point out again that I see no reason I should treat a Republican President's nominee so differently than a Democratic President's nominee would be treated.

Betsy DeVos has visited every office of the Democratic Senators. She has testified for up to 90 minutes longer than either of President Obama's Secretaries. She is answering nearly 1,400 follow-up questions when each of those Secretaries under President Obama answered 53 and 56.

The reasons for opposing her are reasons that are not valid. I mean, how can you turn down a woman for U.S. Secretary when she spent 30 years of her life trying to help low-income children find a better school?

We have had our hearing. She will answer the questions. Next Tuesday we will have a vote. She will be sent to the Senate, and hopefully the Senate will confirm her. I look forward to working with her as U.S. Secretary.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I came to the floor today to talk about wom-

en's health. But before I do, I want to address an issue that my colleague, the Senator from Tennessee, just talked about: President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

This is a nominee the Democrats have significant numbers of concerns about. In her hearing, where Republicans blocked us from asking questions in an unprecedented and disappointing way, Mrs. DeVos gave what has been widely seen as ill-informed, confused, and concerning responses to serious and reasonable questions. She refused to rule out slashing investments in or privatizing our public schools. She was confused that Federal law provides protections for students with disabilities. She actually argued that guns needed to be allowed in our schools across the country to "protect from grizzlies." And even though she was willing to say that President Trump's behavior toward women should be considered sexual assault, she would not commit to actually enforcing Federal laws protecting women and girls in our schools. So that nominee is absolutely not "in the mainstream." She is far from it.

When it comes to policy, many of us have serious concerns about whether she would stand with students and parents who care about strong public education for all or with President Trump and other millionaires and billionaires like them. And that does not even touch on the serious questions that remain regarding her ethics paperwork, her tangled finances, and her potential conflicts of interest—questions that Democrats have continued to demand answers to.

After her first hearing, Mrs. DeVos announced that she would have to divest 102 separate assets, many of them investments in education companies that Democrats were unable to ask her about. So Democrats have requested another hearing to get information on those issues and to do our job scrutinizing this nominee. I am hopeful that my colleague, the Senator from Tennessee, does allow that to happen because here in the Senate, we owe it to our constituents to scrutinize these nominees. That is our job. It is not our job to protect them from tough questions; it is our job to ask them tough questions.

While I suspect that my colleague, the Senator from Tennessee, supports Mrs. DeVos and I respect that he is the chairman of the committee, I am hopeful that he does not simply jam this nominee through without allowing us to do our job.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THEIR ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, having said that, I am on the floor today with a number of my colleagues who will be joining me throughout the time here today in the Senate to stand up and to be a voice for women.

I was so proud to march this weekend with millions of women and men in a

clear rejection of the hate and division that President Trump campaigned on and in strong support of every woman's rights.

This past weekend, we also recognized the anniversary of the historic ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, a decision that has empowered women and expanded economic opportunity and security for families for more than four decades.

I have heard story after story from Washington State and across the country about what *Roe v. Wade* means for women. It means being able to plan your family, to be able to pursue your dreams and give back to your community. But perhaps most importantly, the decision in *Roe v. Wade* sent a clear message that access to abortion—a woman's right to make the most personal of all decisions herself—is fundamental to her freedom and her ability to chart her own path.

Now we have already seen extreme politicians in State after State do everything they can to undermine access to abortion. But, today, the constitutionally protected rights these women have had now for 44 years are, unfortunately, more at risk than ever as a result of President Trump's extreme and deeply harmful agenda.

He has promised to pick Supreme Court nominees whose beliefs about women's reproductive rights simply could not be more backwards or damaging. Unfortunately, in what looks like a sign of things to come, the President yesterday signed an Executive order limiting access to safe abortion and other family planning services on women worldwide by reinstating the global gag rule.

I want to be very clear. If the President continues down this path, women will be hurt. Their lives will be put at risk, and the same goes for women around the world. So I am very concerned, and I am angry.

But if Saturday's march proved anything, it proved that women and men across this country are more motivated than ever, and, frankly, so am I.

Now, I can understand why President Trump may not have wanted to hear from the hundreds of thousands of marchers who completely filled the National Mall on Saturday or the millions more who marched nationwide in every State—coast to coast—and on every continent. But if he didn't get the message, this is just the beginning.

The millions of women and people who care about women's rights and their access to health care are going to keep standing up, and we in the Senate are going to continue to stand with them and fight back every step of the way and do everything in our power to make sure that our country does not go backwards. It will not be easy, but I know we can do it if we keep marching together.

Thank you. 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. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I suggest unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

44TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, this past Sunday we celebrated the 44th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, a ruling that assured every woman of her constitutional right to make her own decision about whether and when to have a child. That fundamental constitutional right is the right to privacy, which all women should cherish and protect.

This weekend, in fact, many of us in Washington, DC, and around the country marched in the streets of our home States—or here, as I did—in support of these ideals and values, including the right to privacy, other civil rights and liberties, economic opportunity, and women's access to health care, which truly make America great.

Fundamental to the principle of women's access to health care is the *Roe v. Wade* decision that reaffirms the constitutional right to reproductive decisions made by women individually on their own in consultation with their health care providers, their families, their clergy. I was a clerk for Justice Blackmun in the term after *Roe v. Wade* was decided, and I can tell you that we all believed then very strongly that that Supreme Court decision would put to rest the question of legal access to abortion in this great country.

In fact, it did not. Despite 7 in 10 Americans opposing the potential overturning of *Roe v. Wade* according to a recent survey by Pew Research Center, the outliers and extremists still seek to eliminate the right to legal abortion. That broad public support was embodied in the spirit and dedication shown over this past weekend by protesters across the world, and I was reminded yet again that we must continue to fight for what we believe, particularly in light of the ongoing threats to and attacks on women's health care.

Efforts to undermine these rights have redoubled in recent years, and throughout the past decade we have seen unprecedented attacks through State efforts to chip away at that virtually protected constitutional right. From 2011 to 2016, there were 334 restrictions enacted by States that would cut back on *Roe v. Wade* rights, accounting for 30 percent of all abortion restrictions since the U.S. Supreme Court decided that case.

The force dedicated to enacting these restrictions, which are designed to undermine the right to reproductive health care, can be particularly disheartening as they disregard the health needs of the most vulnerable population of the women who are most often impacted, by also seeking, or at

least claiming to seek, to advance women's health care. In fact, many of those restrictions are a ruse. They are enacted in the name of health care but are a disguise for restrictions on health care. They have left many women, particularly in rural and underserved locations, with little access to health care, including basic care such as cancer screening, STD testing, and preventive health care. Clearly, improving women's health care has failed to be the focus of State legislatures in these instances, as they have actively worked to restrict access to care and chip away at the constitutional protections provided in *Roe v. Wade*.

I joined with Senator MURRAY in leading a total of 163 Members of the House and Senate in filing an amicus brief in the case of *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*. Last summer, the Supreme Court overturned the restriction at issue in that case, reiterating and clarifying the "undue burden" standard in *Roe* and debunking the lie that anti-choice extremists have been pushing for years—that medically unnecessary, onerous restrictions on clinics and clinicians that provide women abortions do not make women safer. In fact, they simply constrain access.

I am hopeful that this decision will help stem and stop the assault on women's health care taking place in so many States and communities around the country. So I am joining with my colleague, Senator MURRAY, who was here just minutes ago—a wonderful champion of this cause—as well as Senator SHAHEEN, whom I believe will be speaking later today on *Roe v. Wade*'s anniversary, in pushing back on this policy by introducing legislation to permanently repeal the global gag rule that the Trump administration, as one of its first acts, has announced, which will reverse much of the progress that President Obama made in relation to international family planning. This legislation will seek to move that progress forward again and forestall the effort to roll back that process and turn back the clock. I will oppose any and all efforts by the Trump administration to move our country backwards, including yesterday's reversion to the global gag rule.

This 44th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* should be a reminder about the importance of fighting for the right of privacy, the right to live life free of governmental interference, and, as one of our Supreme Court Justices said, the right to be let alone—in effect, let alone from government interference.

It is a right that I have fought for and that so many others have fought for throughout my career and throughout my time as a Senator and the attorney general of Connecticut. It is a right we should all continue to keep at the forefront of our work here in the Senate and for all of us in this country.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.