

By the way, it was done without consultation with our military leaders. A Commander in Chief proposing a policy through a tweet without consulting with the experts who have dedicated their lives to the national security of our Nation—that in and of itself is a real betrayal of responsibility.

Attorney General Sessions filed an amicus brief in *Zarda v. Altitude Express*, and this brief says that title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which provides protection against discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, and sex, does not provide protection against discrimination in terms of one's LGBT status. By the way, that is the opposite of what court after court has ruled.

What happened, one might ask, to the President Trump who, as Candidate Trump, said: "Thank you to the LGBT community!" As a candidate, he said: "I will fight for you." What happened to the President who, after the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, said in a tweet: "Will fight for you." This last week, the President did not fight for you in that community; instead, he attacked that community, and he apparently approved of Attorney General Sessions attacking that community.

This is why we need the Equality Act. The Equality Act would clarify that when we say no discrimination on the basis of sex, that is broadly applying to one's status of who they are or whom they love.

If we go back to President Johnson's presentation of the issue in America, where he said every individual—the matter of freedom is that you have the opportunity to be treated as having the same promise and be treated with the same respect as everyone else, that it is all about being able to thrive in the United States, or to put it quite simply, not having a door slammed in your face when you go to rent an apartment, not having a door slammed in your face when you go to a restaurant or a movie theater, not having a door slammed in your face when you seek to be part of a jury. That is what freedom is in this country. That is the freedom that Attorney General Sessions and President Trump are seeking to rip away from a sizable share of Americans, and that is simply wrong. That is why we need the Equality Act—to make sure that this is remedied. That is why we need the courts to stand up against discrimination on the basis of who you are and whom you love.

It has been a week in which the President attacked and damaged our military and Attorney General Sessions attacked and betrayed and attempted to steal freedom from a vast swath of Americans. That is a very sad week on both counts, and we in this Chamber should stand up and say: That is not OK. We will fight for the security of the United States of America, and we will fight for opportunity for every single American.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from Missouri.

RURAL BROADBAND

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, August is Rural Broadband Month at the Federal Communications Commission. The Commerce Committee just today put forward nominees for the Commission, and the Commission does matter. But I want to talk today specifically about highlighting the importance of broadband in rural America and rural Missouri.

In January of this year, I joined a number of my Senate colleagues on a bipartisan letter to President Trump regarding the importance of broadband and expanding its access to all of the country and, particularly, the parts of our country that are not currently served.

As part of any infrastructure legislation that the Congress is talking about, I think we and the administration need to consider policies that advance infrastructure not just solely in terms of roads, bridges, and ports, which are important, particularly where the Presiding Officer and I live, in Arkansas and Missouri. That transportation network means so much to us, but also important is how people are able to communicate and compete. High speed internet access cannot be overlooked as we consider what our infrastructure should look like going forward.

Broadband can be delivered by wireless or wireline technology. It can be brought to customers by traditional communications companies in rural areas. Often, now, rural electric co-ops show great interest and capacity to do this, as do others. Following the significant steps that Congress took to deregulate the market as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the broadband industry has really responded. They invested a lot of money. In fact, they invested \$1.5 trillion of private money to deploy better and faster networks. If you have access to one of those networks, you know what a difference it makes.

In 2015 alone—that is the last number I have access to—the investment by traditional wireline companies, wireless companies, and cable providers was \$76 billion. All of that is really good, except that there is a real divide between the rural areas of my State and the rural areas of the country and the other more populated areas.

Some people say: Oh, that is just a myth; there is no digital divide. I would have them look at any number of articles. One article in the *Wall Street Journal* in June made the point that 39 percent of the United States' rural population lacks access to broadband. That sounds like a pretty big divide to me—that 39 percent of the entire rural population of the country doesn't have broadband, and 61 percent of rural Missourians lack access to broadband. These numbers are not acceptable.

Most private investment has been directed, as you would assume it would be, toward high populations, highly

populated and easily accessed areas, and future customers. This is like the same problem the country had 100 years ago transitioning to telephones. It was hard to get a telephone to a house that was 5 miles away from the nearest house, as opposed to a house that was in the same apartment building to the nearest apartment. It is a lot harder to do that. The government at that time said that there would be a universal service fee on phone bills, and then use that money to ensure that everybody would have equal access to what was obviously seen as a really important way to communicate. The concept of Universal Service was enshrined in the 1996 act. It said that rural households should have the same access to advanced telecommunications enjoyed by their urban counterparts. It is a good goal for a lot of reasons.

I saw some figures this week. When looking at the overdose deaths and the opioid problems in the country, they are much greater in rural counties than they are in urban centers. In our State, Kansas City, our biggest city by population and any of the five counties that touched it weren't anywhere close to the top list of other areas in our State that had this problem. It matters when you are not connected. It matters when opportunities that you otherwise would have simply aren't there because somehow a service that is essential to our society today isn't available to you in the same way it is available to others. I am not saying it should be free to some and cost other people something, but it should be available to you in the same way that it is available to others in our society, as the 1996 Telecommunications Act stated.

Broadband is necessary to attract and retain business for banks, factories, distribution centers, and small businesses. It is necessary to start and maintain a business, large or small. If business is going to compete outside the local marketplace, there has to be that connectivity. Frankly, in order to compete in the local marketplace and to have the ability to buy at the best price and to get the kind of products needed, the internet really matters.

Broadband is always there. We have to have it if we are going to compete in the world economy. Many people in rural America are able to do that in ways that nobody would have dreamed about 10 years ago, but not everybody has that same access.

Certainly, it is critical for schools and libraries. Just today, a parent was telling me that students can't do their homework anymore unless they can get internet access somewhere close to where they live. Students depend on the internet for education and opportunity where we live today.

A revolution has taken place in agriculture. The great food-producing economy that we have produces more food all the time. It actually produces more food with fewer people. So that creates some displaced people who otherwise would have had those jobs, but

it also uses wireless infrastructure, data, and GPS structures to decide what should happen in a field at a given time in that part of the field. There are data centers, autonomous systems, and fiber optics that are a part of agriculture today. If you are linked to broadband and you are in your combine and have a problem, sometimes that problem can be solved in a couple of minutes by quickly accessing your system, seeing where the problem is, resetting what you need to set and moving on, as opposed to the other option, which is calling the repair person, having the technologist come out with their computer, hook it up to your combine, and 5 or 6 hours later, at a time when you are in the critical moments of your annual livelihood, suddenly you are working again, when you could have been working 5 or 6 minutes later if you had been connected like many farmers are today.

Broadband is more than just economic opportunity. Rural hospitals and health clinics are able to use telemedicine to bring services at a level that otherwise would not be available. This is particularly important in mental and behavioral healthcare. A lot of people are every bit as comfortable or more comfortable with telehealth than they are with somebody in the room with them. Also, with intensive care, suddenly all of the resources that may be available 100 miles away can be right there at the point where questions are asked and that information is handled. Suddenly, somebody's life is saved because of the capacity to have that kind of communication.

For years I have tried to lead when I could, and joined my colleagues when they were leading, with numerous letters to the FCC urging it to reform the Universal Service Program for the digital era. Most people who don't have a line to their phone have a way to get a phone in their hand now, but they don't have a way to get this important way to communicate and to compete. It is frustrating, when we see the limited resources we have—the government resources—to put into something like this to see limited funds go to places where you are just creating another provider and more competition, except that the second provider has government money on its side to compete with the first provider that went in with its own money. There is a big difference between unserved and any level of underserved. If you are unserved, like 69 percent of rural Missourians, the idea that somebody else doesn't have enough competition in the place they live doesn't seem to make very much sense to you. If there is a competitive marketplace and somebody wants to go in there and compete and get the prices down, that is all fine, but I think the government focus should be just like it was with telephones 100 years ago—to see that people had the opportunity to have that phone the same as their neighbors in more densely populated areas.

The President recently designated Ajit Pai to be the Chairman of the FCC. We are finally seeing the Commission take actions to address rural broadband. In February, I wrote to the Chairman and urged him to act on the \$2 billion available for rural broadband and open this money up to auction so new entrants into the field, like electric co-ops, can competitively bid alongside everybody else. The FCC has decided to do that.

Tomorrow the Commission will consider a notice to initiate the pre-auction process for this money to deploy fiber optics in parts of Missouri. This will complement other initiatives underway, as the FCC looks at how to address rural broadband. They have launched a \$4.5 billion auction for mobile wireless service in rural areas. They are suspending out-of-date rules that forced small carriers to raise telephone rates. They are launching a proceeding to reduce costs for companies upgrading from copper to fiber optic networks—another FCC initiative. They are launching a broadband advisory committee. These are all steps in the right direction, where you and I live. They will make a difference.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Chairman and others on the Commission on this issue. I think rural broadband is particularly leveling in creating the opportunities that we would like to see. The Commission will now be back up to its five-member intention of how many people are supposed to be there, making those decisions.

There is still work to be done. We need to reduce the digital divide. Connectivity is critical. We also need policies that support efficient network structures that allow people to not just connect to a network but to connect with a network that really works.

Let me talk about one other Missouri issue that relates here.

I said earlier that Kansas City is now our biggest city, our most populous city. Still, St. Louis, I think, by region, is the bigger region, but the city of St. Louis is not as big as Kansas City. In Kansas City, they have an internet exchange called KCIX. It is a peering center that offers tremendous benefits to secondary educational institutions, to high schools, to vocational programs, and to others so they really maximize how they communicate with each other and have the availability of resources in one place much more equally available in others, and large amounts of bandwidth can be diverted by using this peering infrastructure.

Frankly, what is happening in Kansas City this fall is that the North Kansas City School District will establish connections to KCIX. It is estimated that it may save the district almost \$500,000 a year in bandwidth just by looking at peering. If peering helps there, maybe peering is one of the other things we can look at that will help solve the rural broadband challenge as well.

We are going to be working on this. There will be legislation. There will be continuing efforts to urge the FCC to stay on point. We need to do what we can to make communities in rural America productive and competitive and as healthy as they can be.

By the way, there are a lot of stories here to be told. I hope the next time I come to the floor on this topic that I will come to the floor with some things that are happening in my State that would not have happened if there had not been the access to broadband in not very big communities that are suddenly doing business all over the United States and all over the world.

How we do that is by not letting any of our country wither away, where we have existing infrastructure and schools and sidewalks and water systems and by being sure the people who want to live there can live there, just like we are being sure now, as we see a revitalization of some of our downtowns and inner cities. People will want to move back to them and will have reasons and desires to want to do that. We are seeing an upswing there.

I think we can see the same kind of thing happen in other parts of the country if we work to be sure we have an equity of opportunity. One of the major things that will provide that will be having access to broadband that works. I hope we can continue to fight that fight and see the progress we have made just in the last 6 months.

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

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

GREAT LAKES ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY
INDEX BILL

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, as we head into the month of August, many Americans are planning to spend time along our beautiful coasts. Our country is fortunate to have such a wide variety of natural resources along the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, and the east and west coasts. However, I am partial to America's best coast: The 4,500 miles of U.S. coastline along the Great Lakes.

Our coastal resources make it possible to move cargo and goods around the world. They provide opportunities for outdoor recreation like fishing and boating and trips to the beach. Our coasts are not only beautiful, providing some of the most scenic vistas and picturesque landscapes our country has to offer; these ecosystems also provide many tangible benefits. They serve as flooding buffers, critical habitats for fish and wildlife, and locations for ports and other marine infrastructure.

In the Great Lakes, our freshwater coastline contains one-fifth of the entire world's fresh water and provides drinking water for over 40 million people. We must be stewards of these areas