

issue that we look at and say: Why would we stand in the way of charter schools when, in the past, they have been very well received by Republicans and Democrats alike?

President Obama was a supporter of charter schools. Both of his Secretaries of Education were outspoken supporters of charter schools. In fact, one of them helped found a charter school. Charter schools are public schools, and they are received well.

In my State of Oklahoma, we just had another school that came online that is a charter school that has been approved by our State board of education in a unanimous vote just a few weeks ago. These are decisions that are made by local districts. These are decisions that don't work in every area, in every location, especially in many rural areas. It doesn't work the same way. So why don't you allow that local district to make those decisions? Why don't you allow that State to make that decision? Why don't you give the authority to Oklahoma to do it? Let's not ask Betsy DeVos; in fact, allow Congress to hold her to account to make sure that our Secretary of Education is not trying to impose on our States what she wants to do but is allowing our State to do what we want to do. What we ask of a Secretary of Education is not to run our schools but to stay out of our schools' business and to allow us to be able to make those decisions.

She is not going to step in and try to take funds away. Those are not her funds to give and to be able to monitor. Our decision is—what do we want to do as a State in education? What options do we want to provide to our kids? What I would ask most of a Secretary of Education is to leave us alone and allow us to do what we can for our kids.

Quite frankly, I don't have a problem with school choice, even as a parent who sent my kids to public schools when I could have sent them to private schools. I thought the school was doing a great job in my area. I was glad for my kids to be able to be involved in it.

But why would we ever tell a parent: If you will give us just 5 more years, we will get this school cleaned up and turned around. Their child doesn't have 5 more years. Their child has one shot. And if they wait 5 more years, they graduate from high school and without the opportunities they needed. It may work for their younger brother, but they couldn't wait.

Why don't we give that ability back to the parent? As an avid supporter of public education, as a person with deep respect for teachers in my school, as a person who—I myself have a secondary education degree from college; I spent 22 years working for students, and I cannot tell teachers enough: Thank you for your thankless service. They spend all day with students who don't want to be there most of the time. They deal with parents at night who are upset that their child got a B-plus

rather than an A. And they work tirelessly through a lot of bureaucracy. We are grateful for that. I can assure them that this Congress will make sure that no Secretary of Education, including the next one, reaches into any classroom and tells them how to do their business.

NOMINATIONS OF JEFF SESSIONS AND SCOTT PRUITT

Madam President, we have a couple of others I want to mention, as well. JEFF SESSIONS, who is coming out of this body, will be the next Attorney General. He will be a great Attorney General because JEFF SESSIONS has proved over the years that he is passionate about the law. He did it when he was in Alabama. He has done it here in the Senate. He has been an individual who is very focused: What does the law say? Let's do that.

He has been a person who is a lover of all people but also a person who is not opposed to confronting people when they need to be confronted. It is a good role for an Attorney General. I look forward to seeing him in that spot.

We have a favorite son in this fight as well. His name is Scott Pruitt. Scott Pruitt has been beat up a lot by the special interest lobbyists and environmental lobby. They put out all kinds of stuff about him. I encourage them to actually meet Scott Pruitt and to hear from him. Scott Pruitt has been passionate about the environment. Scott Pruitt actually likes breathing clean air. I know that may be shocking to people, but he actually likes clean air. In fact, he likes clean water as well. I don't know if you knew that or not.

Scott Pruitt has been a very good attorney general for us and has also been very focused on doing this one thing: What does the law say? Let's do that.

Some of the pushback that Scott Pruitt has had is not that he is opposed to the law; it is that he is not willing to push beyond the law, to be more creative with the Clean Water Act, and to be more creative with the Clean Air Act. It is not the job of the executive branch to be creative with an old law; it is to implement the law and to do it well.

I fully expect Scott Pruitt to hold every person and every company that are polluters to account because we as a nation all want clean air and clean water. But I also fully expect him to push back when someone says to him "You ought to do this," and for him to respond "That may be nice, but that has to pass Congress because the Environmental Protection Agency can't make up the rules; they can only implement the rules that have been given to them by Congress." I am looking forward to Scott Pruitt serving in that role.

In the weeks ahead, as he has advanced out of committee, he will come to the floor, and we will have a full vote here. I am willing to tell all of my colleagues that when Scott Pruitt is at the Environmental Protection Agency, you will be pleasantly surprised with

how fair he is, how responsive he is, and how passionate he is about actually implementing the law.

These are long days for us because there are an awful lot of stall tactics going on. President Trump is trying to put his Cabinet together. By this point, 2 weeks in, President Obama had almost all of his Cabinet done already. Over 20 individuals were already in place in President Obama's first term. The other party has blocked as many as they possibly can so that President Trump can't get to work. You may think that is a nice political thing to do, but the Nation had an election. And as President Obama said, elections do have consequences.

President Trump should be allowed to put together his Cabinet just as Republicans allowed President Obama to put together his Cabinet before. It is a fair thing, and it is the right thing to be able to do. We all need to be able to get our work done, President Trump included. Let's let him put his team together and get to work as the American people have asked him to do.

Madam President, with that, I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I come to talk about a topic that is near and dear to my heart. Although I don't serve on the committee of jurisdiction, I will tell some stories today that will demonstrate to you about why I feel so strongly about this nominee and so strongly about this position.

I want to start with my dad's story. My dad grew up on a small family farm outside the town of Barney, ND, not that you would know where that is. When he became an eighth grader—when he graduated with an eighth-grade education, he wanted to go to high school in Wyndmere, but as was the custom at the time, the oldest son was expected to stay on the farm and not get an education beyond the eighth grade and help support the family. That is not unusual. There is probably a number of people in this body whose parents have a similar experience, but this story really came home to me when my dad was diagnosed with melanoma.

Unfortunately, with part of that disease, the cancer moved to his brain and something remarkable happened for all of us, and that was that he would relive parts of his life. He would believe—as the cancer took over his brain, that part would activate his memory, and he would be doing things like calling bingo in the middle of the night during this time when he was in hospice care. It would alarm us, and maybe sometimes even amuse us, but he would

truly believe he was calling bingo at the Mandan VFW Hall.

I remember taking care of him one night, when he started reliving the experience of not going to high school and started really talking about how that affected his life, begging his father. I would never have known that without the cancer, but that education experience was so critical to his future and the future of his children. That experience that he had taught us and informed us and mandated that we appreciate public school education and the opportunity that came with it.

That leads to our story, the seven children of Ray Heitkamp who had a great public school education in Mantador, went to high school in Hankinson. Some of my siblings were fortunate enough to go to parochial school before St. Francis closed down, but we all graduated from Hankinson High School. Then something truly remarkable happened in this country—truly remarkable because we had a chance to go to college. From the time we were just children, my mother would tell us we were going to college. We would wonder, back in the sixties, how that was ever possible.

Then the Federal Government did something truly remarkable. It said our most important asset and our greatest future lies in the education of our children, and we want to help our children advance with that education. We saw what happened with the GI bill when GIs came home from World War II and went to college and became doctors and lawyers, became bankers, became businessmen, and worked to build their communities. We saw that.

We said: Wouldn't it be great if every kid had that opportunity, not just returning veterans but every kid.

So I remember coming here, my first day that I presided in the U.S. Senate after I was elected in 2012, and I was so busy getting ready to serve that I hadn't really gotten to that spot where I realized: Wow. I am standing in the most deliberative body in the world, and I am a U.S. Senator. I remember gaveling in, asking Pastor Black to come forward and give the prayer, and then we turned—as the pages know, we turned to say the Pledge of Allegiance. It was at that moment when I asked myself, "In what country can the daughter of a school cook and a construction worker serve in the U.S. Senate?"

We are blessed in this country to have opportunity, but that opportunity is diminished if we don't support public school education. That opportunity will not be available to future generations. We will continue to divide this country in ways that will destroy our democracy.

So where do we go today and how does this have anything to do with today?

This is our Nation's story. Public school education, which began in Massachusetts, and every step and every development of public school education

has expanded the opportunity for children with disabilities to achieve their highest calling through public school education. Children of a school cook and a construction worker can become a U.S. Senator. Any achievement we all have is because someone cared about our education and cared about our opportunities.

I was fortunate, I had parents who believed in education. Way too many children today are in homes where education isn't a priority. Maybe that home is racked with poverty, addiction, huge challenges. Even homeless children deserve a public school education, deserve access to education.

We are the envy of the world. Children in other countries die for the opportunity for public school education. This is foundational, not just to the individual development but to the future of our country.

So where are we today? Sure, we have challenges in education. No one is denying that. No one is saying our public school education, our entire education system is perfect. The challenge I have in North Dakota is achieving quality education in a rural setting. How do we do that when maybe there are only two high school seniors, and if they are going to go to the next school, they are going to drive at least an hour and a half a day. That is not unheard of. I can only imagine what that looks like in Alaska.

There are parts in our State where we are challenged every day to deliver high-quality education. We have a technology barrier. Fortunately, in North Dakota, we have technology and broadband in many of our schools. That is not true across this country. We need to do more in broadband, bringing high-quality education tools to schools. We need to recruit the best teachers for our rural schools, the best teachers for our urban schools—the best people.

During my time as Attorney General, I did a project involving juvenile justice. We went around to all of the schools, mainly talking to junior high kids because we believed that was the point at which they were making choices that may change the trajectory of their life. We were going around high schools talking to junior high kids. One of the things that kids told us over and over again is, they did not want their teachers to know when they had done something illegal. Why is that? It is not because they didn't trust their teachers with that information. The other group they didn't want to know was their parents because they didn't want to disappoint the heroes in their lives.

Contrary to what people think—because they think children's heroes are some sports hero or some rapper or some performer, and that is absolutely not true. Do you know who kids' heroes are? First, they will say their grandparents or parents or a sister or a brother, one of their family members. Next what we hear is their third grade teacher, their seventh grade math

teacher, their high school coach who maybe made their life a little bit easier when they were in school. Those are their heroes. These are the people who are doing the critical work all too often of helping to raise our kids in very challenging circumstances.

So when we do not support public school education with highly qualified nominees for the highest education job in the country, what does that say to people who may choose an opportunity in education? It says we don't think very much of them because we are just willing to go ahead with a D-minus applicant because maybe that applicant had a big checkbook.

I want to talk a little bit about my colleague who is on the floor today, PATTY MURRAY, and a colleague who is not, and that is Senator ALEXANDER. I can state that I was in State office when No Child Left Behind was passed. It was so apparent to me and everyone at that level that this was not a public policy that was going to achieve the intended results, but yet we maintained that public policy for decades—through gridlock, through the inability to sit down and compromise, through the inability to put politics aside and put children first.

Then something remarkable happened in the last Congress. In a highly contentious partisan environment, two great leaders, Senator MURRAY and Senator ALEXANDER, sat down, and they knew the time had come to reverse the No Child Left Behind Act and replace it with something that was going to be much more successful so the Every Student Succeeds Act was passed, and we are now on the path of implementation. We set a new policy for public school education.

We need a leader in the Department of Education who believes in public school education and who can administer that policy, who can leave policy to the local and State school boards, to parents, to PTAs, and to local folks. We want policy. We need someone who can collaborate and implement and work with schools across our country to make this policy work and then report fairly back to us when something is not working to tell us that wasn't a good idea. We need more afterschool programs. We need a hot lunch program that actually serves more kids in the morning so kids are ready to learn. That is what we need.

So what did we get with this nominee? In my opinion, we got a highly unqualified nominee for one of the most significant positions in government for our most precious resource, our children. That is what we got.

So I am standing today, explaining my belief that we need to do something different than approve this nominee. We need to send the right message to all of those educators, all of those State officials, and all of those parents who came together and worked with Senator MURRAY and Senator ALEXANDER to form a policy. Dissent was hardly anywhere. If it was, it was whispered on the edges. We need somebody

who appreciates that work, who understands that work, and who would never say public schools are a dead end.

Public schools are not a dead end. They are the beginning of opportunity. We have to work hard to make sure that happens, but we have to start from a foundational belief that public school education is critically important and needs to be protected, supported, and advocated for. We have to start there, and I think we are not there with this nominee.

I wish to say it is not just my judgment that I bring to the floor of the Senate today. I bring to the floor the judgment of thousands of North Dakotans who have called me.

Hopefully, I did something to give people greater access to my advocacy in the Senate for them. I opened a portal on my Web page and asked people to tell us what they wanted to have done with these nominees. I have received thousands—in fact, 4,600. It may not sound like a lot to other offices, but that is a lot from a State of only 730,000 or 740,000 people. Of those 4,600, over half were on this nomination. Of those who called this office or sent a message to the portal, 92 percent of them said: Please, do not vote to approve Betsy DeVos. These are incredible statistics, very telling statistics.

I wish to read some of the comments I received from North Dakotans. I received a comment from Amber of Burleigh County, who said:

My husband and I are both public educators and we know how critical a good public school education is for students all across North Dakota, including our two daughters. We need a leader at the U.S. Department of Education who supports students, teachers, and public schools. Unfortunately, Betsy DeVos wants to dismantle public schools.

Judith from Cass County said:

DeVos has no public education experience or training of any kind; she has never been a teacher or school administrator, served on any public board of education, or even attended a public school. It is clear DeVos is not qualified to be the head of the U.S. Department of Education.

Patricia from Bottineau County told me:

As a former public school teacher and grandmother of 6, I do not support Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. She should not get this job with no experience in education other than trying to get rid of public schools.

An editorial today in the Fargo Forum, a very conservative newspaper in my State—I might say, it is not known for its liberal bias—said:

Of Trump's Cabinet nominees, DeVos is among the least qualified for the intended job because of her uninformed and ideologically skewed views of public education. Her ignorance was on display during her Senate committee hearing during which she was unable to answer even softball questions about long-standing education policies.

If we were inclined to support Ms. DeVos, I felt it was my job to watch the hearings. By anyone's measure, I think the hearings were clearly a disaster for this nominee. But I think it

also represented—more than the lack of knowledge and qualifications—an attitude. That attitude is that it is clear she doesn't understand the importance of public schools and refused to rule out taking Federal investments away from public schools. In fact, I think it was very clever in not revealing the true agenda, which is to privatize—not just charter schools. In fact, some of the greatest charter school advocates in this country do not support her nomination.

She doesn't understand basic education policy, yet she wants to lead the Federal agency overseeing education in our country. She doesn't understand or know of current Federal laws that support and protect students with disabilities. She has shown her severe lack of knowledge about rural schools, which represent about one-third of the public schools nationwide. She never attended or taught in a public school or had any of her children in a public school.

Students, parents, and teachers across North Dakota have stood up to say no to Betsy DeVos. In the Senate, only one more vote is needed to stop this nomination from proceeding.

I ask my colleagues who have not made up their mind, my colleagues whom I know care deeply about children to think about the great history of our country and think about the enormous privilege we had as children and as young adults to access that public school education. I ask them to think about how else someone who is the daughter of a school cook and a janitor and a seasonal construction worker could be in the Senate if it weren't for public school education.

Please, we can find someone so much better—someone who understands the new Federal policy, who has the ability to collaborate with public officials and not criticize, someone who hasn't said the work of these people who have dedicated their lives is a dead end, and someone who has respect for public school education.

We can do so much better. Our kids need it and deserve it. Children in the most precarious and difficult situations need a champion, whether it is because they have disabilities or whether they come from poverty and don't have a parent who really cares about their education or is too busy trying to put food on the table to worry about whether the homework gets done. We can make a difference here. We can send a message out to all of those school teachers who have dedicated their lives, who are our kids' heroes, that their life work matters. We are going to send them the best this country has to offer to be their leader.

Madam President, with that, I yield the floor, and I yield my time to Senator MURRAY.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I yield the remainder of my postclosure debate time to Senator MURRAY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Ms. HEITKAMP. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I rise today to address the potential confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. I rise today not just as a Senator from Montana; I am a former public school teacher, a former public school board member. I have a mother who was a teacher and an aunt who was a teacher. I have a daughter who is a teacher. I have a sister-in-law who is a teacher. I have a number of teachers in my family. They all have either taught at or currently teach at public schools. When I was growing up, education was a critical part of what we developed into. Public education was something that my parents thought was very important. That was instilled in them by my grandmother, who over 100 years ago immigrated to this country from Sweden, due in part to the public education system we have in this country today.

When I came home from school every day, my mother would quiz me on what went on in public education. By the way, I went to the same school she did. She would find out what had transpired, both the interactions with the kids and what went on academically in the school, and also offer me a hand if I needed help with the academic portion. We would talk about my experiences in the public school because it was important. She knew it was important.

She was the daughter of a homesteader. When she was a child, homesteading wasn't exactly looked upon kindly by the ranchers of the community. They thought homesteaders were taking away their right to make a living—breaking up that good grass and putting wheat on it, making it so cattle couldn't continue to graze there. There was a lot of friction between ranchers' and farmers' kids. They all went to the same public school. In my particular case, it was Big Sandy Public Schools. In the environment of that public school, those kids learned to get along. What resulted from that was the "greatest generation." We live in a world today due in much part to their figuring out a way to get along, figuring out a way to communicate, figuring out a way to make the world a

better place. That was due I think entirely because of the public education system we have in this country today.

Our public education system is—and this cannot be argued—the foundation of our democracy. When I was growing up and the Vietnam conflict was going on and there were conflicts around the world, everybody said: You know, these countries need to have a democracy. And then there was a realization that without an educated population, democracies really don't work.

We have had a democracy in this country for nearly 250 years because of the success of our public education system. We have had a middle class in this country that has been the envy of the world because of our—listen to me—public education system. It is the foundation of our democracy, it is the foundation of our economy, and it is a place where we learn to live together peacefully.

What is troubling about the nomination of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary is that she wants to privatize this public education system we have. I had her in my office. We talked about vouchers, and we talked about privatizing education. We talked about accountability. Her response to the public education system was that it was failing. Her response to that was, pull a few kids out. Pull the kids out who don't have any disabilities, pull the kids out who are a little smarter, and put them into a classroom, and that will be what makes this country great again. This country is already great, and if we do that, I am here to tell the people of the Senate today that we will destroy the foundation of this country and we will destroy—it may take a few years—we will destroy our democracy.

It would be different if Betsy DeVos had spent 1 hour, 1 minute, 1 second in a public education classroom. She was not educated in public schools. She has not dealt with public schools. I dealt with it as a teacher. I dealt with it as a school board member for 9 years. In fact, my second public service job was on the Big Sandy School Board. It is important because my first one dealt with soil and soil conservation, and my second one dealt with education. She has been in neither of those positions. Quite frankly, it doesn't matter that she wasn't in those—except it does because if you don't touch base with what is going on and see the successes that are happening in public education, you can have a warped view of what is going on in this country right now, and that warped view will cause you to do things like say "You know what, we are going to put up charter schools, we are going to have vouchers, and ultimately we are going to take away public education as we know it today." Instead of saying "You know what, we are going to invest in accountability, we are going to invest in teachers' salaries, and we are going to invest in a 21st-century education system so our kids can compete," the answer is "No,

we are going to pull kids out of the school."

I am going to tell you a secret. I taught in the late seventies. I am far from a master teacher; I taught for a couple of years. I quit teaching because I could do anything else in society and make more money. I could cut meat for a day and make as much money as I made teaching school for a week.

Wouldn't it be a little bit smarter, instead of privatizing the schools, as Betsy DeVos wants to do, to invest in those schools? Let's give the kids the maximum opportunity we can give them. Let's value public education, and let's value education.

I am going to tell you what happens in a rural State like mine with privatization. My school system in my hometown of Big Sandy has about 175 kids. That is not an exception for Montana; there are a lot of schools that have 175 kids or fewer. By the way, that is not high school; that is K-12. Let's say that for whatever reason, somebody wants to set up a charter school a few miles down the road and suck a few kids out of Big Sandy and maybe suck a few kids out of the Fort Benton school system and a few more out of the Chester system. Pretty soon, they have their little charter school, and there is less money to teach the kids who are left in those public schools. What do you think is going to happen to those kids who are left there? That is going to take away from our public education system. Ultimately, it will cause those schools to close because the money that funds our education is at a bare minimum right now.

The other thing that has happened in our public education system is that Congress—people here—has made the promise to local schools to fund kids with disabilities, the IDEA Program, things we can do to help fix public education. Let's fund what we promised—40 percent. It is funded at 16 percent right now. So if we had a person who was going to go in as Secretary of Education and said: You know what, this is a problem, and we are going to fight to make sure that folks have the money from the Federal level to be able to teach the kids; and we are going to live up to our promise; and, by the way, IDEA is a good program that needs to be fully funded, and the Federal Government needs to do their part at 40 percent, I may have a different opinion. But that is not what she wants to do. She, in fact, wants to do something far worse than that.

She told me she wanted to block grant the money for IDEA, which would further put another nail in the coffin of schools around the country, and then put three or four in the rural schools.

It has been documented here earlier this morning that the phones have been ringing off the hook. They have been ringing off the hook opposed to Betsy DeVos. There are 1 million people who live in Montana. Over 3,000 people have contacted me opposing her.

I have had 20 contact me to support her. Phones are ringing off the hook. In fact, the phones are ringing to the tune of 1,200 to 1,500 calls a day. The phone system has shut down. There are some Senators who aren't even answering their phone because they don't want to hear it. But the truth is that public education is important in this country. People know what is at risk here. To have somebody who has never spent any time in the classroom of a public education system is asking for catastrophic results.

I am going to read a few comments from people in my great State who have sent me emails and letters about Betsy DeVos. Here is one from Melee in Missoula:

Mrs. DeVos has no place in our national education system. She is clearly not prepared nor does she even have the most basic experience to do this job well. Our students, teachers, and parents, deserve an excellent candidate, and she is not it.

Kelly from Laurel:

As a mother of an 11-year-old daughter, the thought of this woman in charge of our Nation's school system scares me.

Sandy from Billings:

It would be nice to have an Educational Secretary who has actually worked, I say WORKED, in education instead of some rich woman who has never spent a day in public schools.

Kim in Kalispell:

We need an Education Secretary that knows what the I-D-E-A Act actually is and the needs of rural school districts. We can do better and our kids deserve better.

Jenessa from Froid wrote me quite a long letter. I think it is particularly poignant, so I want to read this to you. It is a little bit long, but I think it is very clear. I want to back up a little bit and tell you that Froid is a very small town, not unlike Big Sandy. It doesn't have a lot of kids, but it has great people. Here is what Jenessa says:

After marrying my husband, a local farmer, in August 2010, I put down my roots with plans to spend my entire teaching career in Froid. With Mrs. DeVos pushing for private school funding, our small school will be one of the first to suffer.

Having two small boys that will be soon entering into their school years, they will be the third generation to walk the halls of Froid Public School. I want them to be able to spend all 13 of their public school years in the same school.

As an educator, I have seen what a small rural school can do for a student. While we may not get the same opportunities as large schools, when the opportunities knock on our door, we have a large percentage of students take advantage.

They have pride in their school and their community. Montana is currently suffering from teacher shortage. With a lack of funding, this shortage will only get worse.

I am currently in the process of earning my Masters degree in Educational Leadership. With this degree, I have been given the opportunity to become the principal of our small school. A school my family attends, my roots are dug, and I do not want a woman like Betsy DeVos having control over [our school].

Please vote no. A vote for Betsy is a vote for private control. A vote for Betsy is against the community of Froid.

A vote for Betsy is against Froid Public School. A vote for Betsy is a vote against public school teachers across this country and against the great State you represent. A vote for Betsy is a vote against my family. A vote for Betsy is a vote against me.

Mary from Red Lodge:

As a 32-year veteran educator in a rural public school, I am deeply concerned about the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary. I'm inclined to say that her loyalty and financial backing of Mr. Trump were the reasons for the misguided appointment and not her experience and knowledge in education issues.

To be in such an esteemed position as Education Secretary, one would expect years of experience and an advanced degree to understand the ongoing issues we face in U.S. education.

Sara from Billings:

As a first grade teacher in a low-income school, I believe wholeheartedly in Montana's public schools.

Betsy DeVos believes in school privatization and vouchers. She has worked to undermine efforts to regulate Michigan charters, even when they clearly fail.

The marketplace solution of DeVos will destroy our democratically governed community schools. Her hostility towards public schools disqualifies her.

She will not work to provide a free and fair education to my students who struggle every day with hunger, with homelessness, and more. I am asking you to vote against the confirmation of Betsy DeVos.

But I have heard from far more than that—from parents to grandparents, to doctors, to average Joes who oppose this nomination. Education is something that affects everybody's life. In my opening remarks, I talked about the need for public education for democracy to work and exist. As a former school teacher and as a former board member, I can tell you that there are a lot of things we can do to make public education better, and we ought to do it.

There are hard things to do. It is much easier to say: Let's just destroy the program and privatize it, and then see what we end up with. That would be a bad decision, and that is why we should not vote for Betsy DeVos.

The impacts are huge. They are huge on our economy, they are huge on our form of government, and they are huge for us being a leader in this free world we live in.

In closing, I want Montanans to know that we have heard you. You called, you wrote, and you contacted me on Facebook and Twitter. Your message has been loud and clear. It is a message that we are hearing all across this country. It is a message that, quite frankly, if we confirm this lady, will not make America great again. In fact, it will, over time, destroy this very country that we love.

As to people who I talk to who say: The Secretary of Education doesn't matter; it is not going to affect me—I don't know whom you are kidding. The fact of the matter is, this will affect every school in every community in this country.

We can say President Trump got elected, and he needs to have the team

that he wants. I am not going to vote for a team that destroys the public education system in this country. I would not be doing a service to the people who came before me—the previous generations—and I certainly would not be doing a service to my kids and my grandkids and the generations to come after. This is a very important decision. If we want to do the tough work of debating our public education system and determining how we can make it better, get the best people in the classrooms, and get the best academic material in there for them to work off of, let's do that. But let's not destroy the public education system that has made this country great for generation after generation after generation.

I urge my colleagues to stand with the thousands of Montanans and the millions of Americans who have told us to vote no on Betsy DeVos.

Madam President, I yield my remaining postclosure debate time to the Senator from Washington, Mrs. PATTY MURRAY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Mr. TESTER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, why are we even debating the nomination of a person who clearly does not believe in our Nation's public schools? No matter whether you are a Democrat, Republican, Independent, no matter what part of the country you live in, whether rural or city, whether you have children or not, who would say that education is not important or valuable? Who would say that education is not foundational to success in life?

Nine of every 10 students in the United States attend a public school. Who among us would say those students should be led by a person who does not believe in public schools? Who among us would say that we should have an Education Secretary who does not commit to making public schools better for the sake of all of our children?

Then we should ask ourselves: Is Betsy DeVos the best that we can do for our children and young people? Does Betsy DeVos believe in public schools? No. Has Betsy DeVos ever been a teacher, a principal, or even attended public school? No. Does Betsy DeVos believe that we should hold charter schools—which are public schools, by the way—equally as accountable as other public schools? No. Does Betsy DeVos understand educational civil rights laws that provide all children with disabilities the opportunity to pursue a free and appropriate public education? No. Did Betsy DeVos

commit to holding schools accountable for campus sexual assault? No. Again, I ask: Is Betsy DeVos the best that we can do for our children and young people? No.

Again, why are we even here to debate whether such a person should lead the Department of Education? I feel as though we are going down a rabbit hole where up is down and down is up. It should not be asking too much to have an Education Secretary who will stand up for public schools and the millions of our children and young people who attend our public schools all across our country.

Education is foundational. I think we all acknowledge that. I speak from experience. When I came to this country at almost 8 years old, I did not speak a word of English. I attended public schools where I learned how to speak English, developed my love of reading, and ultimately prepared for college. Public schools really helped prepare me for life.

I had a great sixth grade teacher. His name is Yoshinobu Oshiro. Before he was a teacher, Mr. Oshiro served in the military intelligence service during World War II, one of the segregated Japanese-American units that went on to earn the Congressional Gold Medal. He really cared about his students, and he encouraged me to study hard.

I have stayed in touch with Mr. Oshiro for decades. When I was last home in Hawaii about a month ago, I invited him to the historic meeting of President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Pearl Harbor. I wanted to make sure that Mr. Oshiro met both Prime Minister Abe and President Obama. This happened. Today, I have a photo of Mr. Oshiro. There he is, meeting President Obama on that historic day in Hawaii.

Mr. Oshiro was a very important part of my life. In public schools across the country, there are many more Mr. Oshiros, teachers who go out of their way to support and encourage their students. They deserve a leader who will fight for them, who understands the challenges our public schools face, and who is committed to meeting those challenges. They deserve a leader who wants all of our children in public schools to succeed. If you can truly say that Betsy DeVos is that leader, that she is the best we can do for the millions of children attending public schools in our country, then vote for her. But I cannot. Thousands of my constituents agree.

I yield the remainder of my postclosure debate time to Senator MURRAY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator may receive up to 40 minutes.

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

PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING LAVELL EDWARDS

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I rise today to honor the memory of LaVell Edwards, a giant of the gridiron who guided the Brigham Young University football program through decades of unprecedented success. Surrounded by his family, Coach Edwards passed away peacefully on the morning of December 29, 2016.

Born to Philo and Addie Edwards in 1930 in Orem, UT, he excelled in football and basketball at Lincoln High School.

Following graduation, he decided to attend Utah State University to play football. LaVell figured that if he played for BYU, the hometown school, he would have lived at home and been required to milk the family cows, so he went north to Logan. At Utah State, he met the love of his life, Patti Covey. A few months after the two went on a blind date, they were married in Beaver Dam, UT.

Following graduation, LaVell served in the Army for 2 years. After receiving an honorable discharge from the military, he became head football coach at Granite High School in Salt Lake City.

After eight seasons as head coach, LaVell was hired at BYU by Hal Mitchell in 1962. LaVell humorously remarked that he was hired only because Coach Mitchell wanted to run the single wing offense and Coach Edwards was the only Mormon running that offense at the time.

After 10 seasons as an assistant coach at BYU, he was promoted to head coach in 1972. Prior to his promotion, BYU had never achieved much success in football. In LaVell's words, it was a matter of when, not if, he would be fired. So he decided to do something that few other coaches were doing at the time: make the forward pass the focal point of the offense. LaVell's bold move revolutionized the game of football. His quarterbacks ended up throwing for over 100,000 yards, and four of them won the Davey O'Brien Award, given annually to college football's best quarterback. One of his quarterbacks even won the Heisman Trophy, which is awarded each year to college football's best player. LaVell's high-powered offense boosted the team to national prominence and culminated in BYU's 1984 national championship victory.

Following this historic season, Coach Edwards was named the AFCA National Coach of the Year. With LaVell at the helm, BYU consistently finished in the top 25. He would eventually lead the Cougars to 19 conference championships and 257 victories, making him the seventh winningest coach in college football history. He coached 31 all-Americans, 6 College Football Hall of Famers, and 2 Outland Trophy winners. Coach Edwards himself was ultimately inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2004.

Despite his tremendous success on the field, LaVell always remained hum-

ble. He also never lost his sense of humor. Although college football fans typically remember Coach Edwards for his trademark sideline scowl, he was renowned for his wit. He quipped on this fact, saying, "Someone once said I'm a happy guy; I just forgot to tell my face." With his disarming humor and clever one-liners, LaVell could lighten the mood and make almost anyone laugh.

Coach Edwards also had a remarkable ability to delegate. Although he knew football forward and backward, he surrounded himself with capable coaches and he let them do their jobs. His assistants were some of the best ever in college football, partially because he let them have free reign. This quality allowed him to focus on the personal element of football.

He valued all of his players, and by all accounts, his door was always open to them. Indeed, many of his players have spoken about having frequent meetings with him that helped change their lives for the better. At his funeral, hundreds of former football players showed up—Hall of Famers, top-notch-rated people in almost every case. I was there at the funeral on Saturday.

Coach Edwards simply cared about people, and I was fortunate to witness this up close. In the 100th Congress, I had the pleasure of working with him when he was president of the American Football Coaches Association. Together, we helped to pass legislation that allowed the AFCA to establish multiemployer pensions for college football coaches. Given the uncertain nature of the coaching profession, this legislation was an important achievement for coaches and their families across the country.

Although football was important to LaVell, his faith was first and foremost. While he was coaching at BYU, LaVell served as a lay bishop in a Mormon student congregation. He thoroughly enjoyed the interactions he had with those students.

Throughout his life, he served his church in many other positions of responsibility. Following his retirement from coaching in 2000, LaVell and Patti served a public affairs mission in New York City for the Mormon Church. He served honorably in that capacity and even put his experience as a football coach to good use.

I might add that he invited me to come up and go to dinner with a number of dignitaries in that area so that he could chat with them and tell them a little bit about his faith and his beliefs, and it was a privilege to do so.

He and Patti were terrific missionaries and good people. While a missionary, LaVell aided in the establishment of Harlem's first high school football program in decades.

Coach Edwards and Patti also met with many different political and religious leaders, and, as he put it, they looked to "build bridges" between these leaders and his church.

Madam President, LaVell Edwards was a champion on and off the field. Not only was he one of the most successful coaches in college football history, he was also one of the greatest men I ever knew. I will be forever grateful for my own friendship with LaVell, and I pray that we will always remember the humility and humor that were the hallmarks of his life. It was one of the privileges of my life to have a personal relationship with him and Patti. They are two of the finest people I have ever met.

I have to say that LaVell would drop anything to support his religious beliefs, and he was a tremendous influence on literally hundreds, if not thousands, of football players and others who watched what he said, watched what he did, and loved how well he did those things.

I personally was befriended by him on a number of occasions, and it meant a lot to me. It means a lot to me to this day not because he was so important, he was one of the greatest coaches who ever lived, and he was in the Hall of Fame, but because he was down-to-earth, a person who loved to play golf, loved all sports, and loved being with people. And when he supported you, it was really support.

All I can say is, he is one of the greatest men I have ever met in my life. He had a great influence on so many people—still does. His wife is every bit as great as he has been. Both are tremendous human beings who have made this world a better place to live.

From a football standpoint, I think most coaches who knew him would say he was unexcelled, and I agree that is true, but that was minor compared to the type of life he lived, the type of things he did, the type of honors he shared, the type of kindness he showed, the ability to talk to people and help them through the problems they had, and, of course, the overall genuine goodness of a fellow whose life was well spent, who touched so many lives, literally hundreds of thousands of lives over the years, and who had this tremendous sense of humor that made being around him a real pleasure.

I am grateful I knew LaVell Edwards well. I am grateful for the life he lived. I am grateful for the example he set. I am grateful for the joy he brought to so many people. And I wish his dear wife Patti well. I just hope that these words will be a little bit of consolation for her.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to strongly oppose the nomination