

We in New York have the third largest rural population in America. I am worried for those schools where, if the school is no good, you don't have much choice; you don't have any choice.

Above all, and on basic competence, Mrs. DeVos has failed to make the grade. She didn't seem to know about the Federal education law that guarantees education to students with disabilities. She could not unequivocally say that guns shouldn't be in the schools, and she didn't seem to know about a long simmering debate in education policy about measuring growth versus proficiency. Frankly, Mrs. DeVos's answers at the hearings were embarrassing, not only for her but for my Republican colleagues on the committee who rushed her nomination through with 5 minutes of questions, only one round, and at 5 p.m.

Cabinet Secretaries can't be expected to know everything, but this is different. The nominee for Secretary of Education doesn't know some of the most basic facts about education policy. She has failed to show proficiency, and there is no longer any time for growth.

The American people are speaking in one loud voice against this nominee. I have had many people come up to me in New York and say: I voted for Donald Trump, but I am making calls about this nominee. Americans across the country in red and blue States have been flooding our offices with phone calls and emails, asking the Senate to vote no on Betsy DeVos. Local newspaper editorial boards, many of whom have endorsed Trump, are saying the same thing.

My friends, the Senators from Maine and Alaska, were profiles in courage last week when they announced their opposition to her nomination, but, unfortunately, so far they are the exception. We need just one more vote, and we can get a Secretary of Education who is a lot better than the one who was nominated. I ask my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to follow the courageous example of the Senators from Maine and Alaska. We have an obligation as Senators—not as Republicans and not as Democrats, but as Senators—to evaluate these nominees and their fitness for office because these nominees are going to wield immense power over the lives of Americans for the next 4 years. I ask my Republican colleagues to look into their conscience and cast their votes tomorrow, not based on party loyalty but based on whether or not Mrs. DeVos is qualified to be our Nation's leader on education policy. If one doesn't measure up, the Senate has a responsibility to reject the nomination.

I realize it rarely occurs, but this should be an exception because she is so uniquely unqualified, whether it comes to competence, whether it comes to philosophy against the public schools, or whether it comes to conflicts of interest, which still exist in far too many instances with Mrs. DeVos.

TRAVEL BAN

Madam President, second, the President's Executive order on immigration and refugees is so poorly constructed, so haphazardly implemented, so constitutionally dubious, so wrong in terms of what America is all about, and so contrary to our basic values as Americans that my Republican friends should feel a duty to country to help us rescind it. Several Members on the other side—I think it is over a dozen—have expressed concerns about it. Several spoke out strongly and unequivocally about imposing any type of ban during the campaign, but now that we have such a ban, they are unfortunately silent. It is time for that silence to end and for Republicans to step up to the plate and start backing up their words with actions.

On Friday, the order was temporarily blocked by a Federal judge, Judge Robart. On Saturday, the President questioned his court credibility via tweet and then asked the country to blame any potential attacks on the country on the judge and the courts. He is not a "so-called" judge as the President tweeted but rather a Senate-confirmed Bush appointee. That is not how we do things here in America.

There is a separation of powers for a reason. An independent judiciary is absolutely necessary to ensure Presidents and Congresses do not break the law or impinge on the Constitution, but this President has shown a certain callousness when it comes to judges who rule against his whim—Judge Curiel during the campaign and Judge Robart now. Instead of attacking the judge, the President should be working with Congress to tighten up security where it is actually needed.

The President has said that if there are attacks, the judge will be to blame. I will remind him that not one attack on U.S. soil has been perpetrated by a refugee from one of the seven countries in the Executive order. This order doesn't make us any safer; if anything, the Executive order increases the risk of lone wolf attacks, our greatest threat. That is what happened in San Bernardino, it is what happened in Orlando, and no authority less than Senator JOHN MCCAIN has said exactly that—that it will increase the likelihood of attacks by lone wolves, those disaffected people who are egged on by the evil ISIS.

So I make this offer to my friends on the other side of the aisle: Join Democrats in rescinding the Executive order, and we will work with you in a bipartisan way in good faith to actually make our country safer. Close up that visa waiver program where people from countries—just because they are generally friendly to us—are not checked. We know places such as France and Belgium have homegrown terrorists lured by ISIS. They can get on a plane and come here far more easily than a refugee from those seven countries. Let's tighten that up. Instead, the President gives us this Executive

order. Lord knows how he came to it. Every expert on terrorism will say there are a lot more important and better things that we need to do.

So let me repeat: The stakes are too high for party loyalty to stand in the way of doing what is right to protect this country. We ought to scrap the order and start over. The order not only does not protect us from terrorism but makes it worse. It stands in the face of what America is all about. Our country has welcomed immigrants, and the beautiful lady with the torch in the harbor of the city in which I live has beckoned us for generations.

RUSSIA

Finally, Madam President, I ask my Republican colleagues to put country over party when it comes to Russia. This administration has shown a disquieting reluctance to criticize Russia when it flouts international norms and laws. The administration seems hesitant to enforce new sanctions and has even hinted at relaxing existing sanctions at what has always been our most formidable enemy along with ISIS: Russia and Putin.

Unbelievably, just yesterday the President insinuated that the Russian and American Governments were somehow morally equivalent. When asked about Putin's authoritarian regime, President Trump responded: "There are a lot of killers. You think our country is so innocent?" Can you imagine if a Democrat had said that? Every one of these seats would be filled with people decrying that kind of moral equivalence.

Russia, a dictatorship where Putin kills his enemies, imprisons the press, and causes trouble anywhere he can in the world is morally equivalent to this great land? Come on. Where are you? You know if the Democrats had said that you would be howling at the moon, and rightfully so. But here, I don't hear much.

Vladimir Putin has little or no respect for the diversity of his people, for freedom of religion and expression, for a free press, for free and fair elections in Russia—and America, it seems—and he has demonstrated on more than one occasion that he will go to any length to silence political dissidents, including murdering them. I would ask President Trump: Does that sound like America? Maybe in President Trump's mind it does, but it sure doesn't to most of America—just about every American. It is not the America that this body represents.

As I said, my Republican colleagues ought to be aghast. I don't think anyone from the other side would associate himself or herself with those comments. I am encouraged that the Republican leader and other Senate Republicans have criticized the President for those dangerous remarks, but what worries me most is the policy. Russia is a persistent and strategic threat to this Nation. Will this administration cozy up to Putin and his oligarchs and relax sanctions? Will they look the

other way when Russia supports separatists in Ukraine, commits human rights violations alongside Iran, Hezbollah, and the Assad regime? Putin is the kind of person who, if you give him an inch, he takes 10 miles. We all have come across people like that.

President Trump's rhetoric is ceding more of the battlespace to our enemies each day. So what we must do in this body is ensure that current sanctions stay in place and are robustly enforced. We also need to increase sanctions on Russia for its interference with our election. We ask our colleagues to step up to the plate, do what they know is right, and join us in making sure that the President cannot unilaterally reduce sanctions and that we strengthen sanctions for what he has tried to do in our election. The stakes are too high to let loyalty to this President—any President—stop this body from doing the right thing for the American people.

On the Cabinet and particularly Mrs. DeVos, on the Executive order, the lack of respect for an independent judiciary, and on Russia, I ask my Republican colleagues once again to consider principle over party and their duty to country before deference to the President.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, over the last few weeks, people across the country have continued to make their voices heard in opposition to the nomination of Betsy DeVos—moms and dads, grandmothers and grandfathers, students young and old, and cities, towns, urban, suburban, and rural communities. People are standing up and they will not be silenced. Thousands upon thousands have joined protests in their communities. Hundreds of thousands have emailed or called their Senators, jamming our phone lines, swamping the voicemail system, and shattering records. Millions have engaged on social media, sharing information with their friends, signing petitions, and pressuring their elected officials.

It has made a difference. Every single Democrat will be standing with their constituents and opposing Betsy DeVos. Just last week, two Republicans announced their opposition as well. I can tell you I know for a fact there are other Republicans who are feeling the heat and could come around.

This nomination is dead even right now, on the razor's edge. Fifty Senators, Democrats and Republicans will vote to reject Betsy DeVos. We need just one more Republican to join us, to stand on the side of students, parents, and public education in America and say no to Betsy DeVos.

I come to the floor to kick off the final day of debate on this nomination. On Friday, I spoke at length, making my case for why the Senate should oppose Betsy DeVos. Democrats will hold

the floor for the next 24 hours, until the final vote, to do everything we can to persuade just one more Republican to join us.

I strongly encourage people across the country to join us. Double down on your advocacy, keep making your voices heard for these last 24 hours.

Over the past 3 weeks, I have heard a number of Republicans wonder why Democrats and so many parents and teachers across the country were so focused on this nomination in this moment. President Trump has done so much in these first few weeks, and so many of his people he has nominated to run critical agencies have not been people I can support, but what is it about Betsy DeVos that has inspired so much grassroots energy and opposition across this country?

I think I understand. It is very clear to me. For the vast majority of people across the country, public education isn't just another issue, it is different. For those of us who owe everything we have to the strong public education we received, for those who saw our children and grandchildren move through our public schools, for those of us who walked into a public classroom ourselves to teach or have friends or family who have dedicated their lives to teaching, for those of us who see the role strong public schools play in our communities, especially our rural communities, often offering an educational and a community resource where it simply wouldn't otherwise be offered, we believe that a commitment to strong public schools is part of America's core, the idea that every student in every community should have the opportunities that strong public schools offer. This is a notion that is embedded in our values. It is who we are. It is in our blood.

For those people across the country who feel that way, who believe those things, the nomination of Betsy DeVos truly hits close to home. It was a slap in the face because she doesn't approach this the way most of us do. She doesn't cherish public education. She doesn't value it. She is someone who has dedicated her career and her inherited fortune to privatizing public schools, to tearing down public education, to defunding it in order to push more taxpayer dollars into private schools and for-profit charters. She has called public education "a dead end." Where she sits from a distance, she has called it "an embarrassment." She has disparaged those who work in our public schools, saying our best and our brightest "steer clear." She has said education is "an industry."

An industry? Well, for someone such as she, a billionaire, rightwing activist who spent her career and inherited fortune buying and selling companies, she just doesn't understand an "industry" that isn't focused on profits and that doesn't exist in the free market. When people across the country hear someone such as Betsy DeVos say these things about public education, when

they hear a rightwing conservative billionaire more focused on her antigovernment ideology than helping our students, when they see that someone who spent her career trying to destroy public schools has been nominated to lead the Federal Agency dedicated to public education, they start to pay some attention.

In a Senate hearing, when they see that person so clearly lack any of the issues, when they see her unable to explain basic concepts in education policy, unwilling to make basic commitments to not privatizing or defunding our public schools, confused about the need for Federal protections for students with disabilities and so committed to a rightwing agenda that she pointed to the need for guns in our schools to protect against "potential grizzly bears" in response to a question from a Senator representing the New-town families, people across the country pay even more attention, and they start to make their voices heard.

I am not surprised that opposition to Betsy DeVos has caught fire across the country. I am not surprised people are talking about it to their friends, writing letters to the Senators, and showing up to protest when they have never done anything like that before because this is about their kids, their schools, and their communities. It is about the core idea that we are a nation that invests in strong public education and one that strives to guarantee the promise and opportunity it affords to every student in our country—not that public education is perfect, of course not. We have a lot of work to do, but that work should be directed toward strengthening public schools, not tearing them down. Public education is something that should be valued as an important piece of the fabric of this Nation and the expansion of our middle class, not scorned and ridiculed by billionaires who never had any use for it themselves.

Friday I spent a lot of time on the floor laying out my case in detail opposing Betsy DeVos. I talked about the open questions that are remaining regarding her tangled finances and potential conflicts of interest. I ran through the strong concerns with her record, her lack of experience, and her lack of clear understanding of basic education issues. I discussed my strong belief that her vision for education in America is deeply at odds with where parents, students, and families across our country want to go. I went through the process of how Republicans jammed this nominee through our committee, cutting corners and doing everything possible to protect her from scrutiny. I will not go through all of that again now, but I do want to make one more point, one I hope will be compelling to my Republican friends who are still resisting pressure from their constituents and sticking with Betsy DeVos; that is, no matter what you think about Betsy DeVos's policy ideas, no matter what you think of her qualifications to run this agency, no matter

what you think about her personal understanding of the issues or her financial entanglements, one thing is very clear; if she is confirmed, she would enter this job as the most controversial and embattled Secretary in the history of this Department. She would start this job with no credibility inside the agency she is supposed to lead, with no influence in Congress, as the punch line in late-night comedy shows, and without the confidence of the American people.

A vote for Betsy DeVos is a vote for a Secretary of Education who is likely to succeed only in further dividing us on education issues and who may try to take steps to try to implement her anti-student agenda but would do so with people across the country. So many of us in the Senate are on guard and ready to fight back.

I urge my Republican friends—and we just need one more—let's cut this off right now. Let's ask President Trump to send us someone who is qualified, who understands the issues, and who truly cares about public education. Together, let's stand with our constituents and say no to Betsy DeVos.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I wish to start by thanking Senator MURRAY and the Members of the HELP Committee for the work they have done to cast light on the record and the lack of record of Mrs. Betsy DeVos, President Trump's nominee to be Secretary of Education.

As the Senator from Washington has told us, the more the American people learn about the record of Betsy DeVos, the more concerned they become. The American people are making their voices heard in every Senate office. The switchboard has been essentially shut down, and I can tell you that I have received over 14,000 calls from Maryland on this nominee alone.

People are calling because the more they look at the record, the more they realize this nominee's lack of commitment to the essential mission of the Department of Education. That mission is to provide every child in America with access to a quality public education. This concern about the nominee is shared across political parties.

As Senator SUSAN COLLINS of Maine said on this floor, Mrs. DeVos's concentration on vouchers "raises the question about whether she fully appreciates that the Secretary of Education's primary focus must be on helping States and communities, parents, teachers, school board members, and administrators strengthen our public schools."

Regardless of ZIP Code, our mission must be to provide every child with access to a high-quality neighborhood public school. It is absolutely true that in too many places around in country we are failing to meet the goal, but the response to a troubled school should not be to walk away from it in favor of

sketchy voucher schemes. Instead we must work together to provide the necessary resources and interventions to help those schools and those students achieve success. Over the last 2 years, I have spent a lot of time traveling over the great State of Maryland. I visited schools, talked to college students, and heard from parents. No matter where I went, in every part of our State, everybody wanted the same thing: a good school, affordable college, either community college or 4-year colleges, and a fair shot at reaching their dreams.

The U.S. Department of Education is supposed to help them get that opportunity. Let me take a moment to talk about what the Department of Education means to some neighborhoods in my State of Maryland. Not long ago, I visited a pair of community schools in Baltimore City, the Historic Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School in Upton/Druid Heights in West Baltimore and the Benjamin Franklin High School in Brooklyn, South Baltimore. Upton/Druid Heights is a historic African-American community in Baltimore. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, jazz great Cab Calloway, and civil rights pioneer Lillie Mae Carroll Jackson all walked its streets, but today it is a community in distress. Most of its children live in poverty; 95 percent of the students at Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary are on free or reduced lunch. Despite its challenges, it has a strong faith-based institution and community groups. Mrs. DeVos's approach to schools such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor has been to give up on them, to abandon them, and to divert resources to voucher programs.

Fortunately, the Department of Education did not abandon this school. In 2012, it designated Upton/Druid Heights as a Promise Neighborhood. The Department provided resources to support comprehensive services for families. These include B'more for Healthy Babies, which has dramatically reduced infant mortality rates in the city; Parient University, to help educate parents of young children; and financial literacy and education, to help with filling out income tax forms and to help families manage their budgets.

In 2012, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor became a community school. It has a community school coordinator, a position that can be filled using funds under title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers of children from low-income families. The community school coordinator works with parents, students, educators, and community residents to learn the needs of the neighborhood and form partnerships to meet them. The University of Maryland School of Social Work, which is located just down the road, joined them to provide trauma training so that teachers could recognize and respond to trauma among the children

and go on home visits to work with families. They received a grant to build a first-ever playground on campus—something that most schools take for granted. Local churches provided safe spaces for kids. The Weinberg Foundation donated a beautiful library. There is a jobs center, where parents can look for employment, and a food bank, to send kids home with something to eat over the weekend. The school was transformed into a place where kids want to be, receiving the mayor's award for the greatest drop in students at risk for chronic absenteeism. It has been a success story.

In a little different part of town, Ben Franklin High School exists, and it is isolated geographically in the Brooklyn neighborhood. It is on a peninsula at the southern part of the city. Brooklyn is a historic waterfront neighborhood with strong ties to manufacturing. The Brooklyn community built ships for the United States in World War II. Many families in Brooklyn have been there for generations. As manufacturing left and Bethlehem Steel closed—Bethlehem Steel provided about 12,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs—times got tougher for those working families.

In the year 2011, Benjamin Franklin was one of the bottom 5 percent of schools in the State of Maryland—again, one of those schools that this nominee would have walked away from in favor of vouchers. Again, the good news is the Department of Education did not walk away. It provided extra funding to help turn things around. Using the community schools model, they assessed and responded to the needs of the students.

Interns from the University of Maryland School of Social Work provided mental health services. The United Way offers a workforce development program and an onsite early childhood development center that helps teen parents graduate, knowing their children have quality care. A family stability program helps families avoid homelessness. CSX is working with the school to build a football field.

Students worked together with their neighbors to take ownership of their communities and protest the placement of an incinerator near them. Some figured that this low-income neighborhood was a good target to put an incinerator, but the community fought back and won. They have put thousands of hours into community service, including the Chesapeake Bay cleanup. The school's office of student service learning helps connect students to internships and job-training programs.

In Brooklyn, the crime rate and the teen pregnancy rates have dropped, and attendance at Ben Franklin is up. When I asked the students what they liked about the school, they said: "We feel like someone cares now," and "everyone is positive."

At both of these schools, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Ben Franklin, the

principals told me that the community schools model allowed them to form partnerships to meet the needs of their students' lives so that they could focus on delivering a high-quality education. Because the students' needs are being met more comprehensively, the students can focus on learning, and because we have a team outside of the teachers who are helping provide some services to these kids, the teachers can focus on teaching.

It is important for us to understand that every child who walks through the doors of a school has a unique family circumstance and their own individual needs.

The community school approach emphasizes the fact that no school is an island onto itself. Every school is part of a neighborhood, and we need to understand the special circumstances of the children and families in those neighborhoods. It is not just for urban schools like Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Ben Franklin. Community schools have shown success in rural areas of Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Montana, and all across the country.

This idea that every child should receive a good public education is as old as our Republic itself. Our Nation's Founders knew the contribution of education to the success of our democracy. They knew that an educated population would be a strong safeguard against tyranny. In a letter in 1786, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness.

As early as 1779, Jefferson was putting forward legislation to create a public school system that would give children a fair start. Jefferson later wrote to John Adams:

It was a bill for the more general diffusion of learning. This proposed to divide every county into wards of five or six miles square, like your townships; to establish in each ward a free school for reading, writing and common arithmetic; to provide for the annual selection of the best subjects from these schools, who might receive, at the public expense, a higher degree of public education at a district school.

He went on to say:

Worth and genius would thus have been sought out from every condition of life, and completely prepared by education for defeating the competition and birth for public trusts.

Though America did not start the public education system at that moment in time, those ideas and that philosophy of education as the great equalizer and tool to develop the talents of Americans, regardless of the circumstances of their birth, were the foundation of the public school system that we have today.

President Trump gave remarkably little attention to education during his campaign. He pretty much ignored the public school education system in favor of his \$20 billion voucher scheme that would drain huge amounts of resources

from neighborhood schools like the two in Baltimore that I just discussed. With the President offering only vague promises and pricey schemes, it is even more important that we have an Education Secretary with a steady hand and a deep understanding of the critical mission of the Department. It is clear that Mrs. Betsy DeVos is not the right person for the job.

Mrs. DeVos advocates a concept of industrialized, privatized, and for-profit schools. This thinking is too small and too cramped for our kids. Our goal should not be vouchers for children to try to shop for a school with no accountability for quality. Our goal should be a neighborhood school for every child that meets their needs.

We cannot abandon the families who cannot afford to make up the difference between the value of the voucher and the tuition at the private school. What do we say to them? We cannot abandon the students who cannot get accepted into private schools because many of these private schools say yes to some and no to others. What do we say to those who have the doors closed on them? We cannot abandon the schools that a voucher program would drain the resources from, and \$20 billion is a huge amount of the resources that we currently provide for schools like the two I mentioned in Baltimore City and schools in neighborhoods throughout the country. So instead of a risky voucher program, we need to make our schools better by giving them the flexibility to meet student needs and the support to make sure that our children are all ready to learn.

In her hearing and in the responses to the questions for the record, Mrs. DeVos displayed an astonishing ignorance about the agency that she intends to run and, indeed, about the role of public schools in our country. All of us who have been part of this debate know that one of the most fundamental discussions in K-12 policy has been over accountability and how best to measure student knowledge and school performance. There has been an intense discussion over whether to measure school and student performance by student proficiency or by student improvement and student growth. Mrs. DeVos seemed totally confused about this discussion that is going to the heart of many of the debates here in Congress.

Perhaps we should not be so surprised that she has such little understanding of the public education system, as she has spent much of her career attempting to dismantle it in favor of private, charter, and for-profit schools. She has been referred to as the "four-star general of the voucher movement." She has forcefully worked to expand vouchers, including spending millions on a failed ballot initiative to bring vouchers to the State of Michigan. When that didn't work, she created the Great Lakes Education Project to fund nonprofits and donate to State legislators who would advance

vouchers and charters. With respect to the millions of dollars she and her family have spent trying to influence lawmakers, she stated: "We expect a return on our investment."

She received a return in Michigan, where she played a role in a 1993 law that created incentives for charters to come to Michigan. The for-profit industry, in particular, responded, and they operate nearly 80 percent of the charters in the State of Michigan. In 2011, she pushed successfully for a law that allowed even low-performing charters to expand and repealed the requirement that the State publish annual reports on charter performance. I think we all believe that transparency is important, and it is shocking that there would be an effort to put the facts under the rug. After years of criticism, modest accountability measures were introduced in 2015, although Mrs. DeVos opposed and successfully stripped a provision from the bill that would have established a commission to explore ways to improve Detroit public schools.

Seventy percent of Detroit charter schools ranked in the bottom quarter of Michigan schools. The nonprofit Education Trust calls their poor performance a "civil rights issue." In a report just last June, the New York Times called the situation in Detroit "a public education fiasco that is perhaps unparalleled in the United States." It would be a big mistake to impose that fiasco on the rest of the country.

Mrs. DeVos has also advocated for online charter schools, and she was formerly an investor in the largest for-profit online school operator, K-12, Inc. In her response to questions about this model, she cited questionable statistics for the accomplishments of several virtual academies. Those statistics were disproved in an article in Education Week which compared them to the publicly reported figures used for State accountability.

For example, Ms. DeVos wrote that Utah Virtual Academy has a 92-percent graduation rate. In fact, the most recently publicly reported figure is 42 percent. The last thing we need is a Secretary of Education coming up with alternative facts.

While I believe that nonprofit public charter schools are important incubators for innovation, they have to play by the same rules as the rest of our schools. But Mrs. DeVos has rejected that equal playing field.

In an exchange with Senator Kaine from Virginia where he repeatedly asked her whether or not the charter schools would have the same standards applied to them as public schools that received Federal funding, she refused to agree.

It is pretty extraordinary when we have a nominee saying that she supports a taxpayer-funded blank check for some schools. Our Secretary of Education must be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars and ensure that funds

are delivering quality and results for students.

Another area where Mrs. DeVos raises serious concerns is that of enforcement of equal rights, especially the rights of children with disabilities. All of us know the Department of Education has the very important job of enforcing civil rights laws and making sure we have equal access to education throughout the Nation. Congress prohibited discrimination in education on the basis of race, color, and national origin in title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibited sex discrimination. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

But all of us know that as late of the mid-1970s, public schools still accommodated only one of five children with disabilities, and many States had laws that explicitly excluded children with certain disabilities. When Congress addressed this with the passage of the IDEA legislation, it was a big breakthrough for our country and for our children. The IDEA was very straightforward and very simple: Every child deserves a “free appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment.” The law requires schools to design an “individualized education program” for each child with a disability.

IDEA has been a lifesaver for children with disabilities and their families. It has empowered them to get the quality education they could not earlier receive, and the law gives them tools with which they can fight to ensure that schools address their needs. This is why it was so alarming at the hearing to hear Mrs. DeVos say that the application of IDEA and the rights behind IDEA really was a State function—the same States that historically discriminated against these very children. That is not what the IDEA legislation is all about. It is a national standard to make sure we do not have discrimination based on disability. Yet, Mrs. DeVos in exchange concluded with: “I think that’s an issue that’s best left to the States.”

So whether it is her position with respect to vouchers and poaching resources that otherwise would go to improve our public schools or lack of support for the very idea behind IDEA, we have a nominee who the overwhelming majority of the American people recognize is the wrong choice to be the custodian of the Department that is responsible at the Federal level for providing support and educational opportunities to our children.

In closing, with respect to the issue of guns in schools—and Senator MURRAY, the ranking member, has addressed this as well—it was pretty shocking to hear Mrs. DeVos trivialize the issue of gun violence in schools when she was asked about this by the Senator from Connecticut, Mr. MURPHY, quipping that guns might be necessary to kill grizzly bears. We have

had lots of debates in this Chamber, and obviously there are strong feelings. But I think we would all agree that the safety of our kids and our schools is not something that should be trivialized.

In conclusion, let us heed the words of the editorial board of the *Detroit Free Press*. They have witnessed firsthand the experiments that Mrs. DeVos has made about education and have written in an editorial: “Make no mistake: A vote to confirm Betsy DeVos as U.S. Secretary of Education is a vote to end public education in this country as we know it.”

In a speech in 2015, Betsy DeVos said bluntly: “Government really sucks.” I suggest that she should not be leading the agency entrusted at the Federal level with the education of our children, which, as our Founder said, is really the root of equal opportunity and the opportunity for every child to achieve their dreams.

I join with the distinguished Senator from Washington State in urging my colleagues to vote no on Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. We can do better. We can do a lot better for our kids.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, constituents from every State who care about our public schools and our students in public schools have broken records calling us, their Senators, in opposition to Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary.

In the past few weeks, I have heard from thousands of Hawaii residents concerned about voting for an Education Secretary who clearly does not believe in our Nation’s public schools. I wish to share two of their messages today.

One constituent wrote to me:

Dear Senator Hirono,

As a proud Hawaii educator for 30 plus years, I’m deeply troubled by the possible appointment of Betsy DeVos to the position of US Secretary of Education.

Although I would personally never consider applying for a job I am not qualified to serve in, it’s baffling to me that our new Commander in Chief thinks someone who has NO experience as a teacher or administrator could be remotely prepared to lead our nation in this role.

I don’t have to explain to you what a selfless calling being a teacher is, nor do I believe our Hawaii delegation takes educating Hawaii’s keiki lightly, so I implore you to work with other leaders in DC to make sure we have a suitable nominee for this essential position.

Mahalo.

Sandy from Honolulu

Sandy and teachers like her devote more time and effort than is mandated to ensure that our public school students have a solid foundation in education and for life. Teaching is a calling, and I have met with many teachers who are totally committed to doing the very best they can for their students, and they want nothing less from the next Secretary of Education. They deserve a better qualified, better expe-

rienced, better prepared, and more committed Secretary of Education than Betsy DeVos.

Next, I wish to share a message from Lorelei, a middle school principal on Oahu. Her letter begins:

Dear Senator Hirono,

As a strong supporter of public education, I ask that you oppose the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.

Educators and students deserve a secretary who can commit to supporting every student in all public schools, and a leader that will work tirelessly to promote a public education system that provides each child with the optimum conditions for teaching and learning.

Betsy DeVos’ past work in education and her performance at the recent confirmation hearing demonstrated neither a depth of experience nor knowledge base in education policy and on critical issues facing the community.

She ends her letter by saying:

As a principal, I have spoken with teachers, parents, students, and community members across the political spectrum and there is widespread agreement that Betsy DeVos is not the right person for the job.

As Lorelei said, it shouldn’t be asking too much to have an Education Secretary who will stand up for public schools and the millions of our children who attend our public schools. That person is certainly not Betsy DeVos.

In his opening remarks at Betsy DeVos’s confirmation hearing, the chairman of the HELP Committee said that Mrs. DeVos was in the “mainstream” for supporting vouchers to send students to private schools, instead of investing in our public schools. This is not mainstream thinking. Being told otherwise is again dealing in “alternative facts.”

The chairman went on to repeat a so-called argument that Betsy DeVos and other school choice advocates make—that vouchers are simply Pell grants for primary and secondary education. Now, this is a real head scratcher, and I say: What? Here we go again down the rabbit hole, where up is down and down is up.

Pell grants and vouchers are fundamentally different. Pell grants help offset the ever-rising cost of a voluntary college education. All colleges charge students tuition, and Pell grants provide opportunity to low-income students to be able to go to college.

In contrast, every American child has a right to a free primary and secondary public education. Vouchers actually take resources away from public schools and make it that much harder to provide a good education for all of our students.

Vouchers take money away from public schools; Pell grants don’t. When a student uses a Pell grant at a private college or university, it has no impact on the funding a State college or university receives. But when a student uses a voucher to attend a private school, it takes away money from local public schools. How is taking money away from local public schools mainstream thinking? The Secretary of

Education should be focused on improving our public schools, not taking money away from them.

Furthermore, saying that Pell grants are similar to vouchers reveals a fundamental lack of understanding of the Pell grant program. Among her many duties as Secretary, Betsy DeVos would be in charge of managing \$30 billion per year of Pell grants, which help more than 8 million students afford a college education in this country.

During the 2014-2015 school year, more than 21,000 students in Hawaii were able to finance their college education with nearly \$81 million in Pell grants. Last Congress, I led legislation to protect and strengthen the Pell grant program. But under Republican majorities, Pell grants are under the constant threat of irresponsible cuts and dismantlement, even though college today is more expensive than ever.

Can we really trust Betsy DeVos to fight to protect Pell grants? Somebody who equates Pell grants with vouchers is not someone who understands her responsibilities under the Pell Grant Program. So can we really trust Betsy DeVos to support the Pell Grant Program? I don't think so.

I have spoken out against Betsy DeVos's nomination a number of times, but some questions need repeating. What are we telling our students if we have an Education Secretary who is not committed to improving the public education system so that our students can succeed in school and in life? Nine out of every 10 students in the United States attend public school. What are we saying to them? Is it the best we can do to give them an Education Secretary who does not believe in the public schools they attend? Who doesn't believe that their education is worth fighting for?

If this is the message you want to send to our students and their families, then vote for Betsy DeVos. On behalf of the nearly 200,000 public school students in Hawaii and their teachers and other educators in Hawaii, my answer is a strong, strong no.

I urge my colleagues to question Betsy DeVos's commitment to our public schools and to the millions of students who go to public schools and vote against her nomination.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam 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.

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

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

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak this afternoon about the nomination of Betsy DeVos to be Secretary of Education. I know we will have had some time later today and even tonight, but I wanted to review some of

the concerns I have about her nomination in the allotted time that I will have—I guess about 15 minutes.

The first concern I have is a broad concern that I think is shared by a number of Senators on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. The ranking member, Senator MURRAY, is here with us on the floor, and I am grateful for her leadership on this nomination debate, as well as many other issues.

I guess the broad concern I have is Betsy DeVos's commitment to public education. I come from a State where we have had a tradition of public education since about the 1830s. I am fairly certain—I will stand corrected—but Pennsylvania might have been the first State to have public education as far back as the 1830s. It is part of the bedrock of the foundation of our State.

Still, today, 92 percent of Pennsylvania students attend a traditional public school. We have charter schools. We have roughly 175 or so, but all of those charter schools in Pennsylvania have to be, by statute, public nonprofit entities. Public charter schools are what we have in Pennsylvania. We don't have for-profit private sector charter schools. It is not allowed by law.

There are some limited circumstances when one entity could affiliate with a for-profit entity, but we have nothing like what Mrs. DeVos has supported in Michigan and across the country. For a Senator from Pennsylvania to be questioning a nominee for Secretary of Education about for-profit charter schools is unusual because we don't have that entity in Pennsylvania.

My concern is substantial—and I will develop this later—about her commitment to public education. In fact, in my meeting with Mrs. DeVos, because of my concerns, I said something very simple, but I said it for a reason, to remind her about her obligation if she were to be confirmed. I said: You will not be the Secretary of private education; you are going to be the Secretary of Education, and for most of the country, that means traditional public schools, and I hope you understand that.

That is a broad concern that I have, and I will talk more about it. My line of questioning the day of our hearing—I should say the evening of our hearing—focused on campus sexual assault; and that, of course, is an area of urgent concern for a lot of people here, a lot of members of the United States. It is also of greater concern now because of her nomination. What do I mean by that?

Let me walk through how I got to my questions with her. We know the Department of Justice tells us that college women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted than robbed in the time they are in college. This is a number that comes from the Centers for Disease Control. We also know that one in five college students experience attempted or completed sexual assault while they are in college.

This is a direct threat to young women all across the country, and I think we have only begun as a country—as a nation, I should say—to begin to take steps to combat sexual assault, to insist that colleges and universities do more to insist that everyone in the education field, every person on a college campus assumes some level of responsibility.

One of the reasons we can start down that path and begin to be certain that we are at least beginning to wrestle with this problem and give young women on our campuses more protection is because of recent legislation. We are not done. We have a lot more to do, but I will highlight one bill that I led the fight on—the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act, known as Campus SaVE. That became law in 2013, when we were reauthorizing—a fancy Washington word for doing it again or improving the law—the Violence Against Women Act. I was glad we were able to take a substantial step to tackle this horrific problem of sexual assault on campus.

That legislation was followed by regulations. If I could summarize them, that law and the regulations that followed made sure that colleges and universities have clear guidelines, that victims know what their rights are, that victims know where to turn in the event of an assault, that we do a lot more on prevention, that bystanders can no longer be inactive, that they have to be trained and prepared to help, and that the entire college campus is focused on preventing sexual assault and then making sure, in the aftermath of an assault, it is dealt with appropriately.

This legislation has helped campus communities respond to not only sexual assault but domestic assault, dating violence, as well as stalking. It does give students and employees the opportunity to do more than has been done on college campuses.

When I was questioning Mrs. DeVos, I asked her if she would commit to upholding title IX, the nondiscrimination statute that includes important protections against sexual assault. I asked her very specifically about the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which had issued guidance in 2011 that advises institutions of higher education to use the so-called preponderance of the evidence standard for campus conduct proceedings. Some may be familiar with that standard. It is a standard that we have used in our jurisprudence for civil cases across the country. You don't have to prove, nor should a victim of sexual assault on campus have to prove by the higher standard; say clear and convincing is a higher standard or beyond a reasonable doubt is a criminal standard. What the Department of Education said to the university campuses across the country is, the standard you should use is preponderance of the evidence. They based that determination after consulting with experts and advocates

across the country. That is the state of law currently, the guidance from the Department of Education about that evidentiary standard, my legislation Campus SaVE, and that is where we are now.

I simply asked Mrs. DeVos whether or not she would commit to enforcing current law and abiding by the 2011 Department of Education guidance. Her response was that it would be premature—I am using her word “premature”—to make that kind of commitment. I was stunned by that answer. Why would it be premature to say you are going to enforce current law? Why would it be premature to say that you can’t make a commitment to insisting upon an evidentiary standard that is in place right now? That made no sense to me, and I don’t think it made any sense to people across the country who have been working on this problem and trying to get the attention of the Senate and the House and any administration for years, if not for decades.

We finally arrived at a place where we are at long last dealing with sexual assault in a very aggressive and appropriate and fair manner. Now we have a nominee who says she is not sure whether she can commit to that. That gave me great pause and is one of the reasons I don’t support her nomination. I have several reasons. I know I am running low on time, but I will wrap up this portion in a moment.

Another area of concern is the answers to questions she gave with regard to specific questions about students with disabilities. This was a set of questions asked by a number of Senators, but I will try to summarize it this way. She seemed to have a lack of knowledge, an apparent and I think obvious lack of knowledge, about basic Federal law, a law that was passed decades ago, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. She didn’t seem to know that was a Federal statute. She seemed to assert that somehow States could decide whether to enforce the policy that undergirded that Federal law. That, of course, is not the case. It is Federal law, and we have to make sure individuals—in this case, students with disabilities—get the rights they are accorded by virtue of that law. Her lack of knowledge in this area was of concern, but maybe even greater concern was a lack of—or seeming lack of, in my judgment—determination to once again enforce this law, to make sure that on her watch the law that would protect students with disabilities would be enforced to the full extent of the law and nothing less. She didn’t seem to be willing to commit to that or didn’t seem to have the kind of commitment I would expect from a Secretary of Education.

What we would all expect, Democrats and Republicans, I would hope, is a Secretary of Education who is a champion for public schools, is a champion for those children in public schools, will fight battles and urge States to

make the investments in public education, would urge the Congress to make investments in public education, in early learning, and all of the concerns we have about lack of funding in public education.

I would hope both parties would want a Secretary of Education who is a champion for students with disabilities, who would be a champion for those who are victims of sexual assault on our college campuses. Unfortunately, because of a series of questions posed both at the hearing and in written questions that were submitted for the record—to which Mrs. DeVos gave written answers—I see that basic commitment lacking. For that and many reasons which we will develop a little later tonight, I will be voting no on her confirmation vote.

I appreciate this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and hope to be back later this evening.

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.

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

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

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise to speak in opposition to the nomination of Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. My mom was a public schoolteacher, and she taught second grade until she was 70 years old. She loved teaching. Her favorite unit was actually the Monarch Butterfly Unit, where she would dress up as the monarch butterfly, and she would teach the kids about metamorphosis. The costume she wore, she would also wear to the supermarket afterward. She was dressed as this big monarch butterfly, with little antennae on her head and a sign that said: “To Mexico or bust” because that is where the monarch would fly on its way from Canada through Minnesota and down. It was the night before my mom’s funeral at the visitation where I met a family who came up to me, and the mom was sobbing. I didn’t know what was going on. I had never met them. They had their older son with them who had pretty severe disabilities. She said: You know, your mom had my kid here in school when he was in second grade. Now he was grown up. She said: He always loved that Monarch Butterfly Unit. After he graduated, your mom would continue to go to the grocery store, and that was why she would go to the store every year. He had gotten a job bagging groceries. She would stand in the line in her monarch butterfly outfit for years and give him a big hug when she got to the end of the line. That was my mom. She loved her kids and she was a devoted teacher.

I went to public school through elementary to high school. My daughter

went to public school. I learned that basic right we have in this country; that every child should have the right to an education. That led me to the conclusion—after reviewing the record of the hearing and talking to my colleagues on the committee—that this nominee and I do not share the same value when it comes to that public education. I note that two of my Republican colleagues, Senators COLLINS and MURKOWSKI, have come to the same conclusion. One of the most troubling examples of Mrs. DeVos’s views came when she was questioned by two of my colleagues. I note Senator MURRAY is here. We thank her for her leadership on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Two of my colleagues, Senators MAGGIE HASSAN and TIM KAINE, asked the nominee about whether schools should meet the standards outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or, as it is known, IDEA. Mrs. DeVos said she would leave the decision of whether to offer equal educational opportunities to the States. This is simply unacceptable. It is not the kind of leadership we need. This is not why we have IDEA. I think most education professionals and people who are experts in this area would know that is not the answer.

I occupy the Senate seat that was once held by Minnesota’s own Hubert Humphrey. He was someone who was never at a loss for words. He delivered a speech to the Minnesota AFL-CIO 40 years ago. One line of that speech is just as appropriate and meaningful today as it was back then. He said:

The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the needy, the sick and the disabled.

I submit that Mrs. DeVos’s opposition toward providing equal education opportunities to students with disabilities does not meet that moral test. Her views are at odds with decades of bipartisan support for IDEA.

In 1975, when Congress passed the original version of IDEA, half of all children with disabilities were not receiving appropriate educational services, and 1 million children with disabilities were excluded entirely from the public school system. In an impassioned floor speech, then-Senator and later Vice President Walter Mondale of Minnesota talked about the need for IDEA. Before the 1975 law, disabled children were placed in segregated schools and classes with little emphasis on an education, training, or development. Many parents also gave up on the poor services offered by the public schools. As a result, disabled students remained at home. To tackle this problem, Republicans and Democrats came together to pass legislation ensuring that students with disabilities would have equal access to public education, just like all other kids. The law guaranteed and continues to guarantee today—the Federal law—that students

with disabilities get a free and appropriate public education. It is not a State-by-State requirement. It is a Federal requirement.

In 1975, both Minnesota Senators played a significant leadership role in enacting this groundbreaking civil rights legislation. Senator Humphrey called IDEA one of the most significant pieces of legislation and a major commitment in this Nation's commitment to its children. Then-Senator Mondale argued that this landmark legislation holds a promise of new opportunity for 7 million children in this country. When Congress first enacted this law in 1975, this was not a partisan issue. The law passed both Houses with overwhelming majorities. The Senate voted in favor of the landmark legislation by a margin of 87 to 7; the House, by a vote of 404 to 7. Bipartisan support for IDEA grew stronger over time.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush signed into law a bill that reauthorized the Disabilities Act. That bill was introduced by former Democratic Senator Tom Harkin and former Minnesota Republican Senator Dave Durenberger. The reauthorization was so uncontroversial that it passed by a voice vote in both the House and the Senate. Members from both parties supported IDEA when it was reauthorized again in 2003. Every single member of the Minnesota delegation, all 10—Democrats and Republicans alike—supported IDEA's reauthorization that year. For four decades, IDEA has garnered support from both sides of the aisle because we all understand the need to support the most vulnerable among us.

Every Member of Congress knows a family member or a person who has been affected by disability. For a lot of lawmakers, this is personal. When my daughter was born, she couldn't swallow for nearly 2 years. She had a feeding tube, and the doctors didn't know what was wrong with her. It ended up being a temporary problem and not a permanent disability, but those 2 years I still look back at as a gift. They were a gift that brought our family closer together, but they were a gift because they made me understand what parents of kids with disabilities face every single day. This wasn't just a temporary thing for the parents I met. This was something they face every single day.

Since the passage of IDEA, our Nation has moved to fulfill the promise of providing a high-quality education to kids with disabilities. Today, more than 4.7 million children with disabilities rely on IDEA to protect their access to high-quality education. Over the last 40 years, the Democratic and Republican Members who have come before me have all fought to preserve those critical rights and opportunities.

These are American values. But they are especially near and dear to our State, where we have this long and proud tradition of working to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the same basic resources and

opportunities as everyone else. This is not just the original work by Senators Humphrey and Mondale, carried on, of course, by Senator Durenberger and others, but it happened in our State as well.

To cite a few examples, it was the Minnesota Ramp Project that introduced a new American model for building statewide standardized wheelchair ramps. Minnesota was the State that sent Paul Wellstone to the Senate, where he fought long and hard for mental health parity. My State is also home to some of the most innovative centers for the disabled in the country, including PACER, the Courage Center, and ARC.

When it comes to educating children with disabilities, Minnesota has also been one of the Nation's leaders. In 1957, our State became one of the first States in the Nation to pass a law requiring that special education services be provided to children and youth with disabilities. In our State, from birth to adulthood, kids with disabilities have access to the quality of life they deserve.

Through IDEA, our State is able to receive Federal funding for early intervention services that help diagnose disabilities or developmental delays among infants and toddlers. Minnesota also provides each child with a disability and their family a personalized K-12 education plan and the support needed to transition from high school to postsecondary education.

These civil rights protections and funding under IDEA have also been an area of bipartisan cooperation among members of the Minnesota delegation. We would like to see even more funding. We don't see us move backwards. At least one Minnesota Republican has cosponsored every version of IDEA and its reauthorization over the last 40 years. We have never had a Secretary of Education who has put these commonsense bipartisan benefits at risk.

Today, over 124,000 Minnesota children rely on the protections in IDEA. I have heard from families in my State, and so many of them tell me how that Federal law has made a real difference in their lives. A mom from Watertown, MN, told me all about her son who was born with Down syndrome. She is so thankful for the Federal law because this protection ensures that he can have everyday experiences like other kids.

It allows her son to be fully integrated with the rest of the students in his high school. As a result, he has developed many friendships and a strong social network. When she asks her son whether he likes school, he always says a resounding "yes."

A mother of two autistic kids who are deafblind, reached out to me from Farmington, MN. She tells me that she depends on IDEA because the law gives her an opportunity to participate in designing individualized education programs for her children. These programs allow her to tailor the best possible educational plans.

A woman from Lakeville, MN, told me that when her son was born with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the late 1980s, and she was so worried about what his future would look like. But because of IDEA, he received specialized services at school while still being included in activities with the rest of his peers. Today, she tells me that he is a successful young adult who happily lives, learns, and works in his community.

During my time in the Senate, I have worked to share those Minnesota values that you hear resonating in those letters across the country. That is why I helped lead the push in Congress to successfully pass bipartisan legislation with Senators Burr and Casey called the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, or ABLE Act, a law that will help people with disabilities and their families better plan for their futures. It is a law that President Obama signed.

We have made progress in removing barriers and empowering people with disabilities. Of course, we know that the ABLE Act alone is not enough. We still need to ensure that the Federal Government lives up to its promise to support education for those with disabilities by enforcing and protecting the IDEA and fully funding special education. Providing equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities is an issue that cuts across partisan lines.

It is an issue of decency and an issue of dignity, and I believe it is an issue that we must all stand behind as Americans. I cannot support a nominee that would jeopardize the education of millions of disabled children across our country or someone that is not fully informed at her own hearing about such an important law. We have continuously maintained and strengthened educational laws for children with disabilities because every child deserves a chance to succeed.

I think about my mom and all those years of teaching—teaching 30 second graders at age 70. I think about that boy, who is now a man, who in the second grade had her as a teacher. He had severe disabilities, but she did everything to make his learning experience as good as all the other kids that were in that class.

I think of how he loved that butterfly unit and felt the passion that my mom brought to teaching it. In her own free time, she would go visit him at his job at that checkout line in the grocery store in her butterfly outfit. That was integrating kids with disabilities into our school systems. That is what special teachers and special education experts who see all children as special are all about.

Thank you. I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing Mrs. DeVos's nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished senior Senator from

Minnesota for her comments. She speaks from experience and knowledge, as has the senior Senator from Washington State, on this issue.

In my years here, I have seen thousands of confirmation votes, literally at all levels, up to and including Cabinet members and Supreme Court justices. I have voted for a large majority of a President's nominations—both Republican and Democratic Presidents. Some may not have been those I would have chosen, but I felt that, at least, the President should be given the prerogative, if the person is qualified.

Now, ideology is one thing, and qualification is another. Out of those thousands of confirmation votes, I have a hard time remembering any that were like this one. This one had a whirlwind confirmation hearing and committee vote. It was almost as though they were afraid to have the nominee actually have to appear and answer questions. And now the Senate is going to vote on the nomination of Betsy DeVos to lead the Department of Education.

I will be very blunt. On the very little time that she was allowed to be shown to the public, she showed—and I certainly believe this—that she does not have the qualifications to uphold the Department of Education's primary goal—that of ensuring that all students—all students, not just the wealthy, but all students—have access to a quality, public education that allows them to succeed.

I am both a father and a grandfather, and I am proud of it. I watched my children go to school. And now I see my grandchildren going to school. I understand well the impact of education on our children. When students have access to strong public education from the very beginning, they are more apt to succeed in the long run.

Our Nation's public schools—as is the case in my home State of Vermont—hold the promise of student success through strong State accountability measures and legal protections regardless of one's race, income, or learning ability. They offer nutritious meals for underserved students, many of whom receive their only meals of the day at school. Any teacher will tell you that if you have a hungry child, you have a child who cannot learn. If a child is fed, you have a child who can learn.

Public education means strong teachers and school leaders, technology in the classroom, an assessment to test not just how well a student can memorize material for an exam on a particular day of the year, but how much they have grown over the course of many months.

Many of the schools have counselors and nurses. They operate under a modern infrastructure to support those with disabilities and children in foster care. But public education also means that both the States and the Federal Government are held accountable for everyone having access to the same excellent resources.

In fact, just over 1 year ago, this body agreed to these protections. We

passed the Every Student Succeeds Act here in the Senate by a vote of 85 to 12—an amazing, overwhelming, bipartisan vote. It was the firm agreement among the majority of the Senate—Republicans and Democrats alike—that all students deserve access to critical public school resources in order to succeed. We made a promise that we would do better by our students; that public schools would be the premier standard for outstanding education for all.

Unfortunately, the nominee before us—in the very little time that she was allowed to testify and be questioned in the confirmation hearing—showed that she does not share these same goals. Instead, she has referred to public schools as a “dead end.”

Well, if you are a billionaire, you have a choice to go wherever you want to school. Maybe these people in a public school are not good enough for you? Well, then, go buy a school if you want. Most people don't have that option. Most people are hard working. My wife and I were when our kids were in school. Our children are today.

What does Betsy DeVos advocate for? She advocates for the privatization of education. She has funneled millions of dollars into organizations and initiatives to promote private school vouchers and school choice.

These efforts have diverted public funds toward private schools, schools that are not held to any antidiscrimination or accountability standards. These schools can discriminate all they want.

At her confirmation hearing—in the very little time that she did speak—she did not understand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This is a landmark law. It is a Federal law that public schools in all 50 States must follow.

Lastly, Mrs. DeVos and her family have contributed to anti-LGBT causes and anti-women's health efforts, which are in direct conflict to the one who is supposed to lead the Department of Education. How can a nominee disagree with the mission of the Department of Education and be fit to oversee that agency and promote the civil rights of schools and college campuses?

She also appears to oppose efforts to expand college access, in an era when college is so important. Again, in the little bit of time she was allowed to testify before the Senate HELP Committee in January, Mrs. DeVos, when asked, would not agree to work with States to offer free community college to eligible students, instead saying that “nothing in life is truly free.” This is an easy thing to say if you are a billionaire.

She also admitted to knowing little about the Pell Grant Program and Federal student loans, as neither she nor her children have ever had to use such resources. As most of us know our children will have to use them, this is simply out of touch with the real life expectations of millions of students and families who rely on these funds to make college attainable.

It is what I hear from hard-working families in Vermont. Parents tell me that their child is going to be the first one in their family to go to college, and the only reason they can do it is because they can get Pell grants or Federal student loans. Mrs. DeVos's answer is: What are those?

College tuition rates have climbed more than 300 percent in the last decade. It is unacceptable to deny students Federal financial resources. To say, well, if you are rich, you can have them, but otherwise, tough.

As it is, students are increasingly saddled by insurmountable student loan debt. Many forgo starting a family, or buying a house or a car. Many of these students have also fallen prey to for-profit institutions, many of which continue to offer the false promise of gainful employment upon graduation. In reality, many of these institutions offer nontransferable credits or unaccredited degrees, and are increasingly shuttering their doors, leaving students with egregious debt and nowhere to turn to finish their degrees.

The Department of Education has an extremely important role to ensure that all students—of every race, income level, or whether that student has disabilities or not—have access to the critical tools provided by public schools and by student financial aid programs.

Thousands—thousands—of Vermonters have called or written to me worried that Mrs. DeVos does not agree with these principles. When I say thousands, to put that in context, we are the second smallest State in the Union. Thousands have contacted me. I share these concerns of my fellow Vermonters.

They know my children went to public school. They want to be able to send their children to public school too. They want the best education.

I am telling these Vermonters I will not support this confirmation. It is dangerous and shortsighted to confirm someone who has so much to learn about our Nation's public schools and the challenges they face.

Universal free public schools were a revolutionary American invention. It has helped make America the great Nation it is today. So in the United States, we should strengthen public schools, not snub them.

Mrs. DeVos is the wrong choice for our children but also for our Nation's future. Our public schools need strong leadership, not someone who has made it her life's work to undermine their success. So I oppose this nomination. I hope my fellow Senators will too.

TRAVEL BAN

Mr. President, while I have the floor, I will just take another minute or two to mention something else, as I have mentioned Vermont.

On February 1 of this year, Vermont welcomed 31 new U.S. citizens from 14 countries through a naturalization ceremony in Rutland, VT. Later that night, more than 1,000 people from our