

This is not only irresponsible, but this is, I believe, dangerous. It should also be an embarrassment. The American people expect their Senators and Congress to do our jobs and fulfill the duties to those who we represent. If our Democratic colleagues don't want to support one of the very well-qualified nominees of the President, that is fine. That is their right, but don't slow walk and slow down the institution of the Senate just to score some political points or to feed some of the irrational rage that you see depicted in some quarters.

Dragging this out doesn't do any good. It won't change the outcome, and it ill serves the American people. Let's get these nominations done so they can be sworn in and begin their service to this new administration and, more importantly, to the American people.

In addition to our work on nominations, last week the Senate started to consider a number of measures to block a host of regulations put in place by the Obama administration during the last 6 months that President Obama was in office. Under President Obama, our country witnessed a volcanic profusion of rules and regulations that empowered unelected bureaucrats and shut out the voices of the elected representatives of the people.

The result? Job creators have less freedom to operate and innovate and are instead suffocated by more and more redtape and compliance costs. That translates into a slower growing economy, which means less jobs and which means the American people are the ones who get hurt, directly as a result of this profusion of redtape and regulation.

According to recent reports, the 600-plus regulations issued by the Obama White House came with a \$700 billion pricetag for our economy. Our economy is not even growing at 2 percent. I think this overregulation is largely responsible because this profusion of regulations hit businesses both big—they can absorb some matter of the costs—but also small businesses, including local community banks that are going out of business on a daily basis because they simply can't afford to compete and to pay for the countless lawyers to comply with all of the redtape and the mindless regulation from the previous administration. It is not just financial services. It is health care, it is agriculture, and it is all sectors of the economy.

I am grateful that President Trump has made it clear where he stands on all of this, and he has already issued guidance requiring the government to cut regulations should it want to add more: Cut two regulations for every one you want to add. With President Trump in the White House, Congress can reverse many of the Obama regulations. That gives the American people and our anemic economic growth some relief.

Through the Congressional Review Act, Congress can review and ulti-

mately block recent regulations handed down by the Federal Government. That is what we did last week, and that is what we are going to continue to do. We can roll back many of the Obama administration rules that are killing jobs and stifling economic growth.

At the end of last week, we repealed the rule called the stream buffer rule, which actually didn't have anything to do with streams. It was a job-killing regulation that was more about stifling domestic energy production, and I am glad we did away with it.

On Friday, Congress passed another resolution—one I was happy to cosponsor. That was aimed at chipping away the regulatory burdens for our community banks and other financial services organizations brought on by Dodd-Frank.

I am all for transparency, but I am against laws that give advantages to foreign companies over our own. This Securities and Exchange Commission rule would have done that by forcing American companies to disclose confidential information that their foreign competitors can keep under wraps. It should go without saying that each of us want a level playing field for our businesses, which help to create jobs and grow the economy. That is why we blocked this rule.

Of course, this and other resolutions are the first few steps in a broader strategy to kill overbearing regulations so that our innovators and our entrepreneurs aren't suffocated by unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy. That is part of what the American people sent us here to do. Certainly, the verdict they rendered on November 8 is that they did not want a continuation of the status quo under the previous administration. They wanted change. It is integral to restoring our economy—the kind of change we are bringing about to restoring our economy and helping it grow for everyone.

I look forward to working with the White House and with our colleagues as we continue to find new ways to build up the American economy.

Mr. President, if I can just close on one last topic. I see some colleagues here wishing to speak. Tomorrow we will vote on the nomination of Betsy DeVos to the Department of Education. The Federal Government, through the Department of Education, funds about 10 percent of public education, because most of that comes from our States; that is, the funding and the regulation of education from kindergarten through the 12th grade. What this fight over this well-qualified nominee is all about is power—as so many of these fights in Washington, DC, are about—and the desire to keep power over public education in all of our States and all across the country right here inside the beltway.

I believe President Trump chose wisely, not because he chose another education bureaucrat who knows all the acronyms and knows the arcanum known to people who have been

brought up within that establishment. Instead, he chose an outsider, someone much like himself but someone more interested in results, rather than paying homage to and feeding the education establishment here in Washington, DC, and retaining the power over the important decisions that should be handed back down to the States, down to teachers, parents, and students, as they choose how best to get to accomplish our universal goal of making sure every child has a good education.

This fight isn't about the quality of education in our country. This fight, for those who are opposing Mrs. DeVos, is largely about whether we should retain power here in Washington, DC, so that Washington can continue to dictate to the States, parents, and teachers what policies they need to apply in our K-12 education system or whether we are going to return that power back where it should be—back into the hands of parents, teachers, and local school districts.

That is what this fight is all about. That is why I am glad that tomorrow we will confirm Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. Listen to what the American people told us on November 8 when they said they didn't want to maintain the status quo because the status quo is not working for them, it is not working for our economy, and, certainly, it is not working for our children, each of whom deserves a good education.

Yes, Mrs. DeVos will shake things up a little bit but, more importantly, she is going to be part of this effort to return power to parents and teachers and to our local school districts. That is what this vote will be about tomorrow. I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

REPEALING AND REPLACING OBAMACARE

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise to briefly discuss a number of ongoing efforts in the early days of the 115th Congress. It is a strange time to be working on Capitol Hill, as strange as I have seen in my four decades in the Senate. That is true for a number of reasons. Let me give you an example. Republicans currently control the Senate, the House, and the White House, and are in widespread agreement about most major policy issues. Sure, there are details that need to be worked out, both on the process and the substance on things like tax reform, trade, and of course health care reform, but by and large Republicans all have the same ultimate goals for these key areas. Yet despite the overwhelming consensus that exists on most of these issues, there seems to be an obsession with advancing a narrative of a deeply divided Republican majority. According to this popular narrative, House and Senate Republicans have completely different views on tax reform, Republicans in Congress oppose everything President Trump wants to do on trade, and Senate Republicans are deeply at odds on

how to press forward on repealing and replacing ObamaCare.

As chairman of the Senate committee that is right in the middle of all these issues, I get asked to comment on these matters, literally, dozens of times every day. The questions take many forms. Senator X says Congress should do “blank” with ObamaCare. What do you think? Can the House’s tax reform plan pass in the Senate? President Trump said “blank” today. Is that going to fly in your committee?

These questions may seem straightforward. However, the underlying question behind all of these lines of inquiry is: Will you publically disagree with or criticize another Republican so we can write another story about Republican divisions? Matters such as repealing and replacing ObamaCare or reforming the Tax Code are certainly important topics that are rightly under intense public scrutiny. However, given that these monumental efforts are still in the early stages, the fact that there are some relatively minor differences of opinion shouldn’t be all that noteworthy. The existence of these differences in the initial stages of the process doesn’t significantly jeopardize the success of these efforts. The purpose of the legislative process—particularly the process we use in the Senate—is to allow differences to be aired and worked through so, at the end of the process, consensus can be reached. Differing views on some issues at the beginning of the process are to be expected. Once again, they are hardly noteworthy.

Case in point, Republicans are united in our desire to repeal and replace ObamaCare. The vast majority of us want reforms that are more patient-centered and market-driven. As far as I know, pretty much all of us want to return most of the authority for regulating the health care system back to the States. On some of the other questions, let me make clear what my position is just so there is no confusion on these points. I believe we should repeal ObamaCare—including the taxes—and provide for a stable transition period. I believe the work to replace ObamaCare should also begin immediately, meaning that our repeal bill should include as many ObamaCare replacement policies as procedures allow. A more complete replacement can and should be crafted in the coming months as we work through some of the more complicated issues. That has been my position since roughly March of 2010, when the final pieces of ObamaCare were signed into law. I have repeated it numerous times over the years. Moreover, I believe most Republicans in Congress share that same view.

Do some Republicans have different views regarding the proper order and procedure for this endeavor? I am sure they do. But I don’t know of a single Republican who does not want to get rid of ObamaCare. I certainly don’t know any Republicans who are fine with the status quo in our health care

system. That being the case, no one should be trying to parse anyone’s words or split hairs in order to manufacture divisions in the Republican ranks on repealing and replacing ObamaCare.

I have little doubt that we can work through whatever differences do exist, and, more importantly, I think we will. I am not going to speculate today on the floor about what the final process or product will look like, but I will say that at the end of the day, only 3 numbers matter: 218, 51 and 1. Those are the numbers of supporters we need at each step to pass an ObamaCare repeal and replacement.

At this point, given what we currently know, I strongly believe that the process I described earlier—a full repeal and a responsible transition, coupled with a sizable downpayment on replacement, followed by a committed effort to implement additional replacement policies in the coming months—provides the best path forward to achieving those thresholds. Like I said, most Republicans in Congress agree with me.

We can discuss other ideas, and I am happy to engage in that discussion, but those numbers—218, 51, and 1—have to be the standard by which we judge any alternatives. And while I would love to see the final product pass with even larger numbers, and even with some Democrats onboard with us, those numbers give us a clear picture as to how much consensus is necessary.

Once again, I think we can get there, and I am continually working with colleagues in both the House and Senate to make sure we do.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to oppose the nomination of Betsy DeVos, President Trump’s choice to be Secretary of Education. I fundamentally disagree with my colleague from Texas who said earlier that this is a fight about power and who maintains power, whether it is going to stay in Washington or whether it is going to be in our State and local communities.

In New Hampshire, we believe in local control of education. It is a bedrock principle of our public education system. This fight, today, is not about power in Washington versus power in the States; this is a fight about whether we are going to continue to support our public school system and our system of public higher education, or are we going to take the money out, the support out, and divert it into private and religious schools, and gut the public education system in this country?

My parents were part of the “greatest generation,” and they raised me in post-World War II America. They understood that the best way for my sisters and me to have opportunities for the future was to make sure we had a solid education. I benefited by going to great public schools in the State of

Missouri and in the State of Pennsylvania, and I was also able to receive a quality public higher education. Without the opportunity to attend public universities in Pennsylvania and later in West Virginia and in the State of Mississippi, I would not have been able to get a college education because my parents wouldn’t have been able to afford to send me to a private college or university, just like they wouldn’t have been able to afford to send me to private K–12 schools.

I am grateful for the public schools I attended and proud of the support my parents and so many other parents have given to public schools across America. My children and grandchildren have benefited from the great public schools in New Hampshire.

As Governor, I was proud to work with the Republican legislature to improve the public schools in the State of New Hampshire. We expanded public kindergarten in our State because at the time I became Governor, we didn’t have public kindergarten for all students. We were able to open the door for an additional 25,000 kids to go to public kindergarten. We were able to increase funding for schools in New Hampshire during my time as Governor. I learned during those experiences and also as a teacher—I taught in public schools in Dover, New Hampshire and also in Mississippi—the close connection between quality public education and a strong, growing economy.

I taught in Mississippi in 1970. At that time, there was no requirement for all young people to attend school. So if you didn’t want to go to school, you didn’t have to. We saw the negative impact that had on economic indicators in the State of Mississippi. Since then, the State has adopted compulsory education for students in Mississippi. But it was a great lesson to me to see how important good schools are and how they contribute to a strong economy in this country.

As Governor, when I talked to businesses in the State of New Hampshire, one of the things they told me that they needed in order for their businesses to succeed was a skilled workforce, young people who had a good education, who could learn advanced skills on the job. They looked to locate in communities where there was a strong system of public education.

I value public schools as one of our Nation’s bedrock civic and democratic institutions because they provide the best opportunity for kids from all walks of life to get a quality education. They pass on to each new generation, including the children of immigrants, America’s shared ideals and values.

Regrettably, after careful study of Mrs. DeVos’s record as an activist, I have concluded that she doesn’t agree with this view of our public schools. She has no relevant experience as a teacher or as a leader in public schools. She has never attended a public school, and she has not sent any of her children to a public school. To the contrary, she has spent her entire career

and countless millions of dollars of her personal fortune working not to improve public schools but to privatize them, to weaken them by diverting public funds to private and religious schools. Given her past record, it makes no sense to put Mrs. DeVos in charge of the Department of Education unless the aim is to devalue, defund, and perhaps eventually destroy our public schools. I think that is unacceptable.

In my State of New Hampshire, support for our public schools is bipartisan and it is passionate. In rural communities and small towns and our cities across the State, public schools are institutions that have strong support within our communities. They are a big part of our communities' identities and shared experiences. Across centuries and generations in the Granite State, public schools have been at the heart of our common civic life.

I think it is not surprising that my office has been inundated with letters, emails, and phone calls strongly opposing the DeVos nomination. My office has received more than 4,000 letters and emails from Granite Staters. That may not seem like a lot to somebody from the State of California, but from the State of New Hampshire, to have 4,000 letters and emails on a nomination is unheard of. And almost all of them oppose this nomination. In addition, we have received 1,405 telephone calls in opposition and only 3 in support. I am impressed not only by the volume of constituent messages but by the intensity of their opposition.

Megan is a social studies teacher in New Hampshire. She writes:

Mrs. DeVos clearly lacks even a basic understanding of Federal education policy, laws and instructional practices. She has no relevant experience. There is just no way I would ever be certified to instruct students in New Hampshire if I lacked as much knowledge and experience in my field. But she gets to be the nation's chief educator? How is this good for kids?

Roger is a retired public school teacher from the central part of my State, and he writes:

Please reject DeVos because she is anti-public education in word and in practice, lacking the understanding of the public education system and having no understanding of the dreamers sitting in public schools this morning, creating their own American dreams, learning of the promise and justice that is America.

Sam from our Seacoast region writes:

It is important that we maintain a strong public school system. This is not a partisan issue. Any person, regardless of party, can see that Miss DeVos is unqualified to fill the position. You need to vote "no" to save our education system.

Mike from one of our university towns writes:

I am really concerned that we might have someone with so little experience in education and with seemingly anti-public education views as our next education leader. I fear that a DeVos confirmation will only exacerbate the already segregated school experiences that children have in our country. I want all students to have a fair shake at a

high-quality school experience, not just those who live in wealthy communities or who have parents savvy enough to advocate on their behalf.

Many of the letters I have received are from parents who are outraged by Mrs. DeVos's comments on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which is one of the landmark civil rights laws of the 20th century. In response to a question from my colleague, Senator HASSAN, Mrs. DeVos made it clear that she was unaware that that law was a Federal law and that it governs all our public schools in the United States.

IDEA ensures that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free appropriate public education and that they are accommodated in our schools and classrooms, just like all other children. In her testimony, Mrs. DeVos said that decisions about how to treat students with disabilities should be left to the States. Can you imagine? What would happen in States that decide they don't want to make sure that those students can go to school?

I received this message from Marilyn, who lives in the western part of New Hampshire. She says:

Thank you for opposing the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary. She is a dangerous, unqualified choice. As the parent of a daughter with Down syndrome, I fear for the future of IDEA if DeVos is in charge.

Ashley Preston, who was the Teacher of the Year in New Hampshire in 2016, wrote this to me:

If our Secretary of Education does not understand and value the importance of Federal laws such as IDEA, how can we expect states and local school districts to do that? These are the elements crucial to ensuring the best chance for our future.

Mr. President, the Department of Education has oversight not only of K-12 public schools but also higher education, including a portfolio of more than \$1.2 trillion in Federal student loans. I have had the opportunity not only to teach in our K-12 schools but to work in public universities in New Hampshire and in private universities. Listening to Mrs. DeVos's testimony, I was appalled by her lack of understanding of higher education policy. She acknowledged that neither she nor her children had ever received a Federal loan or Pell grant. And this is the worst part: When asked to commit to enforcing rules that ensure students are not cheated and end up with no degree but a mountain of student debt—in other words, the predicament of students who went to Trump University and so many other for-profit colleges—she refused to do that. She refused to say that this is something that we should support as a policy in America.

I am also deeply concerned by her support for charter schools that are not accountable and her reputation as "the four-star general of the voucher movement." I believe there is a role for charter schools. I think as we try to improve our public system of higher

education, we need to look at a number of models. I voted for New Hampshire's charter school law, but we should hold them accountable just as we hold our public schools accountable. We should ensure that they do not drain resources from public schools.

There was a report that came out in 2013 that was done by a working group under the auspices of the Annenberg Institute for Social Reform. They uncovered similar challenges across charter schools. They found that there was uneven academic performance; that some of them had overly harsh discipline practices; that funding sometimes destabilized traditional schools; that there was a lack of transparency and oversight that led to conflicts of interest and, in some cases, fraud; and that many of them practiced policies that kept students out for various reasons.

Mrs. DeVos was one of the architects of Michigan's first charter school law in 1993. It has been widely criticized for lacking accountability and safeguards for students. In her confirmation hearing, Mrs. DeVos refused to agree that for-profit charter schools should be held to the same standards as public schools. Just as disturbing is her support for school vouchers, which would siphon funding from public schools and divert it to private and religious schools.

Advocates of vouchers like to call it school choice, but, in practice, parents have learned that choice is not a reality. Florida, under Governor Jeb Bush, was the first State to enact a statewide voucher system, and nearly 93 percent of private and parochial schools in Florida—after that law—refused to accept any voucher students.

In New Hampshire, we have parts of the State where, if we don't have public schools, there are no other choices for our students. I don't care whether you have a voucher or not. You can't drive 3 or 4 hours to get to the closest private school.

So let's be clear: Vouchers and other privatization schemes advocated by Mrs. DeVos are not about pedagogy; they are about ideology. They are all about disdain for what many voucher advocates like to call government schools. Well, what they call government schools are our public schools. They are schools that our communities have created and control locally for the education of their kids.

What Mrs. DeVos fails to understand is that quality education has nothing to do with whether a school is public or private. We have public schools in New Hampshire that can do better, and we have public schools that are world class. The same can be said about our private schools in New Hampshire. But what counts in public and private schools alike are high-quality teachers, support from parents and communities, facilities where kids can learn and be safe, rigorous academic standards, and the resources to make sure that children get the instruction they need, including individualized assistance for

kids with special needs. What counts is the political and budgetary commitment to create high-quality schools in every neighborhood, regardless of ZIP Code. Because Betsy DeVos does not understand these basic truths about education in America, because she is driven by an ideological hostility to our public schools, she is the wrong person to serve as our Secretary of Education.

I intend to vote no on the nomination of Mrs. DeVos, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in rejecting this unqualified nominee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in opposition to the nomination of Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. My reason is very simple: Mrs. DeVos lacks the experience required to oversee the Department of Education, an agency that serves over 50 million public school children across America.

Despite spending many years giving hundreds of millions of dollars to back political candidates and ballot initiatives that support unproven education policies, she remains shockingly unfamiliar with Federal law and even some very basic education concepts. Educating our children is an incredibly important job, and we need someone who is experienced, prepared, and well qualified to lead the Department of Education.

As I have said before, Mrs. DeVos has no experience in public education at any level, not as a teacher, not as an administrator, not as a student, not as a parent, not as a school board member, and not even as a borrower of public loans for college.

Ask any parent; our children are what we hold most dear. It only makes sense that the individual whom we entrust with our children's education should have at least some—some—experience in public education. Mrs. DeVos has absolutely no experience—I repeat, no tangible experience—with neighborhood public schools. In fact, her only experience in education is her work lobbying for the transfer of taxpayer money to private schools.

She has also pushed for the rapid expansion of charter schools without sufficient accountability to parents and to students, which brings me to her track record in my home State of Michigan. Mrs. DeVos has pushed for school vouchers to send our public tax dollars to private schools. Her staunch advocacy for the use of taxpayer funding for private and charter school systems earned her the nickname as the “four-star general of the pro-voucher movement.”

The vast majority of children in Michigan and in the United States attend neighborhood public schools. Voucher programs rob these children of the resources they need to receive high-quality education near where they

live. Michigan voters soundly rejected her plan, and we cannot—I repeat, we cannot—put her in a position to push for voucher programs on a national scale that will weaken our neighborhood schools and will weaken, in particular, our rural schools.

Let me be clear: I support innovative models for improving our education system but only when those models are proven to work. For example, I worked hard to ensure that all children have access to the skills and education that are vital to joining the modern workforce and competing in today's global economy. I introduced legislation that will reduce the price tag for higher learning by allowing students to complete college-level courses while they are still in public high school.

The Making Education Affordable and Accessible Act will help students save time and money as they kick-start their careers through a very personalized curriculum. Whether an early-middle college program or a dual and concurrent enrollment program, these models help traditional public school students save money and get ahead by earning college credits while they finish their high school education.

These programs are typically run by a local school district or an intermediate school district and are offered at little or no cost to the student. They also help students identify their major or interest area sooner so that they can complete their college degree and graduate as much as 1 year earlier. Across the State of Michigan, students are participating in more than 90 early and middle college programs, programs that are proven to significantly increase high school graduation rates.

Jobs for the Future found that, nationally, 90 percent of early college students graduate high school versus 78 percent nationally. This is just one example of the kind of innovative approach with proven results that policymakers should support to improve education outcomes.

Education reform must be driven by data and validated outcomes and not by political ideology. Our primary focus must always be on increasing opportunities for the millions of students in our neighborhood public schools. Given Mrs. DeVos's history of supporting policies that undermine traditional public schools and the communities they serve, I do not think she would act in the best interests of American students.

Michigan has been devoted to great public education for generations, a commitment that stretches back to even before the founding of our State. Some of our State's earliest pioneers, including my ancestors, settled under the guidance of the Northwest Ordinance, which stated that “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” Our Nation has strived to live up to this creed ever since, honoring the fundamental truth that all of our children have the right to an education no matter who they are, where

they live, how much money their parents have, or how they learn.

All levels of government—State, local and Federal—share the responsibility of ensuring that our children have access to quality education. In addition to providing significant Federal dollars to local school districts, the Federal Government plays a critical role in preventing discrimination and creating opportunity.

Federal education laws play a vital roll in ensuring that all students have equal access to learning opportunities, laws like the landmark 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

Before the enactment of IDEA, too many of our children with disabilities were denied the chance to learn from our broader communities. Likewise, our broader communities were denied the chance to learn from these youth and the extraordinary perspectives and contributions they offer to American society.

Now, thanks to IDEA, 6.5 million of our children, or 13 percent of all public school students, are not condemned to a life of isolation or mere accommodation. Instead, Federal law ensures that every child has access to the resources he or she needs to become productive and included members of our increasingly diverse 21st-century society.

IDEA assists public schools with offering high-quality special education and early intervention services for children with disabilities from birth to age 21. As a result, IDEA is responsible for millions of youth with disabilities graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and finding jobs as valuable participants in the American economy.

But IDEA will not enforce itself; it is the responsibility of the Department of Education and its leadership to monitor, evaluate, and provide technical assistance to States, making sure that our schools are offering learning opportunities that meet every student's needs.

It is the responsibility of the Senate to determine whether Mrs. DeVos can carry out this task and live up to the creed of “forever encouraging” education. Unfortunately, Mrs. DeVos has demonstrated little comprehension of the Federal role in protecting students with disabilities' equal right to an education. This became evident when she was asked directly about IDEA during her confirmation hearing, and Mrs. DeVos tried to excuse her erroneous answer by saying, “I may have confused it.” Every student knows the importance of doing their homework, studying for their exams, and practicing for any class presentations in advance. Every educator knows that the answer “I may have confused it” is not a response that leads to a passing grade.

With the stakes as high as they are, it is clear that Mrs. DeVos did not do her homework. She did not study for her potential role. She did not practice for her interview with the Senate committee and, most importantly, the

American people. She has contributed millions of dollars to Republican politicians over the years and probably thought that was the only qualification that she needed. We need to prove to the American people that she is wrong.

I take my responsibility under the U.S. Constitution to provide advise and consent to the President very seriously, and I know my colleagues here in the Senate do so as well. Given Mrs. DeVos's weak performance in her interview before the American people and her inability to demonstrate a basic understanding of key education concepts, I do not think we can give her a passing grade.

As Senators, we do not operate under a model of social promotion under which we pass an unqualified individual to a higher office simply because they showed up. Perhaps this is why Mrs. DeVos's nomination is expected to see the most bipartisan opposition to her confirmation of all of the President's nominations to date.

Mrs. DeVos's response regarding IDEA during her confirmation hearing was not the only response that I found alarming. As the father of two college-age daughters, I am extremely concerned about ensuring that our college campuses provide safe environments where students can learn and grow.

I was shocked by a recent comprehensive report done by one school that found that over 20 percent of female undergraduates experienced unwanted sexual contact. Sadly, this problem is not confined to one school. It is a public safety and health crisis that we must immediately take action to address.

The Department of Education has taken important first steps to combat the prevalence of campus sexual assault by opening investigations in over 200 schools and publishing guidance to ensure that universities are affording students title IX protections, the freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex and freedom from sexual violence.

Mrs. DeVos apparently has a different reaction to the threats many young students face while pursuing their higher education. As we saw during her confirmation hearing, she said it is "premature" for her to say if she will choose to uphold the Department of Education's guidance on preventing sexual violence. This is completely unacceptable to me as a Senator representing over 500,000 undergraduate students attending one of Michigan's outstanding colleges and universities, and this is completely unacceptable to me as a father.

It is also unacceptable in the eyes of over 1,000 graduates of the same school in Michigan that Mrs. DeVos attended herself: Calvin College. Calvin College alumni from the class of 1947 to the class of 2020 sent my office an extensive petition expressing their deep concern with Mrs. DeVos's nomination. In their letter, these alumni presented several

reasons they oppose Mrs. DeVos's confirmation. Specifically, they expressed concerns that she does not understand or support the many Federal policies—like IDEA and title IX—that she would be required to enforce. They wrote: "This is especially concerning given that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and title IX, which ensure that all students' educational experiences are free of discrimination that impede learning, are not of value to Mrs. DeVos." I cannot agree more with her fellow alumni.

My office has received over 8,000 calls in opposition to the nomination of Betsy DeVos, and I am sure my colleagues have also heard from thousands of their own constituents all across this country. The American people are making their voices heard, and they are telling the Senate that Mrs. DeVos is not the right choice to lead the Department of Education. I urge my colleagues to listen to their constituents who are forcefully—forcefully—rejecting Mrs. DeVos's misguided vision for neighborhood public schools in America.

I will be standing with the people of Michigan, and I once again call on my colleagues to join the bipartisan opposition to Mrs. DeVos's nomination. Our children's future depends on it, and for their sake, please vote no.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I believe Betsy DeVos is going to be an excellent Secretary of Education.

NOMINATION OF JEFF SESSIONS

Mr. President, I have been fortunate enough to get to know JEFF SESSIONS over the past 20 years. Not only is he a colleague whom I admire and respect, he is also one of my very best friends. I actually suffered through with him back when he had a nomination that was rejected by this body many years ago.

As you know, Senator SESSIONS has been nominated by the President to be the next Attorney General of the United States. It is an incredible honor. There is no doubt in my mind that my friend will be perfect for the job. He is more than qualified for this position, and I know he will keep his word when he says he plans to uphold the laws we pass in Congress.

Senator SESSIONS was elected to the Senate in 1997. That was 2 years after I was elected, and we have been very close friends ever since. For 20 years now, we have known each other and worked alongside each other on both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Environment and Public Works Committee. Those are the two major committees we have been on. He is seated just to my right in each one of the committees, and, as the Chair knows, you get to know a person pretty well when you have been sitting there for these 3- or 4-hour-long meetings. So we have had that relationship with each other.

Not only have we worked together, but we have also traveled and prayed together. You really get to know someone when you work, travel, and pray together. When working, a person's mind is revealed; when traveling, a person's character is revealed; and when you pray, the person's heart is revealed. I have come to know Senator SESSIONS as a God-fearing family man who puts others before himself and has a deep respect for the rule of law.

Family man—every time he has a grandchild, his wife and my wife talk about our competing grandchildren.

He helps those in need and makes sure that the legal system is protecting our citizens and holding criminals accountable.

A person only needs to look at the legislation and causes he has championed to know him. He played a key role in fighting for fairness and funding for the rural HIV/AIDS patients when negotiating a reauthorization of the bipartisan Ryan White CARE Act. His advocacy brought funding to low-income, mostly African-American women who did not have easily accessible health care before. Senator SESSIONS has been an author and supporter of many pieces of bipartisan legislation, including protecting victims of child abuse, reducing prison sentences for those who are unfairly targeted, and helping the families of our fallen military personnel.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator SESSIONS has become a fierce advocate for keeping our country safe from terrorism, and he understands the risks we face. In fact, Senator SESSIONS is tough on crime and is well suited to oversee Federal law enforcement activities and to assist local governments in their efforts.

Violent crime has recently been increasing. Furthermore—and I just found this out—the shooting deaths of police officers has increased by 68 percent just in the last year, between 2015 and 2016. That is pretty remarkable. These trends are unacceptable, and Senator SESSIONS has pledged to reverse the course by strengthening the partnership between Federal and local law enforcement and by going after drug traffickers, aliens who violate the laws, and criminals who use guns to commit crimes.

There is no question that Senator SESSIONS is qualified to do what he says he will and what the job asks of him. He served as a U.S. attorney for Alabama's Southern District, and he was also Alabama's attorney general, so he clearly knows the job. He doesn't have to be trained. It is because of his previous experiences that he will be able to transition from a partisan legislator to our Nation's top law enforcement officer with great ease.

Countless groups of people have come out to support the nominee: the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, former U.S. attorneys, a former FBI Director, current