

all of whom are enjoying the freedom of this country for which he fought so gallantly.

Earl has resided in Metairie, LA, since 1942.

It is imperative, in my judgment, that this Veterans Day—and every day—we honor the service and sacrifices made by our women and our men in uniform. That is why I have introduced a bill. It is the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War II Commemorative Coin Act. I say to the Presiding Officer, I hope you will vote for it. This bill would authorize a commemorative coin to mark the milestone anniversary and the historic sacrifices of what has been aptly termed “the Greatest Generation,” and this bill will cost the American taxpayer zero dollars.

Thanks to the selflessness and bravery of 16 million American military personnel—brave men and women, brave men like Ira and Earl, of whom I just spoke, many of whom have lost their lives in this global conflict in World War II—liberty and democracy ultimately prevailed against the rawest, ugliest form of tyranny. The least we can do, it seems to me, for those who fought for our freedom, is to ensure that institutions like the National World War II Museum in New Orleans are able to continue their mission to educate future generations about our country's role in World War II and to support the families of our veterans.

I would like to urge all of my colleagues to please join with me, as I know they will, in thanking the millions of veterans who have fought and served our country, and I hope we can all pray together for the safety of our brave women and men in uniform who are still serving today.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

BRINK ACT

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, as we all know, President Trump is now in China on an important trip, where his top priority is obtaining China's cooperation in confronting North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

While we should continue to seek China's cooperation in applying economic and other pressures on North Korea, we also need to send a very clear and strong message to banks in China and throughout the world that there will be a price to pay for lack of cooperation.

That is why I am pleased that yesterday, before President Trump arrived in China, the Senate Banking Committee, on a unanimous basis, passed a bill to impose and enforce mandatory sanctions against banks and financial firms

in China or anywhere else in the world that help to prop up the regime of Kim Jong Un. The bill is named the Otto Warmbier Banking Restrictions Involving North Korea Act, or the BRINK Act, for short. I introduced this bill with Senator TOOMEY earlier this year, after North Korea engaged in its threatening and provocative missile launches.

I want to thank Senator TOOMEY for his partnership in developing the BRINK Act. I want to thank Mr. CRAPO, chairman of the Banking Committee, and Ranking Member BROWN for their leadership in addressing the North Korean threat and working to pass this bill out of the Banking Committee with unanimous support. I want to thank all of the members of the Banking Committee for their bipartisan effort on this matter.

I also want to thank the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CORKER, and the Ranking Member, Senator CARDIN, for their bipartisan leadership in confronting the threat of North Korea, and also the leadership of the East Asia Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, headed by Senators GARDNER and MARKEY. They have been consistent in their efforts to address the North Korean threat and to seek a peaceful resolution of this crisis.

Back in August, I had the opportunity to visit South Korea, Japan, and China, as part of a bipartisan delegation that was led by Senator MARKEY. We had the opportunity to travel not only to the DMZ zone between South and North Korea but also to visit the city of Dandong, which is a Chinese city on the border between China and North Korea, along the Yalu River. That is where a lot of the cross-border trade and transactions between North Korea and China take place.

The threat posed by North Korea to the United States and our allies is very real. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dunford, testified in September that North Korea has the capability to strike the United States' mainland with an intercontinental ballistic missile. North Korea has ramped up the pace of its ballistic missile tests, firing two ballistic missiles over Japan in recent months. In September North Korea conducted its sixth test of a nuclear weapon—the largest yet.

The question is this: How do we deal with this threat?

Way back when it came to foreign policy and national security issues, President Teddy Roosevelt counseled that we should “speak softly and carry a big stick.” President Trump and all of us would be wise to heed that advice. Bluster and overheated rhetoric not only will not work, but they raise the risk of miscalculation and war with North Korea.

It is much better to steadily and dramatically ratchet up the pressure on North Korea to come to the negotiating table with the goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

That strategy has to include lots of elements, but an indispensable tool is putting much greater pressure on Pyongyang.

Despite what many people think, North Korea is not sanctioned out. It is not as if we already applied and enforced maximum economic pressure on North Korea. In fact, our existing sanctions regime against North Korea is much weaker than the sanctions regime we had in place against Iran in the lead-up to the Iran nuclear deal. That is because the United States and others have not seriously gone after the foreign banks and firms that support the North Korean leadership and its cronies.

The reality is that North Korea's economy is not as weak or isolated as many believe. Its annual GDP is estimated to be \$40 billion, and China accounts for almost 90 percent of North Korea's trade. The United Nations has repeatedly found that North Korea evades the existing international sanctions effort and maintains access to the international financial system, primarily through a comprehensive network of Chinese-based front companies. North Korea relies heavily on this network to directly support its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs.

We have no time to waste. We must sever Kim Jong Un's economic lifeline. That is why Senator TOOMEY and I have introduced the BRINK Act and why it received such strong support. The BRINK Act targets this illicit financial network by imposing mandatory sanctions on those doing business with North Korea.

It sends a clear and unequivocal message to foreign banks and foreign firms: You can do business with North Korea or you can do business with the United States, but you cannot do business with both. That is the choice we placed before other countries with respect to Iran, and it helped to generate the pressure to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

If you trade with North Korea, you will not have any access to the U.S. markets. This, as I indicated, is the choice that we ultimately gave to Iran back in 2010, and the BRINK Act is modeled after the sanctions laws that we applied in the case of Iran that brought them ultimately to the negotiating table. Our goal is to cut off North Korea's remaining access to the international financial system, deprive Kim Jong Un of the resources needed for his regime's survival, and create the leverage necessary for serious negotiations.

Some critics of this approach argue that China may lash out at the United States or respond in kind. The gravity of the situation compels us to act regardless of Beijing's reaction in these circumstances. Simply asking China for its cooperation is not enough. It has to be backed up by a clear message and law from the United States that there are severe penalties for those who do not cooperate and do not abide

by the sanctions. That is what this bill is all about.

It is also important to note that when secondary sanctions on Iran were put into place, the Chinese Government issued a tepid public protest, and then privately directed its sanctioned banks to stop working with Iran. In other words, after some quiet protest, they complied with that secondary sanctions regime on Iran.

Moreover, Beijing claimed just this September that it is directing its banks to freeze any North Korean accounts—a directive which, if true, is long overdue. But it will be hard for China to say that we shouldn't take this action if it is an action they already said they directed their banks to take. This makes it clear that it will be in China's economic interests to fully enforce the sanctions on North Korea.

I am clear-eyed about the challenges we face in bringing North Korea to the negotiating table. Previous Democratic and Republican administrations have failed to end North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and because of this, some argue that Kim Jong Un will never give up his nuclear program.

To those critics, my response is simply that we have not exhausted all of our options on North Korea. There is incredible leakage right now in the sanctions regime, and that leakage is what the BRINK Act is designed to address and to close the loopholes and put teeth into the sanctions.

The choice between accepting a nuclear North Korea or launching some kind of preventive war is a false one. I strongly believe that this aggressive secondary sanctions regime, as part of an overall coherent strategy backed by our allies and the threat of force, is our best remaining chance of achieving a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

Right now, we face no more urgent task than achieving a peaceful resolution on the North Korean nuclear crisis. We need clear thinking. We need courage. We need common sense on the choices before us. At stake is not just the security of those in the region but, ultimately, of the United States. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that the pursuit of peace prevails in this effort.

I ask my colleagues in the Senate to follow the lead of the Banking Committee in giving this a unanimous bipartisan vote in the Senate so we can get this to the House as soon as possible and have it signed into law, so that when we ask other nations for cooperation, they know that failing to cooperate with us is not an option, or if they do take that course, they will face severe economic consequences.

So I hope the Senate will take this up without delay and that we can pass it and get it to the President's desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Maryland for his thoughtful words on North Korea.

I come to the floor today to urge my colleagues to oppose the nomination of William Wehrum to lead the Office of Air and Radiation at the EPA.

If confirmed, Mr. Wehrum would be responsible for implementing critical programs like the Renewable Fuel Standard Program and other key public health standards under the Clean Air Act.

Mr. Wehrum is part of a larger trend within President Trump's administration. Many of the nominees who are being sworn in are unqualified, incompetent, and have actually built their careers on dismantling the agencies they are now leading.

To be clear, Mr. Wehrum's nomination represents yet another broken promise by President Trump—this time, to our Nation's farmers. As a candidate, Mr. Trump pledged to champion the RFS, a policy with broad bipartisan support that reduces our greenhouse gas emissions, helps us revive rural economies, and makes our Nation less dependent on foreign oil.

Yet the President continues to surround himself with advisers intent on sabotaging the RFS, like Scott Pruitt, Carl Icahn, and, now, Mr. Wehrum. Mr. Wehrum has proven, time and again, that he is not a friend of the Renewable Fuel Standard Program.

He sued the biofuels industries—not once, not twice, not three times, but at least four times—representing groups like the American Petroleum Institute which are strong opponents of the RFS. During his nomination hearings, Mr. Wehrum refused to commit to supporting the RFS, claiming he was “unfamiliar” with the program. He wouldn't even acknowledge the unprecedented attacks launched on the biofuel industries by this administration.

If you support the RFS, as Illinois farmers and I do, it should be obvious that the right thing to do is to oppose Mr. Wehrum. This is not about having blanket opposition to President Trump's nominees; this is about our national security, our rural communities, and our environment.

I have already fought a war over oil, and I would rather run my car on American-grown corn and soybeans than oil from the Middle East. Our farmers deserve better than a President who makes campaign promises to protect the RFS in Iowa but will not honor them when he gets to the White House.

I understand that Administrator Pruitt has written a letter to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle regarding a pending petition requesting to move the “point of obligation” and a rulemaking on renewable volumetric obligations. Both of these decisions, as Administrator Pruitt's letter states, will be final in the coming days. That is why I am calling on my colleagues to simply hold Mr. Wehrum's nomination until after EPA finalizes these decisions.

There is no rush to confirm Mr. Wehrum this week. Better yet, let's oppose his nomination altogether.

I am also concerned that he will gut key public health protections that we all rely on to protect our families and the air we breathe. One of the most serious responsibilities I have, as both a U.S. Senator and a mother, is to protect children and families from harmful pollutants and to make sure the air they breathe is safe from toxic chemicals.

After reviewing Bill Wehrum's previous work in the Office of Air and Radiation, it is clear that he made dismantling the Clean Air Act—and all of the air pollution safeguards and public health protections guaranteed by it—one of his top priorities. In that office, he actively fought to roll back commonsense safeguards against lead, fine particulate pollution, and ozone smog. But he didn't stop there. He even led efforts to weaken standards designed to reduce emissions of mercury—one of the most deadly, toxic pollutants in the world—from coal-fired powerplants. Bill Wehrum wasn't looking out for us; he was looking out for the fossil fuel industry.

When Mr. Wehrum was originally nominated for this position under the Bush administration, the Senate had the good sense to reject his nomination. He was never confirmed, and I hope we do not confirm him now.

Again, I urge all my colleagues to oppose Mr. Wehrum's nomination and, instead, support our farmers, our children, and our families.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Thank you, Mr. President.

Like the Senator from Illinois, I rise to voice my opposition to the nomination of Bill Wehrum to serve as the Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation at the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Office of Air and Radiation oversees matters that are critical to human and environmental health, specifically, air and radiation but also climate change, air quality, and vehicle emissions.

If confirmed, Mr. Wehrum would be responsible for these immensely important issues, which require putting the health of our citizens above industry interests. Given this, I don't know why the Senate would confirm him for this position.

Mr. Wehrum has already served in this role in an acting capacity during the Bush administration. His confirmation was blocked by the Senate in 2006. His prior tenure shows that he will not fulfill the mission of the EPA to protect human health and the environment. In fact, he has a record of putting corporate profits before the well-being of citizens.

During his tenure in the Bush administration, Mr. Wehrum rolled back clean air safeguards that protect public

health on 27 occasions. His actions were challenged in court for not fulfilling the requirements of the Clean Air Act, and 27 times the court ruled against Mr. Wehrum.

One particular issue that he was involved in was mercury pollution. Under the Clean Air Act, the EPA has to reduce hazardous air pollutants like mercury, which is particularly harmful to children. Instead of protecting this population from mercury pollution, a neurotoxin, Mr. Wehrum decided to advance the interests of polluters.

During his tenure, Mr. Wehrum also led efforts to prevent EPA from addressing climate pollution. Fortunately, the Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of regulating greenhouse gases, forcing the Agency to take action.

After the Senate blocked his nomination in 2006, Mr. Wehrum decided he would undermine the mission of the Agency on behalf of polluters. In his current role as a corporate attorney, he has sued the EPA multiple times on behalf of clients in the oil, gas, coal, and chemical industries to undermine protections that safeguard public health and the environment. He has used his current position to attack the renewable fuel standard, which requires biofuels to be blended with gasoline—something the big oil companies hate because it means serious competition for dirty oil. So as an attorney for the American Petroleum Institute—the trade association that represents ExxonMobil, BP, and a number of other oil and gas giants—Mr. Wehrum sued the EPA at least four times in an effort to weaken the RFS, the renewable fuel standard. This is deeply troubling, considering that if he gets this job, he will be in charge of administering the RFS, which will allow him to implement his clear agenda. He has done nothing to lead us to believe he would do anything but side with the giant oil companies.

The facts are clear. The RFS boosts energy security, it creates rural jobs, and it is better for the environment than oil. You are never going to see an ethanol spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Colleagues on both sides of the aisle agree that despite this bipartisan support, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has reduced advanced biofuel blending targets for 2018. Now, with Mr. Wehrum's nomination, I have even less confidence in this administration upholding Congress's intent on the RFS.

He also has a history of willful ignorance of science. When asked whether he believes that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the main drivers of climate change, Mr. Wehrum stated that he believes it is an open question—an answer that runs contrary to the conclusion of 97 percent of climate scientists and runs counter to the “National Climate Assessment” that was released by this administration just last week.

Emissions from fossil fuel-fired powerplants are some of the main contributors to climate change. We know this.

At the Office of Air and Radiation, Mr. Wehrum would oversee the repeal of standards that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector, the Clean Power Plan. He would also be in charge of crafting a weaker replacement, if any.

Let me be clear. A weak standard is an affront to the public health and safety of future generations.

To overcome the challenge of climate change, we must transform our economy to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If we don't, Americans and future generations will pay an unacceptable price. But rather than driving innovation and pushing us to overcome this challenge, the administration has ordered a retreat. You can see that retreat everywhere, in a budget that would gut funding for science and innovation, in an EPA that values industry profits over the welfare of the public.

The 23rd annual United Nations climate change conference is taking place right now in Bonn, Germany. Two years ago, 195 nations came together to sign the Paris climate agreement in a historic display of the power of collective human will, and they did it because of U.S. leadership.

Now contrast that to earlier this year, when President Trump ordered the United States to retreat. He announced that he was pulling us out of the Paris climate agreement.

Yesterday, Syria announced that it would ratify the agreement. They were the last remaining nation to not be a part of this agreement. We now stand alone as the only country in the world choosing not to be part of the global effort to combat climate change.

Let's be clear. The President has not only ceded leadership, but he has isolated the United States from the global community. He has put us in this dangerous situation simply to protect short-term profits of the fossil fuel industry.

Mr. Wehrum would exacerbate this administration's wrong-headed approach. He is anti-science, anti-public health, anti-environment. That is why the Senate blocked his nomination in 2006. The Senate recognized then that he wasn't fit for the job. He is even less fit today.

I oppose his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 400, 401, and 402.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Melissa Sue Glynn, of the District of Columbia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Enterprise Integration); Cheryl L. Mason, of Virginia, to be Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals for a term of six years; and Randy Reeves, of Mississippi, to be Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Memorial Affairs.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Glynn, Mason, and Reeves nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, as we prepare to commemorate Veterans Day this weekend, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to the dedicated veterans who have served our country so bravely over the years. Only in a great country such as ours do we have so many willing and able citizens who volunteer for duty. These selfless individuals understand the importance of protecting our country and are willing to give their lives to do it.

Many of these brave men and women make the ultimate sacrifice, such as my own brother, Jesse Morlan Hatch who was killed in World War II. SSG Aaron Butler of Utah also comes to mind. Staff Sergeant Butler was tragically killed in the line of duty last summer while serving in Afghanistan. The valor of patriots like Jesse and Aaron is indicative of all men and women who volunteer to serve in our Armed Forces. I have always had a deep-rooted respect for America's servicemembers and her veterans.

On behalf of the State of Utah, I would also like to express our humble gratitude for our Nation's veterans and active servicemembers. Throughout