

Bible is the first educational experience I have encountered that truly appreciates the full magnitude of the Bible's role throughout history.

The six exhibits, curated by a panel of faith leaders that span religious and geographic divides, truly bring the Word of God to life in a way that positively educates, informs, and encourages people of all faiths and beliefs to learn more about the Bible.

General Washington reminded us in his Farewell Address: "Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion."

Steve Green's father David founded Hobby Lobby. I remember this so well because I was in the State legislature at the time this happened. They started in their garage making frames for pictures. It turned out to be this giant, worldwide corporation, the largest arts and crafts retailer in the history of America, currently or in the past.

Remember Hobby Lobby, when ObamaCare required that all employers provide free access to the pills that terminate pregnancies, David clearly recognized this as a violation of his faith. That is what America is all about. If you believe in it, you do it, you take a risk. He was risking millions of dollars, but the morality was so significant from the teachings of the Bible that he went ahead and did it. He took the challenge all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won in a split decision. He successfully argued the importance to maintain the fundamental freedom of religion to apply his faith convictions to how he operates his private business.

David won his case, but his family understood we needed to do more. So he started the Museum of the Bible. I actually was there last June, when it was under construction at the time, as we walked through and visualized what it was going to look like later on. It is magnificent.

They have a stage, and you live on the stage. He is going to have performances there. I am so anxious to be there tonight, the night before the official opening, to see now what it looks like.

I am so grateful David's son Steve and his entire family are leading this effort to make the Bible and its impact more accessible to the whole world. I am especially honored that the museum will open on my birthday tomorrow. I am not sure they really knew that when they made the decision, but somebody knew it.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

Mr. President, let me turn to another topic that I think is very important right now; that is, our energy independence. It is a huge issue. People are not aware, while we may have talked about the importance of the budget reconciliation process to set up and to pass the historic and much needed tax cuts for our individuals and small businesses, the process also allowed the Senate to use reconciliation for some-

thing equally as valuable—to allow energy exploration in Alaska.

Yesterday the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee met to consider legislation to open up a very small part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for responsible energy development. This bill was successfully passed by the committee, and I look forward to helping it continue to move through Congress.

I have long been an advocate for this to happen. It is interesting, the people in Alaska all want it. The polling is something like 96 percent of the people really want this to happen. They know the benefits that will come to Alaska, the money that will be there. People talk about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as if it is this great big thing. It is the size of South Carolina. It is a very small thing. Right now, we are going to be able to go up there to create jobs and opportunities and authorize the leases in Alaska. We will also increase revenue to the United States.

It is estimated that the energy production in Alaska could lead to over \$1 trillion in revenue. Responsible management will have a positive impact on reducing our national debt and most significantly opening ANWR is allowing Alaska to do what they want to do.

We are so good in this body thinking that we know more about what is good for Alaska and what is good for Oklahoma and what is good for Georgia than they do in their own States. One of few things we do right around this place is how we do our highway bill. In the highway bill, we get the priorities from the States when they come in, and they decide what it is they want to do in their States.

Remember the issue about the "bridge to nowhere." Everybody was concerned about this. All the talk shows jumped on it without realizing, until it was too late, it had already gotten committed.

Here was something that happened right for a change. I was chairman of the committee at that time. The "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska didn't go "nowhere," it went somewhere. The problem was, there weren't any people there once you got there, and the reason is you couldn't get there. On their list of 100 priorities, No. 4 was to build that bridge, but we, in our infinite wisdom here, said: No, you can't do that. Somehow the public didn't know what they were talking about. Well, that is kind of the same situation we have right now. We have something in Alaska that was their No. 1 priority to develop, and for years and years we have stopped them from being able to do with their land what they wanted to do with their land. The Federal Government has been keeping Alaskans from acting in their own best interest.

Finally, increasing energy production in Alaska is a key part of making the United States not only energy independent but energy dominant. We are on the verge of doing just that. Earlier this week, the Executive Direc-

tor of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, said the United States "will become the undisputed global oil and gas leader for decades to come" and that "the growth in production is unprecedented, exceeding all historical levels." ANWR could be and should be a part of that story.

Energy independence is vital to our national security. How many of these countries over there that have been part of the old Soviet Union want their allegiance to us, and yet they are forced to buy their oil and gas from Russia and from Iran and they don't want to do it. Now we are taking them off the hook.

I had a great experience not long ago. I was invited by the President of Lithuania to come and open up their first terminal. Now we are changing all that.

We have a guy named Harold Hamm, an Oklahoman who is the chairman and CEO of Continental Resources in Oklahoma. He announced they would begin exporting oil to China. Exporting to China is kind of a big deal. He talks about how we are going to become undeniably a leader in exporting energy that will have an impact on the rest of the world.

President Trump has been clear that he intends to make the United States a net energy exporter, something we haven't been since 1953. Opening up the National Wildlife Refuge, which just took place this last week, will be a big step toward this initiative, and I applaud the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for helping the administration make this happen.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. President, the leader of the Senate, a few minutes ago, talked about the NDAA and JOHN McCAIN's role in that. JOHN McCAIN, of course, has been and is an American hero. Everybody knows his past and knows what he did and the suffering he went through.

He was very instrumental—sure, we had some disagreements on some of the finer parts of the bill—but this is one that had to be done. All of a sudden we are changing what happened, unfortunately, in the past.

I can remember about 3 years ago we got all the way to December before we voted this out. We have now voted. This is the 55th year in a row that we have passed a Defense authorization bill. If we didn't by the end of December, then our kids wouldn't be getting hazard pay or pilots wouldn't be getting flight pay, and it would be an absolute disaster. Of course, it didn't happen because we are now doing it.

I have to say this. One thing that hasn't been said enough is what Senator McCANN and a lot of his supporters were able to do; that is, reprioritize what defending America is about.

Read the Constitution. Look at the history of this country. I always say people should sometime get out that old document that nobody reads anymore, the Constitution, and see what we are supposed to be doing around here.

Do you know that what we are supposed to be doing in this body primarily is defending America, No. 1, and they called them post roads, back then, building roads and transportation. That is what we are supposed to be doing, but what has happened in our military is something people don't know about. I applaud our military in uniform now because they are saying it for the first time in my memory that we are in the most threatened position this country has ever been in. We have adversaries out there. Some are somewhat mentally deranged. They are rapidly getting or already have the capability of hitting an American city with a weapon. As tragic as it was when we went through 9/11, what a lot of people don't realize is, if that were to happen, a whole city could be wiped out.

The problem is that we have gotten away from prioritizing the fact that the No. 1 concern should be and the mission should be for us to defend America. To give an example, up through the 1960s, we spent over 50 percent of all the revenue that came into the Federal Government on defending America. Do you know what it is today, Mr. President? It is 15 percent. So we have gone from 50 percent down to 15 percent. What does that tell you? It tells you that the priorities aren't right.

So we have looked at this, and this is a first step. This MCCAIN-led NDAA is the first step in reprioritizing where we are. If anyone questions this, if you look at the Obama administration, when we were trying to recover on sequestration, he had a policy. He said: For every dollar we put in, we are going to have to put an equal amount into social programs. That shows you the lack of priority. All that is being changed.

About 10 minutes ago when I started, I quoted Patrick Henry. You stop and think about the courage it took at one time to get to the point that we are going to be progressing to, starting with this bill, when he said: There is a just God who reigns over the destinies of nations and who will raise up friends to fight our battles with us. The battle is not to the strong alone but to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Gentlemen may cry "peace," but there is no peace. Why stand we idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, is peace so sweet, it must be bought at the price of chains and slavery?

That is what it used to be. That was the priority. And this bill reestablishes that priority as the No. 1 priority, as our history reflects we should be doing, as our Constitution has charged us with doing, and we are doing it with the passage of the national defense authorization bill. We are on the road to recovery, and I am very excited about it.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to make a simple request of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. When it comes to the tax legislation that Republican colleagues are rushing through Congress, please stop, slow down, and let's start over together.

We need real tax reform with clear policy goals that will make our Nation more competitive, not a partisan attempt to pass something—anything—that can get 51 Republican votes in the Senate. Our shared policy goals should be making the Tax Code fairer, simpler, and fiscally responsible. If we can achieve these goals, that would be real tax reform.

If we worked together, we could take long overdue steps and build a tax code that lets working families in Michigan and across the country keep more of their hard-earned money, levels the playing field for our small businesses, and keeps good jobs here at home in the United States. Fairer, simpler, responsible—those are three key points making a tax code that works. If we don't start over, I am afraid the current tax legislation will fail on all three accounts.

First, this tax legislation is not fair. It dramatically moves toward benefiting the wealthiest people in this Nation, with only a little sliver of the benefits going to working-class families.

The Republican tax bill was clearly written to cut rates for CEOs and large corporations and treats the middle class like an afterthought. I would argue that working Americans who are struggling with stagnant wages—while the cost of prescription drugs, college, and housing continue to rise—need tax cuts that are built around them.

Instead, we are looking at a Republican tax plan that repeals the alternative minimum tax—a fail-safe designed specifically to make sure that wealthy Americans cannot deduct their way to paying nothing in taxes. From what little we have seen of President Trump's tax returns, we know that the AMT—the alternative minimum tax—is the only reason he paid income taxes at all. The Republican bill will eliminate the AMT, and President Trump and folks like him will receive a huge windfall and may not have to pay any taxes at all—zero.

Wall Street loves this bill, too, because hedge funds will continue to be taxed at lower rates than small businesses in our local communities. This means many hedge fund managers making millions of dollars will have a lower tax rate than an office assistant working at their firm. Simply put, this

proposal fails on the test of making the Tax Code fairer.

I also believe this effort fails on the test of making the code simpler. For small business owners back in Michigan, they want to spend their time doing what they know best, which is running their business, not spending days or weeks trying to figure out the taxes they owe. But, as many of my colleagues in the Finance Committee have pointed out throughout this week, the provisions for a small business passthrough serve only to make a complicated tax code even more complicated—yes, even more complicated.

Expert analysis says that the pass-through provisions will require years of rulemakings and thousands of pages of additional rules and regulations. As a small business owner, unless your hobby is studying the Internal Revenue Code, this bill is going to make your life a whole lot more difficult.

Finally, on the last test, the test of whether or not this bill is responsible, this proposal fails miserably. Writing responsible tax legislation means making hard choices—closing loopholes and balancing out the pros and cons of any action.

Congress has the responsibility to take seriously the threat of a growing national debt, and we have to think about this when changing our Tax Code. But instead of working to reduce our debt, which we are passing on to our children and grandchildren, this proposal actually adds more than \$1 trillion to our deficit. And it would be even more expensive, but in a haphazard attempt to limit the cost, the majority has put forward a bill where hundreds of millions of dollars of provisions that middle-class families could use to reduce their taxes expire at random times over the next few years.

When you add it all up and factor in the additional interest costs to carry this new debt, you have a proposal that adds over \$2 trillion to the Federal debt, according to the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. It is wildly irresponsible to pile on this debt to finance a tax break for the wealthiest people in this country, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Tax reform can be bipartisan. The goal of tax reform must be fairer, simpler, and responsible. This isn't just idealism or wishful thinking. We have seen it happen before. When Ronald Reagan worked with Congress to pass tax reform in 1986, the bill received 97 votes in the U.S. Senate—yes, 97 votes. That is the sort of bipartisan approach we need, and we need to start working on that now.

Michiganers—and all Americans—deserve a tax code that is fairer, simpler, and more responsible, not more multinational corporate giveaways and more debt.

I will not stop fighting for hard-working American families and small businesses who deserve to see more take-home pay, and I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will join me.