

Railroad Administrator. We urge the Senate to proceed to Mr. Batory's nomination as soon as possible.

Mr. Batory's nomination was announced in July, unanimously approved and reported by the Senate Commerce Committee in August, and now awaits action on the Senate floor. Mr. Batory is eminently qualified to be FRA Administrator and we believe he will have considerable bipartisan Member support once the Senate turns to his nomination.

We ask that his nomination be considered soon by the full Senate, in light of the importance of having Mr. Batory's expertise and leadership at the agency responsible for railroad safety.

Thank you for considering our views on this important matter.

Association of American Railroads (AAR); BNSF Railway; Canadian National Railway; Canadian Pacific Railway; CSX Transportation; Kansas City Southern Railroad; Norfolk Southern Railway; Union Pacific Railroad; American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA); International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART); Transportation Communications Union/IAM.

National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP); National Railroad Construction & Maintenance Association (NRC); Railway Engineering-Maintenance Suppliers Association (REMSA); Railway Supply Institute (RSI); States for Passenger Rail Coalition (SPRC); American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners (AAPRCO); AECOM; GE Transportation; Progress Rail Services; Siemens.

JULY 19, 2017.

Hon. JOHN THUNE,
Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

Hon. BILL NELSON,
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN THUNE AND RANKING MEMBER NELSON: On behalf of the States for Passenger Rail Coalition, Inc (SPRC), I write in support of the confirmation of Ronald L. Batory as Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT).

The SPRC's mission is to promote the research, development, implementation, operation, sustainability, and expansion of publicly supported intercity passenger rail services. On behalf of its membership representing 25 state departments of transportation and passenger rail authorities, SPRC advocates for ongoing federal funding and programmatic support for intercity passenger rail initiatives, including efforts to improve safety on our nation's rail system and at highway-rail at-grade crossings.

We are impressed with Mr. Batory's extensive experience in the railroad industry and appreciate his plan to improve communications within the agency, and we encourage him to collaborate closely with public and private stakeholders to achieve policy goals. We are especially encouraged by his reputation as a good listener with a sound analytical approach. We commend his affirmation of the need for the FRA to move to performance-based rulemaking and fact-based policy making. Focusing upon these two objectives will strengthen the role of the states in promoting the development of a safe, reliable and efficient vibrant national network of freight and passenger rail services.

We ask that the Committee act speedily to confirm Mr. Batory. The issues facing the railroad industry today are significant, and it is vital that we have an experienced, capa-

ble and dedicated leader like Mr. Batory, who is willing to work with the states to make the improvements necessary to build a national rail system with an emphasis on increasing mobility and reliability, while enhancing safety and security now, and in the years to come.

Sincerely,

PAUL C. WORLEY, *CPM, Chair,*
States for Passenger Rail Coalition, Inc.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we have had an immensely qualified leader, Ronald Batory, ready to lead an important safety agency for over 4 months. The time for playing political games with the leadership of this railroad safety agency should be over. It is long past time that my Democratic colleagues end the obstruction, and this body must confirm Ronald Batory.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of Calendar No. 261, Ronald Batory. I further ask that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SCHUMER. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I am kind of beyond words to explain why we are objecting to someone who was unanimously approved out of the committee, is highly qualified, noncontroversial, and would run an incredibly important safety agency in this country. I just don't have words to explain what that objection might be.

I hope this is the last time the Democrats in the Senate will object to getting this important position filled with an individual who comes highly regarded, highly qualified, and has gone through the entire process—answered all of the questions through his confirmation—and is ready now for a final vote in the U.S. Senate, which would allow him to get the job and to get about the important work of ensuring that there is safety on the railroads in this country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

OPIOID CRISIS

Mr. DONNELLY. Mr. President, at some point this evening, we expect the House of Representatives to send the Senate a bill that would keep the Federal Government open for another few weeks before our heading home for Christmas. For most families, the holidays are an opportunity to take a break away from our busy lives and enjoy time with the people we love. It is safe to say, however, that will not be the case for tens of thousands of American families who have lost a loved one this year due to a drug overdose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released two important new reports this week. First, they found that life expectancy decreased in the United States for the second year in a row. Second, the likely cause of that decrease in 2016 is that over 63,000 people died of drug overdoses. That is more than 144 deaths per day, and it is a 21-percent increase from 2015.

This is a crisis. People are dying in communities across this country every single day. Congress must do much more to address this scourge. Here in Washington, we have talked at length about the massive size and scope of the problem.

Last year, we passed bipartisan legislation that was signed into law and is providing our local communities with more tools to fight the epidemic, and we approved initial funding to begin to support these and other efforts.

I was proud to help bring nearly \$11 million of that funding to Indiana. Earlier this fall, the President rightly declared the opioid abuse epidemic to be a nationwide public health emergency. On the frontlines, in places like my home State of Indiana, however, the battle is raging. Despite a unified response, there is more work to do.

Our Governor, Governor Holcomb, has made the fight against opioid abuse the priority it needs to be. He and his administration are working closely with local communities to provide resources and support. Together, we have engaged our healthcare providers—both public and private—the business community, our educators, and the clergy who are all committed to this cause. Yet the message I continue to hear from people on the ground is, we need more resources and we need to expand treatment capabilities as soon as possible.

We all know this is not a partisan issue. Over the last few years, I have been honored to work with seven of my Republican colleagues to introduce seven bills and amendments that address everything from prescribing practices to the shortage of addiction treatment professionals, and many of these ideas have already been signed into law.

I am partnering with my State's Republican Governor to make sure we do everything in our power to help those who are battling with addiction, but it is not enough unless we provide our communities with the resources they are asking for and they need.

This is the time of year that many Americans reflect on the year that has passed and identify the priorities in the years to come. In Congress, we need to do the same. More than 63,000 Americans died last year from opioid abuse. Those are 63,000 moms and dads, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, sons and daughters who are not with us this year. We must make this issue a priority.

I hope Congress will demonstrate to the American people that fighting the opioid epidemic is a priority. One way

to do that is to include meaningful resources in the bill to fund our Federal Government and key programs when we deal with this again before January 19 of next year.

I implore my colleagues to make this a priority, to provide the robust and meaningful funding our communities need to seriously address this problem. We are in the midst of a crisis. We must do more in 2018. We have families all across our Nation with broken hearts tonight for the ones they love and the ones they miss. Let's make sure there are no more in 2018; that this ends today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes and that after I speak, Senator WYDEN be recognized.

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

EXTREME RHETORIC

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, 6 months ago, on a beautiful June morning, just a few miles from here in Alexandria, VA, a man with a gun opened fire on me and several of my Republican colleagues.

In the chaotic aftermath of that awful morning, the gunman's purpose slowly became clear. Because of our beliefs and our political affiliation, this individual believed my colleagues and I should die. Since that day, I struggled to understand this thinking. How could any American look onto a field that June morning, where a bunch of middle-aged men were playing baseball, and see the enemy?

Some of the bombastic rhetoric being offered this week in response to the tax reform bill has given me pause. If you listen to some of the hyperbolic vitriol that opponents of this bill are producing, the attitude that nearly killed my friend STEVE SCALISE and threatened many more lives begins to make a perverse kind of sense.

When respectable public figures go on television or take to Twitter and announce that thousands, if not millions, of Americans are going to die as a direct result of the passage of a tax reform bill, what impact do we expect this to have on the thinking of many Americans? If a person takes such outlandish statements as true, attacking Members of Congress in support of the measure almost appears to be a moral action. This could lead someone to believe that killing a few legislators might save the lives of millions of Americans.

Beyond the physical danger of promoting such misinformation, these claims do grave harm to the legislative process. How are we expected to work together to achieve anything if one side's position is viewed as the end of America as we know it? One of my colleagues called this tax reform bill "the worst bill in the history of Congress."

Upon the bill's passage, one media pundit went so far as to encourage

young Americans to flee their country and declared "America died tonight."

Full-throated and passionate debate should always be encouraged. We all love arguing the merits of supply-side economics, but this is not that. This is demonizing of the worst kind. It leaves us all in this body unable to engage in the kind of negotiations and compromise that Congress was created to foster.

To be clear, this is not a problem with one party or of one moment. During the public debate over the Affordable Care Act, Members of my party engaged in similar tactics. I was in the House Chamber when one of my Republican colleagues stood and yelled "You lie" at the President of the United States. The accusation that passage of healthcare reform legislation would result in so-called death panels was promoted far and wide by many Republicans. One conservative commentator suggested the government would begin educating seniors on how to end their own lives.

A Republican legislator claimed that the bill would put seniors in a position of being "put to death by their government." This rhetoric was wrong then, and it is wrong now.

The threat posed to all of us and to the democratic process for giving in to extreme rhetoric is not theoretical. Some of us faced it on that baseball field in Alexandria in June, and all of us have witnessed its corrosive effect on Congress. I urge my colleagues, all of us, let's end this practice where raw politics drowns out the supplications of the better angels of our nature. Let us all be more humble as to our predictive powers when it comes to placing a value on the work we do here. In reality, this legislation will probably not turn out to be as good as the proponents assert, nor as bad as the opponents contend.

The country is watching. It is my hope that we—all of us—can eschew contempt and vitriol in our speech and be more measured in our tone.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor tonight to discuss the Senate's investigation into Russia in the 2016 election. Specifically, I have been reviewing for months documents in the possession of the Senate's Intelligence Committee. I regret to say, the depth of the committee's investigation is completely unsatisfactory into the crucial issues of what I call following the money.

Early in 2017, I began asking the committee leadership to look into any and all financial relationships between Russia and Donald Trump and his associates. In an open hearing the committee held in March, I noted a number of public facts. First, there is an extraordinary history of money laun-

dering in Russia. Billions of dollars from corruption and other illegal activities have been moved out of the country. Second, the President's son said in 2008: "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets." Third, entities associated with the President had already been the subject of millions of dollars of fines for willful, repeated, and long-standing violations of anti-money laundering laws. Fourth, the Congress and the American people still haven't seen the President's tax returns.

Since then, there have been numerous additional press stories about associates of the President and their financial connections to Russia. In my view, these stories require thorough, detailed investigation. It is not just by the press. The special counsel's indictment against former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort included extensive detailed allegations of laundering of millions of dollars from pro-Russia-Ukrainian interests. This indictment provided a clear example of how a foreign-influenced campaign can be financed through illicit means and why the importance of following the money is so crucial.

There have been others, acknowledged financial connections, such as former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and his payment from RT, the television station that is part of Russia's state-run propaganda apparatus.

Then there are the strange denials, such as when Jared Kushner wrote in his statement in July, "I have not relied on Russian funds to finance my business activities in the private sector."

I can state, that is some kind of good lawyering because the word "rely" is subjective. Mr. Kushner did not deny financial ties to Russia. He said he hadn't relied on those funds, not whether he had any, not whether he ever had any, but he hadn't relied on them. That is about as lawyerly and subjective a statement as you can imagine.

My bottom line is, these financial ties need to be a central focus of the Intelligence Committee's inquiry. The reason I say this, I want to spell out what the connection here is. Our inquiry covered counterintelligence concerns related to Russia and the election, including any intelligence regarding links between Russia and individuals associated with political campaigns. Following the money is counterintelligence 101.

If you want to compromise somebody, money is one of the best ways to do it. Well, let me repeat that. That is the connection. That is the connection between the counterintelligence work that is so important and part of the committee's charge. That counterintelligence work involves following the money because that is key to really getting into the question of whether somebody's been compromised because one of the best ways to do it is through funds.