

reading a letter from Coretta Scott King—that was too much.

Suggesting that the distinguished majority leader had repeatedly lied to the press—a comment made by a fellow Republican, by the way—that was fine. Reading the letter of a civil rights icon? At least to the other side, unacceptable.

Just last week I heard a friend on the other side of the aisle accuse me of engaging in a “tear-jerking performance” that belonged at the “Screen Actors Guild awards.” It was only the second time that week I had been accused of fake tears on the floor of the Senate, but I didn’t run to the floor to invoke rule XIX. But when my friend from Massachusetts read a piece of congressional testimony by Coretta Scott King, she was told to sit down.

Why was my friend from Massachusetts cut off when these other, much more explicit, much more direct, much nastier attacks were disregarded? There is a shocking double standard here when it comes to speech. Unfortunately, it is not constrained by the four walls of this Chamber.

While the Senator from Massachusetts has my Republican colleagues up in arms by simply reciting the words of a civil rights leader, my Republican colleagues can hardly summon a note of disapproval for an administration that insults a Federal judge, tells the news media to “shut up,” offhandedly threatens a legislator’s career, and seems to invent new dimensions of falsehood each and every day.

I certainly hope that this anti-free speech attitude is not traveling down Pennsylvania Avenue to our great Chamber, especially when the only speech being stifled is speech that Republicans don’t agree with—even speech that is substantive, relevant, on point to the matter this body is considering, and appropriate and measured in tone.

I would make a broader point. This is not what America is about, silencing speech, especially in this Chamber. What we do here is debate. We debate fiercely and forcefully but respectfully. The Founders of the Republic and titans of the early Senate—Webster, Clay, and Calhoun—debated until they were blue in the face. From time to time, they probably had tough words for one another. We are not afraid of tough words in America. We don’t look to censor speech. The rule is only intended to keep Senators on the facts, to keep them from making baseless accusations about another’s character. My friend from Massachusetts was following the letter and the spirit of the rule last night. She was engaging in that tradition of forceful but respectful debate when she was cut off. That is not what the Senate is about. That is not what our dear country is about.

Every Member on the other side of the aisle ought to realize that what they did to Senator WARREN was selective enforcement. It was the most selective enforcement of a rarely used

procedure to interrupt her, to silence her, and it was the only violation of the spirit of mutual respect and comity in this body that occurred last night.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following the prayer, the Senator from Nevada be recognized for such time as he shall consume, and then I be recognized.

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

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

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

PRAYER

Pursuant to rule IV, paragraph 2, the hour of 12 noon having arrived, the Senate having been in continuous session since Monday, the Senate will suspend for a prayer by the Senate Chaplain.

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, teach us this day, through all our employments, to see You working for the good of those who love You.

Strengthen the hearts of our lawmakers against temptations and make them more than conquerors in Your love. Lord, deliver them from all dejection of spirit and free their hearts to give You zealous, active, and cheerful service. May they vigorously perform whatever You command, thankfully enduring whatever You have chosen for them to suffer. Guard their desires so that they will not deviate from the path of integrity.

Lord, strengthen them with Your almighty arms to do Your will on Earth, even as it is done in Heaven.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The Senator from Nevada.

REPEALING OBAMACARE

Mr. HELLER. Madam President, I want to take a few moments to discuss an issue, one that is on everybody’s mind; that is, the status of ObamaCare. Congress has taken the first step to repeal ObamaCare. I was in the House of Representatives when ObamaCare was passed into law. I opposed the law five times while I was in the House before it was passed with zero bipartisan, zero Republican support and was signed into law by the President.

I opposed ObamaCare because I feared that this law would increase costs, make it harder for patients to see a doctor, increase taxes on the middle class, increase taxes on seniors, and hurt the economy.

Over the last 7 years, all of these fears have become a reality. A new Congress and a new administration have heard the people’s response loud and clear, and that response is that we must repeal ObamaCare. Repealing ObamaCare means repealing all of the taxes that go with it—not part of them, not some of them, but all of them.

ObamaCare increased taxes on hard-working Americans by \$1.1 trillion. Higher taxes lead to more money being taken out of the pockets of hard-working families. Health care costs have increased to a degree where I have heard from Nevadans across the State, of all ages and backgrounds, all with similar concerns.

What I wish to do is take a moment to read an email that I received just last week from a 13-year-old boy who lives in Las Vegas. He said:

I wanted to write an email to express my concerns about Obamacare and hopefully persuade you in making a change.

My family used to have health insurance until ObamaCare kicked in and forced my family to drop our insurance since it tripled the cost and wasn’t affordable. We are getting penalized now for not having insurance.

Think about that. ObamaCare kicked their family off their insurance by tripling the costs, making it unaffordable, and then ObamaCare penalized that family for not having insurance.

Going back to the young boy, he said:

Since then we have had medical bills piling up. This is an issue with a lot of people and I don’t know a lot about policies but I do know that something needs to change for the good of the people.

I’ve heard President Donald Trump will be addressing this issue. I just hope you will represent Nevada in favor of getting rid of ObamaCare.

I can assure my constituents back home in Nevada, and especially this young man who is advocating for his family, that I am committed to repealing ObamaCare. This young man’s parents had employer-sponsored health care coverage that took care of their family when they needed medical care. And as a result of ObamaCare, the costs were too high to afford the health insurance they had.

One of the biggest drivers of cost increases on the middle class is the 40-percent excise tax on employee health benefits, better known as the Cadillac tax. In Nevada, 1.3 million workers who have employer-sponsored health insurance plans will be hit by this Cadillac tax. These are public employees in Carson City. These are service industry workers on the Strip in Las Vegas. These are small business owners and retirees across the State.

We are talking about reduced benefits, increased premiums, and higher deductibles. When I first started working on this issue, I knew the devastating impact this tax would have on Nevadans, but also in order to get anything done, we needed a bipartisan effort to reduce this tax and to eliminate it.

I recruited a good friend by the name of Senator MARTIN HEINRICH from New

Mexico, and together we were able to gain huge support on both sides of the aisle. During the highly partisan reconciliation debate in 2015, where Congress successfully delivered an ObamaCare repeal bill to President Obama's desk, Senator HEINRICH and I pushed our colleagues to include our legislation to fully repeal the Cadillac tax as an amendment.

Our amendment passed with overwhelming bipartisan support by a vote of 90 to 10. With this nearly unanimous vote, we were able to delay the Cadillac tax until 2020.

This Congress, Senator HEINRICH and I have reintroduced Senate bill 58, the Middle Class Health Benefits Repeal Tax Act, which fully repeals this bad tax. I hope that my Senate colleagues on the other side of the aisle will join Senator HEINRICH on this bipartisan piece of legislation and on this issue to support our bill and get rid of this Cadillac tax once and for all.

I know that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will have a lot of differing opinions on the Affordable Care Act, but one thing we can agree on is that the Cadillac tax should be fully repealed.

Now that we have passed an ObamaCare repeal resolution, we will move to the next phase of the repeal process. The budget we just passed included reconciliation instructions for the Senate Finance Committee and the HELP Committee to repeal ObamaCare.

We made a promise to repeal ObamaCare, and now it is time to keep that promise. This includes my legislation to fully repeal the Cadillac tax. The goal of health reform should be to lower costs for those who already have health benefits and to expand access to those who do not currently have coverage. ObamaCare did not achieve either of those two goals.

I am committed to ensuring that all Americans have access to high-quality, affordable health care. We must start by repealing the Cadillac tax.

I thank Senator HEINRICH for his continued leadership on this issue. I want to thank him, and I want to say that Senator HEINRICH continues to put his constituents above politics. I know that he shares my commitment to repeal this bad tax.

I also want to thank Congressman KELLY and Congressman COURTNEY for their leadership on the House side. I know that we are all eager to work together to get this bill to the finish line.

Madam President, I yield to the senior Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, last night we all witnessed a rather extraordinary event. Certainly for the first time in my time in the Senate, we saw rule XIX of the Standing Senate Rules invoked. That rule says: "No Senator in debate shall, directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another Senator or to other Sen-

ators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a Senator."

I certainly agree with the ruling of the Chair and the decision of the Senate as a body that that line was crossed last night. A Senator can't evade that rule by somehow claiming: These weren't my words; I was reading what somebody else said.

Specifically, in the case of our former colleague, now deceased, Senator Ted Kennedy claimed that the nominee for Attorney General was somehow a disgrace to the Justice Department and ought to resign. That certainly crossed that line.

Our colleagues want to point to a letter written by Coretta Scott King. That was part but not the whole of the speech given by the Senator from Massachusetts. I hope that maybe we have all been chastened a little bit, and maybe we have all learned a little bit of a lesson here.

I yearn for the day when the Senate and, frankly, the country as a whole would pull back from the abyss of recrimination, personal attacks, and we would get back to doing what this institution was designed to do—which is to be a great body for deliberation and debate—and we would treat each other with the civility with which we would all want to be treated.

We are at a pretty challenging time in our Nation's history, when many people who were surprised and disappointed at the last election are unwilling to accept the results of that election and the verdict of the American people. I can only hope that, after the passage of some time, they will return to their senses, and they will agree that no one is well served by this race to the bottom in terms of decorum and in terms of rhetoric, in terms of how we treat one another. The American people are better served when we treat each other with civility and respect and when we don't make personal attacks against Senators because of the positions that they take.

This debate over the nomination of Senator JEFF SESSIONS has taken on some rather unusual twists and turns. I want to comment briefly on some of the remarks made by our colleague from Minnesota about voting rights because I think this is exemplary of the way that Senator SESSIONS' record on voting rights has been misrepresented.

We all know that in 2006—those of us who were here in the Senate, including Senator SESSIONS, including the Democratic whip and myself—we all voted to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. That included section 2 and section 5, which was later struck down. Section 2 is the provision of the Voting Rights Act that applies to the entire Nation, and it authorizes a lawsuit to vindicate voting rights that are jeopardized by some illegal practice. Section 5, which was the subject of the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Shelby County case that was decided in 2013—that was directed not at section 2, which applies to the entire Nation, but

to section 5, which applied only to a handful of jurisdictions around the country. It was based on voting practices that existed in the middle 1960s.

I would be the first to admit that the record of vindicating the rights of minority voters in 1965 was nothing to be proud of. We have come a long way in this country, and it has been because of the Voting Rights Act. It has been because of our collective commitment to the right of every citizen to vote that I believe those statistics which existed in the mid-sixties are no longer valid today.

In fact, if you look at many of the jurisdictions covered in the 1960s, including places like Alabama, where Senator SESSIONS is from, they have records of minority voting that are superior to jurisdictions that are not covered by section 5. How our colleagues across the aisle can somehow condemn Senator SESSIONS for the Supreme Court's decision in the Shelby County case, when he voted for the reauthorization of the entire Voting Rights Act, section 2 and section 5, strikes me as extremely misleading and unfortunate, but it does seem to characterize the nature of the debate about this nominee.

During his confirmation hearing, I said: Well, those who don't know Senator SESSIONS are interested to learn his record and his resume, but those of us who worked with him—we don't need to read his resume. We don't need to hear a recitation of his record. We know the man. We know what is in his heart. And he is a thoroughly decent and honorable Member of the Senate, and he will do an outstanding job, I believe, restoring the reputation of the Department of Justice, as one dedicated to the rule of law above all else.

There is always a risk—and this happens in Democratic administrations, as well as Republican administrations—when the Attorney General feels like they are an arm of the White House. That is not the job of the Attorney General. The President has a lawyer, White House Counsel. The Attorney General is supposed to have some measure of independence even though he or she is appointed by the President and serves at the President's pleasure.

That is why we ask questions of people, like Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates: Can you tell the President no? Well, she said she could. And then ultimately, unfortunately, in the case of the Executive order that was issued by President Trump later on, said—even though this order was vetted by the Office of Legal Counsel and determined that this was a legal Executive order both in content and in form, she said: I still disagree with the President's Executive order, and I am going to order the Justice Department lawyers not to defend it.

Well, that is the kind of politics that we need none of in the Department of Justice. We have plenty of politicians in this country. We have plenty of politicians in the Congress and in the White House. We don't need another

politician as Attorney General. In fact, we need a nonpolitician, an apolitician, somebody who believes that their allegiance to the rule of law, irrespective of who is involved, whether it is the President of the United States or the least among us—that is what the rule of law is all about. And that is one reason why I feel so strongly that Senator SESSIONS will be an outstanding Attorney General, because I believe he will restore the Department of Justice to an institution that believes in and enforces the rule of law above politics, and that is a fundamentally important thing to do.

We know Senator SESSIONS, as I said earlier, brings a lifetime of relevant experience to this job: former Federal prosecutor, former U.S. attorney for the Department of Justice. He said those were some of the best years of his life.

I once had a colleague who now serves on the Fifth Circuit. When he became a U.S. district judge in San Antonio, he was recalling his days as U.S. attorney. He said—I still remember this after all these many years—he said he never had a prouder moment in his life than when he appeared in court and he said: “I am here and I am ready on behalf of the United States of America.”

Senator SESSIONS is here, and he is ready to serve the American people as Attorney General. And we know from his service at the Department of Justice, as attorney general of Alabama, and now for the past 20 years in the Senate, that he is devoted to the rule of law and keeping our country safe. So it has really been sad to see interest groups vilifying him over and over again or people mischaracterizing him, as they have on his voting rights record, things that he is not responsible for after voting to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act in 2006. He didn't decide the Shelby County case.

This is a man we have worked with for—some for 20 years, people who have been here that long with him, and we know JEFF SESSIONS to be a man who has dedicated his life to public service. Our colleagues across the aisle have offered him an occasional compliment, like the Democratic leader, who once called him straightforward and fair. The assistant Democratic leader called him a man of his word. But now the decision to drag out Cabinet nominations as long as possible and to waste valuable time that could be used on other bipartisan legislation—we know our Democratic colleagues have chosen to slow-walk the process, and I think it is a shame, particularly in the case of somebody whom we all know so well and who is dedicated to the Department of Justice and the restoration of the rule of law.

Several of us have talked from time to time about how the holding up of these nominees is unprecedented. At this point in President Obama's term, 21 Cabinet members were confirmed. Senator SESSIONS, when we vote on his

nomination tonight, will be No. 8—21 to 8. You have to go back to George Washington to find a slower confirmation timeline for a new administration. There is no good excuse for it, particularly in light of the fact that now, under the Reid precedent, our colleagues across the aisle know that all of these nominees, particularly in the case of Senator SESSIONS, will be confirmed. So holding up the nomination just for delay alone makes no sense at all.

Well, some have said holding up Senator SESSIONS' nomination is somehow similar to the confirmation process for Loretta Lynch, but that really rings hollow on examination. Let me remind them what happened when Loretta Lynch was nominated as Attorney General. At the time, our Democratic friends were filibustering a bipartisan bill that later passed 99 to 0. They were filibustering a bipartisan anti-trafficking bill for no good reason. That is my view; they may think they had a good reason. I think actually what it had to do with was the Hyde amendment and the longstanding limitation on the use of taxpayer funds for abortion that had gone back to roughly 1976. They wanted to eliminate that restriction in this anti-trafficking bill, so they refused to consider that legislation, which many of them had cosponsored, to help thousands of victims of sexual exploitation, slavery, and human trafficking find a path to healing and restoration. So the majority leader, in an action that I completely endorsed, simply said that as soon as they dropped the filibuster, we would move on with the Loretta Lynch nomination. They did finally, and we processed her nomination. So in no way were those two situations similar.

Today, our colleagues across the aisle want to keep a new President from surrounding himself with the men and women he has selected to help run the country. I think if there is one thing that should give people more confidence in the new administration, it is the quality of the men and women he has chosen for his Cabinet, and I would add Vice President PENCE, somebody we know here, having served 12 years in the House of Representatives.

So the delay is really for no good reason at all and will have no achievable results. They are not going to be able to block the nomination but, rather, just try to score political points. And preventing an exemplary nominee from filling an important national security position I believe makes our country less safe.

I will give our colleagues across the aisle some credit for allowing the confirmation of Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Gen. John Kelly at the Department of Homeland Security and finally, after a long weekend, Mike Pompeo as Director of the CIA. Those are essential components of the President's national security Cabinet, but it also includes the Attorney General of the United States, someone whose

nomination has been delayed until we vote on him tonight. After 9/11, the Attorney General became more than just a law enforcement officer; he became a counterterrorism official as well, integrally tied, with supervision of the FBI, to our efforts to protect the American people from terrorists who would kill us or our allies.

So there is really no good excuse for delaying the confirmation of Senator SESSIONS, and I am confident that tonight we will finally do what we should have done at least 3 weeks ago—confirm Senator SESSIONS as the next Attorney General of the United States. And I believe it is past time that we do so.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I would like to respond to the statement made by the Republican whip, my friend from Texas, Senator CORNYN. This is day 20 of the Trump administration. Day 20. Not quite 3 weeks since President Trump was sworn in as President of the United States. This evening at about 7 p.m., we will vote on his nominee for Attorney General. So in the first 20 days of his administration, he will have his Attorney General.

What the Senator from Texas failed to relate was the experience we went through not that long ago when President Obama wanted to fill the vacancy of the Attorney General's office with Loretta Lynch, a woman who had served as prosecutor, U.S. attorney, lifelong professional in the Department of Justice, who went through the regular hearing process in the Judiciary Committee, was reported from the committee, and she was sent more than 20 additional questions by Senator JEFF SESSIONS of Alabama—more questions which of course, she dutifully answered, as she was required to do. Then she was reported to the calendar, where she sat for 2 months. A 2-month vacancy in the Attorney General's office. Why? Was there something substantively wrong or controversial about Loretta Lynch? If there happened to be, I never heard it.

Where then was that argument about national security and leaving the Attorney General nomination in limbo when it was President Obama seeking to fill that spot? Well, we didn't hear it at all. In fact, the Senator from Texas said: Oh, it was related to another bill and whether that bill was going to be called; it was actually Senator Reid who was holding it up.

From where I was sitting—and I came to the floor at one point and said: What are we waiting for? This lady is eminently qualified. She has been reported by the committee. She has answered all the questions. She languishes on the calendar.

She wasn't alone in this experience, incidentally. The Executive Calendar, as the Obama Presidency ended, was filled with nominees who were held for

no obvious reason by the Republicans. They had been reported from the committees. They were ready to fill judicial vacancies across the United States and other posts. And the official position of the Republican Senators happened to be: We are not going to ever let people vote on them because we are hoping and praying we will get a Republican President who can fill those same vacancies with people of our political persuasion. That was the reality.

That was the same reality that left Merrick Garland, President Obama's nominee to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court, languishing for almost 1 year. The Republicans and the leaders in the Senate would not give him a hearing or a vote. And Senator McConnell came to the floor and said: I won't even meet with him.

So when I hear these protests now from the Republican side of how we are not moving quickly enough on these nominations, we are. And I think we are moving in the appropriate way. We are asking hard questions.

And I don't subscribe to the position of the Senator from Texas, who preceded me here, when it comes to the Voting Rights Act. I listened as Senator Sessions of Alabama said that he believed the Shelby County v. Holder decision was a victory for the South when it ended preclearance of legislation that could have a direct impact on the voting rights of individuals. And I do recall what happened when the Federal court took a specific look at North Carolina's legislation statutes as it related to voting and said the North Carolina legislature had "with surgical precision" found ways to exclude African Americans from voting—not 20 years ago but just a few months ago, before this last election.

This is a critical issue, and it is interesting to me that last night the dustup on the floor involving the Senator from Massachusetts, Senator Warren, was about the same issue, the Voting Rights Act.

In a letter sent by Coretta Scott King to Strom Thurmond—then chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee—when Senator Sessions, before he was Senator, was being considered for Federal judgeship—this is what Coretta Scott King said in the letter. I am not going to read the personal and controversial sections that have been pointed out before, but it is critical to what her message happened to be. She said to Strom Thurmond in a letter about Senator Sessions moving to the Federal bench:

Free exercise of voting rights is so fundamental to American democracy that we cannot tolerate any form of infringement of those rights. Of all the groups who have been disenfranchised in our Nation's history, none has struggled longer or suffered more in the attempt to win the vote than black citizens. No group has had access to the ballot box denied so persistently and intently.

It was a critical issue over 30 years ago when Mr. Sessions was then being considered for a Federal judgeship. It is

a critical issue to this day because of two things: a decision by the Supreme Court, which basically took away one of the major powers of the Voting Rights Act, and, secondly, a coordinated effort by Republicans across the United States to suppress the vote of minorities and particularly African Americans.

I point directly to that North Carolina decision for what I just said. What they have tried to do is to systematically reduce the likelihood that poor people and minorities will vote. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, I held public hearings in Ohio and Florida. Those hearings were held in those States because they had proposed new restrictions on voters.

So, both in Cleveland and in Florida, I brought the election officials—Democrats and Republicans—before my subcommittee, put them under oath and asked: What was the incidence of widespread voter fraud in the elections in your State which led you to make it more difficult and challenging for the people of your State to vote?

The answer was: There were none. There were no examples of widespread fraud. There were only a handful of prosecutions for voter fraud. That told the story. This didn't have anything to do with voter fraud. This had to do with discouraging turnout in areas that were more friendly to Democratic candidates, period. So when we make a big issue of the position of Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions on the Voting Rights Act, it is with good cause.

It is historically an issue which has haunted the United States since the Civil War, when excuses after excuses were made for African Americans seeking the right to vote, and people were denied the right to vote with poll taxes and literacy tests and ridiculous standards to this very day, when the Republican Party strategy is to diminish the African-American vote by voter suppression.

Is it important that we know the position of Senator Jeff Sessions on the Voting Rights Act? To me, it is one of the most important questions to be asked. The fact that it evoked controversy on the Senate floor with Senator Warren last night is an indication of how seriously we take it. Yes, we have added a few more hours to the debate. I disagree with the Senator from Utah and the Senator from Texas who say: You know how it is going to end; why are you wasting our time?

I don't think it is a waste of time to have a fulsome debate in the Senate on something as fundamental as protecting the right of every American citizen to vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, will the Senator from Illinois yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I will be happy to yield.

Mr. TESTER. I say to Senator Durbin, there has been a lot of talk about the fact that the number of Cabinet appointees were much higher in the Obama administration than they are now. Could you take us back 8 years ago? I mean, we just confirmed a lady to be Secretary of Education who has never spent 1 minute in a public school classroom, on a school board, teaching, student, otherwise. There are claims out there about some of these nominees being involved in insider trading. There are claims out there that some of these nominees did not pay their taxes.

Could you take us back 8 years ago and tell us how those folks were treated, if there was anything wrong with them when they came to this floor?

Mr. DURBIN. Through the Chair, I will respond to the Senator from Montana. Here is the difference. Eight years ago, when Barack Obama was elected President and was to be sworn in on January 20, he brought together his team to serve in his Cabinet and said to them: The first thing you need to do is to follow the law. You need to file all the papers required of you by the ethics standards of the United States Government.

So, I am told that on January 8, almost 2 weeks before he was sworn in, their paperwork was on file. So they had complied with the law and they were awaiting their opportunity for a hearing. Contrast that with the current situation. There are still proposed Cabinet members by President Trump who have not filed their required ethics disclosures.

Why is it important? Because we believe that though we can't reach in and require the President to file his income tax returns, which he has steadfastly refused to do, we know what the standards are when it comes to many of those departments.

The standards are very demanding. There has to be a disclosure and there has to be a process of divestment. If I am about to become the head of an agency and my personal wealth includes holdings that have a direct impact on that agency, I am required by law to divest myself of those holdings. The more complicated my portfolio and net worth might be, the more challenging this is.

Penny Pritzker, a very wealthy individual from Chicago, was chosen by President Obama to be the Secretary of Commerce. It took her 6 months, I say to the Senator from Montana, to fully comply with the law so she could go through the hearing—6 months. Now we hear complaints from the Republicans: Well, why aren't the Trump nominees going through more quickly? Why aren't our billionaires put on the fast-track?

I am sorry, but Trump billionaires are subject to the same rules as all billionaires. They have to file the necessary documents. I might add, you can go back a little further in history and find disqualifications for Cabinet positions. Oh, you hired someone in your

household to work for you and you did not pay their Social Security, their FICA? Sorry, you are disqualified from being in a Cabinet.

Now we have Trump nominees where that is happening—not with frequency, but it is happening—and it doesn't seem to be even close to a disqualification. So it clearly is a double standard. I would say to the Senator from Montana, the fact that the Obama nominees moved through as quickly as they did showed they took the law seriously, they made the disclosures they were required to make, and in virtually every case had unique qualifications for the job.

To put Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education next to Arne Duncan, who headed up the Chicago Public School System as Secretary of Education, is to show that contrast.

Mr. TESTER. I want to thank the Senator from Illinois for his history lesson on the confirmation process over the last 8 years, at least in the Senate.

I want to speak today on behalf of the thousands of Montanans who have asked me to oppose the nomination of Mr. SESSIONS as the Attorney General of the United States. As this country's top law enforcement official, the Attorney General must stand up and fight for all Americans. The Attorney General must provide a voice for the folks who often are not able to speak for themselves.

The Attorney General must enforce the law as it is written, not how the President wishes it was written. I believe Mr. SESSIONS has proven time and time again that he does not fulfill these qualifications, and therefore I will oppose his nomination for Attorney General.

Mr. SESSIONS opposed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. This landmark legislation protects women from domestic violence and sexual assault and brings perpetrators to justice. In my State of Montana, this law helped provide over \$10 million every year to support women and children. Those are critical resources that make a real difference in the lives of women, children, and their families, and they keep our communities safe.

The Violence Against Women Act supports shelters like the Friendship Center in Helena, which is literally saving lives and protecting women and children from violence every day—in fact, they help over 1,000 Montanans each and every year—or programs like Rocky Boy Office of Victims Services, which is in the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation.

Thanks to the Violence Against Women Act, this has helped reduce the number of sexual assaults on that reservation. If he is confirmed, I would invite Mr. SESSIONS to Red Lodge, Missoula or Browning, and the many other places in our State to see how the Violence Against Women Act is saving lives and making communities safer. I invite him to sit down with the sur-

vivors at any of the YWCAs in Montana and explain to them why he opposes the Violence Against Women Act.

As Attorney General, Mr. SESSIONS will be responsible for administering critical resources through the Violence Against Women Act, resources that will save lives, but as a Senator, Mr. SESSIONS has turned his back on the survivors of domestic violence. I am not confident he will be there for them as Attorney General.

I will not support a nominee for Attorney General who opposed legislation that helps us better investigate and prosecute violent crimes against women, but that is not all. I am not convinced that Mr. SESSIONS will stand up for the privacy laws of law-abiding Americans. Less than 2 years ago, right on this Senate floor, Mr. SESSIONS fought to preserve the most intrusive aspects of the PATRIOT Act.

That was not the first time he supported unchecked government surveillance. Mr. SESSIONS has voted in support of the most intrusive aspects of the PATRIOT Act seven times—seven times.

He is a staunch advocate for the NSA's bulk data collection, which violates the privacy of millions of Americans. If Mr. SESSIONS is confirmed as Attorney General, will he push back and fight our government that undercuts our freedoms? Will he fight on behalf of government officials who listen into our phone calls, or scroll through our emails or preserve our Snapchats?

Will he intervene if the government once again spies on citizens without a warrant? I think the answer to that, quite frankly, is no. When government agencies like the NSA collect bulk data, they do so at the expense of our freedoms. If Mr. SESSIONS is not willing to protect our Fourth Amendment rights, can we expect him to fight for other constitutional rights?

Will he fight for the First, the Second, the Fifth? Again, the answer is no. We need an Attorney General who will fight and protect our individual freedoms, not one who is willing to sacrifice it.

I am not alone. Thousands of Montanans have contacted my office opposing Mr. SESSIONS. Here are some of the things Montanans have written to me. Anne from Missoula wrote me:

Please vote against the nomination of Jeff Sessions for Attorney General. He has a history of supporting the weakening of our civil liberties. Voting rights should be strengthened, not weakened. His support of the Patriot Act and opposition of the Violence Against Women Act are just a few of the many egregious positions that he has taken.

Susan from Bigfork:

Please vote no on Jeff Sessions for Attorney General. She is an inappropriate choice due to women's issues and civil liberty issues. He has shown poor choices in protecting voting rights and women's choices.

Jerilyn from Belgrade:

Jeff Sessions is completely the wrong person to be Attorney General. His record on civil rights and women's issues belong in a different century.

Amy from Whitefish:

Vote no to the nomination of Jeff Sessions, who has shown himself time and again to be no friend to equality or civil liberties. Please know that we in Montana expect you to uphold our desire for all members of this great Nation regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation or sexual orientation, to be treated with respect and dignity.

Charles from Livingston:

He voted no on the Violence Against Women Act.

That "he" being Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. SESSIONS voted no on adding sexual orientation to the definition of hate crimes. He voted yes on loosening restrictions on cell phone wiretapping.

Now, I agree with Anne and Susan and Amy and Jerilyn and Charles and thousands of other Montanans. Because of that, I will not support Mr. SESSIONS, and I will urge my colleagues to oppose his nomination.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Madam President, I rise to urge my colleagues to join me in opposing the confirmation of our colleague JEFF SESSIONS to be Attorney General of the United States.

I have great respect for Senator SESSIONS' long history of public service, and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to work with him where we have found common ground. However, Senator SESSIONS and I have frequently and sometimes vehemently disagreed on important issues, including matters like civil rights and voting rights, hate crimes laws, immigration, and criminal justice reform.

I want to acknowledge that Senator SESSIONS' nomination is supported by many, including many in the law enforcement community in my home State of Wisconsin. It is vital that the Attorney General have a good working relationship with the law enforcement community, and I have no doubt that Senator SESSIONS will be a strong voice for law enforcement, if he is confirmed.

But the role and the responsibility of our Attorney General is bigger than any one group. Our Attorney General must work on behalf of all Americans. The Department of Justice has a broad jurisdiction. So I have also heard from over 16,000 Wisconsinites who are opposed to his confirmation, many of whom expressed profound concerns about what it would mean for racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, including DREAMers, and others, were he to become our Attorney General. Hundreds of national civil and human rights organizations have expressed their opposition on similar grounds.

After reviewing his record, getting a chance to meet with him in my office, and considering everything that I have heard from my constituents, I simply do not believe that Senator SESSIONS is the right choice to be Attorney General of the United States. I have that belief for a number of reasons.

First, I am concerned that Senator SESSIONS will not be the independent

champion for the rule of law that we need with Donald Trump in the White House. In any administration, the Attorney General's first duty is to the Constitution and to the people of the United States. This President has already issued a number of orders—legally questionable orders—including one affecting our visa and refugee programs that a number of Federal courts have already temporarily blocked. We need an Attorney General who will ensure that the President's actions do not run roughshod over protections guaranteed by our Nation's laws and Constitution. I am not convinced that Senator SESSIONS will be that kind of Attorney General.

Second, I do not believe that Senator SESSIONS will be the champion of the civil rights of all Americans that an Attorney General must be. The Department of Justice plays a central role in enforcing our Nation's civil rights laws, from investigating hate crimes to safeguarding the right to vote, to fighting discrimination against women, racial and religious minorities, and people with disabilities. At a time when there has been a disturbing increase in hate-motivated crimes, discrimination, and harassment, including, particularly, against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and people of the Muslim faith, it is even more important that the Department of Justice be strong and proactive.

I have heard from constituents in Wisconsin who have faced bigotry and hate-motivated speech in the wake of the election of Donald Trump. Among them is a family from Fitchburg, WI, with 11 adopted children, including children from Ghana and China.

This family received an anonymous letter proclaiming "Trump won" and calling them race traitors and telling them to go home. This and other reports from Wisconsinites and, frankly, from people throughout the United States breaks our hearts.

Senator SESSIONS fought against efforts to strengthen and make more inclusive Federal hate crimes laws and criticized voting rights laws as "intrusive." He has shown hostility to the rights of LGBT individuals and attacked the reproductive health care rights of women.

Now more than ever we need a Justice Department that places a priority on enforcing our civil rights and voting rights laws, proactively combatting hate violence and fighting for the equality of all Americans. I am simply not convinced that Senator SESSIONS will be the champion vulnerable Americans need as Attorney General with an unflagging commitment to make our country a fairer and more equal place.

Third, I believe Senator SESSIONS will not take a fair or humane approach as Attorney General with regard to immigration. I was deeply troubled by candidate Trump's ugly and divisive rhetoric on immigration, and I am appalled by the actions that he has taken thus far as President.

Senator SESSIONS was one of his campaign's key advisers on immigration and has been a vocal opponent of bipartisan, comprehensive reforms that would address our broken immigration system.

The Department of Justice is responsible for adjudicating immigration cases and ensuring fairness and due process in the treatment of undocumented individuals and refugees.

The Department also plays a key role in our national security apparatus, helping to fight terrorism, and keeping the homeland safe.

The President's recent orders on immigration have furthered divisions, created chaos and confusion, proven to be legally and constitutionally questionable, and are inconsistent with core American values. In the opinion of many national security experts, they will make our Nation less safe, not more.

I simply do not believe that Senator SESSIONS, with his history of hostility to immigration and support for this President's approach, is the right person to lead the Department of Justice, as it discharges its critical duties on immigration and national security.

America has made great progress over the last 8 years with an administration that has taken seriously a shared responsibility to pass on to the next generation a country that is more equal, not less.

All Americans deserve a strong commitment from America's top law enforcement official to act on violence born out of hatred based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other characteristic.

At a time when voting rights and the constitutional right of women to make their own health care decisions are under attack across our country, we need an Attorney General who will stay true to these constitutional freedoms and not be driven by politics.

For me, the vote on Senator SESSIONS' confirmation is a moral choice. I am guided by my strong belief that all Americans deserve equal opportunity and freedom to pursue their hopes and dreams. I cannot support this nomination for Senator SESSIONS to be Attorney General, and I urge my colleagues to oppose him.

Now I would like to take a moment to discuss what happened last night here on the Senate floor. Last night, the Republican leadership of this Chamber stopped one of my colleagues from reading the words of Coretta Scott King.

Coretta Scott King wrote a letter and a statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee back in 1986, expressing her opposition to JEFF SESSIONS' nomination to serve as a Federal judge.

Coretta Scott King believed, as I do, that the right to vote is a fundamental right afforded to every American. It is a right that people have lost their lives seeking and defending.

Mrs. King wrote in her testimony regarding JEFF SESSIONS' record:

Blacks still fall far short of having equal participation in the electoral process. Particularly in the South, efforts continue to be made to deny Blacks access to the polls, even where Blacks constitute the majority of the voters. It has been a long up-hill struggle to keep alive the vital legislation that protects the most fundamental right to vote. A person who has exhibited so much hostility to the enforcement of those laws, and thus, to the exercise of those rights by Black people should not be elevated to the Federal bench.

Mrs. King's words matter. They matter to me, and they matter to millions of Americans. Mrs. King's words should matter in this debate, and they deserve to be heard. I believe it is simply wrong to silence legitimate questions about a nominee for U.S. Attorney General, and I hope that her words can be heard as this debate continues.

Madam 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. PORTMAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about Career and Technical Education Month. The month of February has been set aside as Career and Technical Education Month. It is an opportunity for us to talk about something that is working very well in some of our States and is giving our young people amazing opportunities, and it should be expanded.

Over the last 6 years, my home State of Ohio has come a long way. We have turned a record deficit into a billion-dollar rainy day fund. We have created lots of new jobs, but we also have a problem in Ohio and around the country, and that is a skills gap.

If you go on the www.ohiomeansjobs.com Web site right now, I think you will see about 122,000 jobs being offered. In other words, these are companies saying: We are looking for people.

At the same time, in Ohio today, we have about 280,000 people who are out of work. So how could that be, you ask? Well, if you look at the jobs and you look at what the descriptions are, many are jobs that require skills, and some of these skills are not available right now in the workforce. So you could get a lot of people put back to work just by developing these skills in Ohio.

At the same time, this is happening around the country, and this skills gap—this mismatch between the skills that are in demand in a local economy and the skills of a worker—is something that can be dealt with with more aggressive career and technical education.

Businesses want to invest more. They want to make better products, but they