

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

can't do so if they can't find the right people.

By the way, when those skilled workers aren't available, often those jobs go somewhere else. So in the case of Ohio, some may go to other States—let's say Indiana—but some go to other countries—say India.

So if you don't have the skilled workforce, you are not going to be able to keep the jobs that we want here in America because workers are such a critical part of making a business successful.

The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics says that the typical unemployed worker today has been unemployed for about 6 months. So we have this long-term unemployment again. The skills gap would help deal with that. There are 5.8 million Americans who are now stuck in part-time work who would want full-time work. So we have some challenges in our economy, and this skills training would really help.

According to a survey from Deloitte, 98 of the 100 biggest privately held employers in my hometown of Cincinnati, OH—98 out of 100—say they are struggling to find qualified workers. There is a shortage of machinists—machine operators. We are a manufacturing State. There is also a shortage of other jobs, IT skills, health care skills. Companies want to hire, but they have a hard time finding workers with the right skills.

By the way, it is not just in Cincinnati or in Ohio; it is across the country. There was a study done by the National Association of Manufacturers that found that three out of every four manufacturers say the skills gap is hurting their ability to expand and create more jobs. So as soon as this new Congress and new administration get to work, I think there is an opportunity for us to address this.

One thing we have heard about from the administration and also from both sides of the aisle here is the need for more infrastructure. We have all heard about the funding for our crumbling roads and bridges, our water systems, our waste water systems. I think that is all true, but it is going to be tough to do it because we don't have the skilled workers to rebuild the infrastructure. I think there is an area of common ground that if we have skilled workers, we will be much more likely to rebuild that infrastructure.

We had a conference on this issue a couple of weeks ago in Congress, and we brought people in from Ohio from the building trades. The point they made was: We would love to see this infrastructure expansion everybody is talking about. But who is going to do the work? We need more skills training, and we need to make sure that is there.

Yesterday afternoon we confirmed the Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. One reason I voted for Betsy DeVos is that she talked about skills training. Her quote was that CTE, ca-

reer technical education, is an "important priority," and she agrees that we must do more to give our young people the job skills they need.

Some people, when they hear about CTE, wonder what it is. For some in my generation, it is what was called vocational education, but I will tell you that it is not your father's Oldsmobile. It is really impressive to go to these CTE schools and see what they are doing and see the changes in the attitudes of the kids and their parents once they get into these programs.

One of the challenges we have is getting kids to enroll in some of these CTE programs. Sometimes the parents say to their kids: That is not something you should do. You should get on track to go to college because that is the track we were on, and that is the track we were told was better. I will tell you that is a big mistake. Changing that attitude is really important to helping expand CTE because young people going into these CTE programs have an incredible opportunity. By the way, many of them do go on to college, 2- or 4-year institutions. Many of them also get a job out of high school, and, again, that job is very important to our employers keeping jobs and economic activity here in this country, but it is also a huge opportunity for them.

I was at a CTE center a couple of years ago. We were sitting around the table talking to some of the employers who were there supporting the programs, some of the administrators, and, of course most importantly, some of the students who were from three local high schools who were all involved in this CTE program. Of the three young people who were there, two of them were going off to manufacturing jobs where they were going to be making 50 grand a year plus benefits, and the third was going into an IT position where, again, she was going to have a great opportunity.

My question to the students was: Have you gone back to your high school and talked to your friends about this? They all indicated they were planning to do that because they had a great experience. They had great opportunities. By the way, one of them was interested in being an engineer. He was going to CTE and then going to get a job. He had a job lined up with a company he had interned for, but that same company was willing to send him to school to get a degree in engineering over the subsequent years.

All three of them had college credits already because in Ohio students are allowed to get college credits from CTE courses, which makes it more likely that they will graduate but also more likely that they will be able to get to college and have college be more affordable by getting credits in advance. It is a terrific idea.

There is a story that I heard about recently of a young woman in Ohio. Her name is Mackenzie Slicker from Massillon, OH. She will tell you that

she was not doing very well in school. She was not hitting her marks, and she was not very excited about school. Then one day she saw there was an opportunity to get into a CTE course in sports medicine. She applied for it. The teacher looked at her scores in other classes and non-CTE classes, and said: I will take a chance on you, but I am concerned about you because your grades are so low. But she applied. She said she was embarrassed by those scores. The teacher let her in with the understanding that she would do a better job in her other classes. The CTE course gave her a totally new-found motivation to work hard and get good grades.

I hear this again and again back home. These kids from CTE are excited. They not only stay in school—they are not dropouts—but they do better.

In her senior year in high school she had a 4.0 after getting into the CTE program for sports medicine. She is studying at Miami University where she is on track for living out her dream of becoming an orthopedic surgeon. That is an example of how CTE really works.

Senator TIM KAINE and I had this in mind when we started the Senate CTE Caucus. It is a caucus that started with just a couple of Members, and now it has a strong following. Senator TAMMY BALDWIN of Wisconsin is among the leaders of that caucus, and she is on the floor today. This caucus not only has these conferences that bring people together to talk about issues, but we also put together legislation.

Senator KAINE and I introduced legislation called Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students Act, or the JOBS Act. We tried hard to get that acronym, JOBS. We introduced it a couple weeks ago. It would let low-income people get Pell grants for job training programs. Under current law, financial aid for programs can be used for courses lasting 15 weeks or more, but a lot of the licensing programs and the job training programs are less than 15 weeks. In Ohio a lot of them are 9 weeks. So we think this legislation will be helpful, giving young people options that they don't have now to be able to have this funding to be able to give them opportunities for a better start in their careers, getting them the licensing they need, the certificates they need, and putting them on the path to joining the middle class and the ability to get a job, but also to be able to buy that car, to be able to buy that home over time by having this opportunity to get skills training.

Our legislation has been endorsed by education groups like the Association of Career and Technical Education, the National Skills Coalition, the National Council for Workforce Education, and many other groups. We appreciate their help, and we are going to get that legislation done.

I hope colleagues from both sides of the aisle can join us to get that legislation enacted. It makes so much sense.

Senator KAINE and I are also planning to reintroduce another bill called Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Act, which improves the quality of our CTE programs by setting minimum standards for CTE programs that would ensure students are able to transfer their credits, be able to have their work graded today based on today's industry standards, and use equipment that is up to date. So basically it is legislation—and again I thank Senator BALDWIN for her support—to help increase the quality of CTE education. In some of our States this is working incredibly well. Ohio is one of those cutting-edge States. We have to ensure that the standards are maintained and expanded everywhere and we continue to support reauthorization to strongly support our CTE programs.

Just like the JOBS Act, this bill has been endorsed by a number of education experts and groups, and we appreciate their help, including the National Career Academy Coalition, the National Career Development Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and many more.

In Ohio we have some great schools, whether it is Cleveland, OH—the Max Hayes High School does an awesome job. I was there for its opening, now about a year and a half ago, and they are doing a terrific job of working with the building trades, working with private industry, working with the high schools in the area, and developing skills that are badly needed in Northeast Ohio. Ohio also has some great health care CTE programs. I mentioned the young woman who found her motivation getting involved in CTE for sports medicine.

Recently I went to Butler Tech to their health care campus, which is north of Cincinnati, and what they are doing there is amazing. You walk in and all the kids have on their white medical coats, and whether they are dental hygienists who are being trained or technologists or students who plan to go to medical school someday or those who are interested in getting a degree in nursing, there are some incredible sites. They have brought in outside partners, all from the area, who are involved with working with them. It is good for our kids but also really good for our community.

Mr. President, if we pass this legislation that I am talking about today, if we continue to focus on career and technical education as we are supposed to do this month—CTE month, February—we are going to help many millions of our young people to be able to have better opportunities and, most importantly, we are going to be able to help our economy. We are going to help create more jobs and more opportunities in this country, to be able to close that skills gap, to put people back to work. It makes too much sense for us not to come together as Republicans and Democrats alike, and with the new administration, to promote career and technical education.

With that I yield my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I rise today to support the nomination of Senator JEFF SESSIONS for Attorney General of the United States. He is a veteran and an outstanding public servant who has worked tirelessly for decades in service of his constituents in Alabama, in this body, as a U.S. attorney, as Attorney General of Alabama. He is a good colleague and a friend to many of us on both sides of the aisle. He is gracious with his time, his wisdom, his intelligence.

In all nomination processes there is some twisting of facts that goes on and, unfortunately, even some character attacks, but the twisting of his record and the attacks on Senator SESSIONS, in my view, have been particularly egregious. That is why I was very saddened by what happened on the floor of the U.S. Senate last night.

One of our colleagues violated rule XIX. Here is what rule XIX says: "No Senator in debate shall, directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another Senator or to other Senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a Senator."

That is the rule. It has been in place for decades, and I don't think you need to be a Harvard law professor to realize that rule was violated last night.

Mr. President, like you, I have been in the Senate for a couple of years. I certainly have tried very hard to work with my colleagues, all my colleagues across the aisle, Democrats, Republicans. I have respect for all of them. I have no problem whatsoever with Senators coming down, and in the last week or so, Senators coming down to the floor of the Senate to debate their views on nominees for Cabinet positions, up-or-down votes on the merits and the qualifications of these nominees. That is what we should be doing. That is our job. We have seen a lot of that over the last several weeks.

Like the Presiding Officer, in the last couple of years, I supported some of President Obama's Cabinet officials, was opposed to others, as is our job, on their merits and qualifications. We can do this in a respectful manner, especially here on the floor of the U.S. Senate. We can certainly do this in a way that does not violate rule XIX by imputing conduct and motives unbecoming of a U.S. Senator. More importantly, we can do this in a way that is respectful of each other. For the sake of the Senate and for the country, I hope we can get back to that tradition that is so important to this body.

Let me try to set the record straight on Senator SESSIONS, the Senator JEFF SESSIONS I know. I have gotten to know him over the last 2 years. He certainly has a long, distinguished history of public service. Nobody in this body is denying that. Everybody in this body knows Senator SESSIONS well, knows that he is a man of integrity, a man of principle. He will support the laws of

the land, and he will be a fierce advocate for the rule of law and defending the Constitution.

I wish to spend a few minutes on the broader issue of what is happening on the Senate floor right now. We are not getting a lot of press on it, but it is the unprecedented obstruction that is happening with regard to President Trump's Cabinet. Because of this obstruction—unfortunately, by my colleagues—more than 2 weeks into President Trump's term, he has fewer Cabinet Secretaries confirmed at this point than any other incoming President since George Washington. That is some pretty serious obstruction. Nineteen days into his term as President of the United States, President Obama had 21 Cabinet Members confirmed. Right now, President Trump has seven. President Obama had three times the numbers we now have today.

I believe most Americans—certainly the Americans I represent, fairminded Alaskans who are desperate to get our country and our economy working again—don't like this kind of obstruction. They see a new President who should be allowed to move forward with his Cabinet in place so the Federal Government can get to work on behalf of the American people. I think Americans are also seeing the reputation of good people who want to serve their country tarnished for political purposes.

I hope the Members on the other side of the aisle understand that the American people are wise. They see through all this theater. We need to get to work. We need to let the Trump administration get to work.

This body has a responsibility to treat the confirmation process with the same courtesy, seriousness, and focus the Senate gave to President Obama when he came into office, and that has not happened right now. It is not happening right now, and we need to move forward on that.

VISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF JAPAN

Mr. President, we are on the eve right now of a very important visit of a very important ally. Prime Minister Abe of Japan will be visiting the United States here in the next day. He is going to be visiting with some Members of the Senate, visiting with President Trump and his team.

I wish to make a few points on how important this visit is, not only for the United States-Japan relationship, but the importance of our allies. We are an ally-rich nation. When you look around the world, you look at the broad number of allies the United States has, and then you look at our adversaries or potential adversaries who are ally-poor. This is one of the most important strategic advantages the United States has right now in the world, to keep Americans safe and our allies safe. We are an ally-rich nation and our adversaries and our potential adversaries are ally-poor.

For over 7 years, since the end of World War II, both the executive