

unilaterally—that is, asking for criminal charges—without consulting with or providing notice to the minority. Yet he still expressed outrage when the ranking member of his committee released a transcript of his committee's interview with the chairman of Fusion GPS even though that was what was in contention. There is a fundamental double standard here. You can't complain, Mr. Chairman of Judiciary, about our side doing things unilaterally if you do them unilaterally. We want to work in a bipartisan way.

I applaud my friend, the senior Senator from California, for releasing that transcript. It contained information that was crucial for the American people to read and understand in order to judge for themselves the allegations my friends across the aisle have made. You make a serious allegation against someone but say no one can see the information? That is not fair. That is not how we work here in America.

Now, in the Foreign Relations Committee, my friend Senator CARDIN was compelled to release a minority report about Russia's interference in foreign elections because the majority would not join him. Think about that. Senator CARDIN's report showed something we already know to be true—no one disputes that; well, maybe a few—that Russia maliciously and persistently interferes in elections around the globe and will not cease without unified and strong countermeasures.

Senator CARDIN's report is another compelling reason that the Senate act on election security legislation. Before we left for the holidays, Senators LANKFORD, KLOBUCHAR, HARRIS, and COLLINS introduced the Secure Elections Act. It is a good piece of legislation that would help shore up election security. Midterm elections are just around the corner, and, as Senator CARDIN's report tells us, Russia will no doubt endeavor to sow confusion and chaos into our democracy once again. That is what they do. That is what Putin likes to do. We have to stop it. And making information public about it is very important. This should be a unifying, nonpartisan issue.

Why would the Republican majority on the Foreign Relations Committee refuse to join that report? It is because—in my judgment, at least—for partisan reasons, Republicans in Congress and some in some parts of the media—the conservative parts of the media—have sought to undermine the Russia investigation in countless ways. They have hidden behind secrecy and innuendo to cast aspersions on the investigation and erect roadblocks in its path. Their goal, it seems, is to discredit the investigation so that ultimately they can discredit any findings that are detrimental to their party or their President.

President Trump makes the strategy manifest, clear as day, almost every day on his Twitter feed. Yesterday, he tweeted that the Russia investigation was “the single greatest witch hunt in

American history.” That is a little self-centered. How about Salem? Those people were burned at the stake. And he wrote that “Republicans should finally take control.” That last line should send shivers down our spines, that “Republicans should finally take control.”

From the very beginning, this investigation has been about an issue most sensitive to our national interests—interference in our elections, the wellspring and pride of our wonderful and great and grand democracy. If ever there were an issue that transcends party, this is it. Yet here is the President of the United States imploring his party to “take control” of the investigation. You never thought you would hear a President say something like this. Frankly, you never thought you would hear such silence from the other side of the aisle when he does, but that is where we are. Republican lawmakers ought to shout down that kind of appeal. We all must commit to the essential truth of the matter, which is that the investigation into Russian interference in our election must remain as bipartisan and as nonpartisan as possible. The interests of the Nation are at stake. All of us—all of us—must choose country over party.

I yield the floor.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Michael Lawrence Brown, of Georgia, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Georgia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

#### NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS DAY

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, today is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Montana, like much of the United States, is suffering from the rise in human trafficking. I am grateful that Montana's attorney general, Tim Fox, has taken this issue head-on. In fact, Montana has had three times as many human trafficking cases in 2017 as we had in 2015—a threefold increase. Unfortunately, this number will likely continue to rise in the coming

years, and online platforms are a driving force for it. Like so many things, the internet has tremendous power for good as well as for evil.

Having spent 12 years building a startup cloud computing business in my hometown of Bozeman—a business we grew to over 1,000 employees. We took the company public. This became a large, global business. I understand the power of the internet for good. But I also believe we must and can have better safeguards to protect our children, our families, and our neighbors from sex trafficking, while at the same time protecting innovation on the internet.

Unfortunately, a startup business—your business—has the potential to be used for terrible reasons without your awareness. Even more upsetting, it is also possible that online platforms do know that bad actors are using that platform and they do nothing about it. During my first hearing on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, we investigated one of these platforms: backpage.com.

Bad actors like backpage.com must be held accountable. That is why today, on Human Trafficking Awareness Day, I will be joining the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act. This act strips protections for platforms that knowingly assist, support, or facilitate sex trafficking. We must take steps now to stop human trafficking and protect vulnerable members of our community. The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act moves us closer to that goal.

I tip my hat and I am thankful to Senator PORTMAN for introducing this bill. I am thankful for the work of the Senate Commerce Committee to ensure that this legislation protects the millions of companies on the internet that are building our economy and creating high-paying jobs and doing so in good faith.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be added as a cosponsor for S. 1693, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act.

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

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

#### ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGULATORY RELIEF, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, on Tuesday of this week, I regained my previous held seat on the Senate Banking

Committee, a committee I served on from 2011 until the beginning of this Congress. While this committee sometimes flies under the radar for many Americans, the oversight it conducts and the issues it considers under its substantial jurisdiction are of great consequence to America and to the American people.

The owners and employees of banking institutions have experienced success when their communities experience success. What I am saying is, how we lend money matters to every kind of person every day. So what we have experienced across Kansas, in many instances, is difficulty and really hard times.

I want to talk about community. Community financial institutions are of great importance to the folks I represent in Kansas. What I want to do, in part, with my opportunity to serve on the Banking Committee is to make sure those financial institutions have a regulatory environment in which they can benefit their communities and benefit the citizens who live there.

Communities in Kansas are losing their hometown banks to consolidation and sales, and some of these banks that are moving in that direction have been family owned for generations. In order to better understand why these lenders are consolidating or selling, I have sought out the nature of this decline by speaking with financial leaders from across the country. The overwhelming response I received is that the costs associated with complying with new Federal regulations are simply too much to absorb in their business model.

In the aftermath of our country's significant financial downturn, a new regulatory framework was put in place to rein in those bad actors and punish bad behavior that led us down that path in 2007 and 2008. We have had more than 7 years to determine what the effects are of this new regulatory environment—Dodd-Frank—and what it has meant to our community banks and our community financial institutions. The most glaring aspect of these new regulations is the disproportionate burden placed upon those smaller institutions seeking to comply with their new responsibilities.

Rather than extending credit to best fit the needs of their customers, banks are exiting entire lines of business because the penalties for making a mistake far outweigh the economic benefits derived from extending a loan. I experienced this damaging news and reality during the Senate Banking Committee's consideration of legislation to reform the secondary mortgage markets in 2014. I was attempting to solicit feedback from Kansas lenders of the financial impact some of these proposed changes would have on their communities, and what I learned, unfortunately, was this: "Jerry, we don't make home loans anymore." When pressed for a reason, they responded it just didn't make business sense for them to

do that any longer due to the increased Federal regulators' crackdown on mortgage lending.

As a member of the Senate who cares deeply about rural America and the special way of life we enjoy in Kansas, this is a very damaging occurrence. If a community banker determines they can no longer extend credit to what would have otherwise been a credit-worthy borrower because of the fear of making a mistake and the repercussions that follow, then they decide not to make the loan at all and not even to be in the business. What community would expect their financial institutions in their community to refuse to make a home loan? It is the American dream.

While community banks had been consolidating for a number of years due to shifting demographics and market conditions, we cannot nor should we attempt to discount the role the post-Dodd-Frank regulatory environment has played in the acceleration of the harming of our community banking structure.

I am not opposed to regulations, and neither are the community bankers working to serve their communities, but there has to be prioritization on the part of Congress to create an environment where local lenders can succeed because the success of these institutions means the success of their communities and the people who live there.

During the fall of 2015, I worked alongside a number of committee colleagues—both Republicans and Democrats—to see if we could bridge the divide and bring relief to our community lenders across the country. While these efforts did not then produce a result, these discussions demonstrated that the issues facing the financial service world need not be partisan, and they sowed the seeds for what has now resulted in legislation moving its way through the legislative process today.

I am happy to support S. 2155, the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act recently reported out of the Banking Committee on a bipartisan vote. Many of the provisions in this bill originated in legislation I have promoted since I came to the Senate, first as the Communities First Act, and most recently as the CLEAR Relief Act. While this legislation will not solve every issue that needs to be solved, it is meaningful progress that will make a difference.

It is Congress's responsibility to ensure that economic growth is not needlessly impeded, and it is our duty to ensure that economic opportunities flourish and that Americans have access to the tools necessary to pursue the American dream.

The Banking Committee can and will play an important role in providing these tools, and I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to lend the voice of Kansans to that effort. I look forward to working with the chairman, MIKE CRAPO, the Senator from Idaho, and the ranking member, SHERROD BROWN from

Ohio, as we work together to make sure good things happen in Kansas and across the country.

Again, I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Banking Committee and on the Senate floor to see that all Americans have the opportunity to have access to credit so we can continue to pursue growing economic opportunities for all Americans to keep the American dream alive and well.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I am here today with my colleague Senator CAPITO to talk about something that is getting a lot of attention but needs even more attention from this Congress, which is the opioid epidemic—the epidemic the President has rightly called a crisis, and he then turned to Congress and said: Find the money to solve the problem. We have been doing a substantial amount of that, but I think we see a clear desire here and in all of our States to find a better solution.

This is an issue that has hit every town in America, small and large, I believe. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 40,000 people died from an opioid overdose. This is a fraction of the people who had an opioid overdose. These are the people who died from an opioid overdose in 2016, 40,000 people; over 90 Americans every single day. It was a 28-percent increase over 2015 and a dramatic increase over where we were just 10 years before.

Opioid overdoses now surpass car accidents as the No. 1 accidental cause of death in the country. Both of our States and our surrounding States, I think almost every one of them, have had more overdose deaths in 2016—and an increased number, I think, in 2017—than car accident deaths. The Centers for Disease Control estimates the economic burden of this epidemic is almost \$80 billion a year.

We have just gone through a tax discussion, an economic growth discussion. When we were talking about billions of dollars, seldom were we talking about \$80 billion to do something with or to stop doing something with, but the economic cost of all of this—lost productivity, addiction, the crime related to that addiction—the CDC says \$78.5 billion a year is now the cost.

We are both appropriators. The members of the Appropriations Committee have looked at this carefully. Our colleagues have had a chance to confront this issue in our committee head-on. We brought bills to the floor that have passed and made a big difference in a