

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

ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGULATORY RELIEF, AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION BILL

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, 10 years ago, millions of American families were on the verge of devastation. The failure of Bear Stearns in March of 2008 was the first major signal of a coming financial crisis that would cost 9 million people their jobs and millions more people their homes or their savings. Lives and plans and dreams would be crushed—and even after the economy began to recover its footing, millions of American families would have to spend years just to get back to where they started before 2008. A lot of those families have given up the dream of home ownership forever, and many are still struggling today.

But in the next few days, with broad support among Republicans and far too much support among Democrats, the Senate is on the verge of passing a bill that puts American families in danger of that same devastation all over again.

Over the last few days, I have talked about what this bill will do. I have explained how it strips consumer protections for American families who are trying to buy a home, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color. I have talked about how this bill will peel away vital safeguards we put on large banks after the financial crisis to make sure they can't crash the economy all over again.

Now, as the bill is on the verge of passing the Senate, I want to stop and just ask a basic question: Why? Who exactly is asking us to do this?

Our constituents hate it. A recent poll showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans oppose this bill. So why is it that the only thing Washington can agree to do on a bipartisan basis in this Congress is to help out giant banks?

I will tell you why. Washington's amnesia is legendary. We go through the same cycle like clockwork. When the economy is looking good, lobbyists flood Congress and tell politicians it is perfectly safe to roll back the rules on the big banks. It is always the same set of arguments: America needs more lending for more economic growth. Our country is losing ground to its competitors. Banks have learned their lesson and don't need rules to behave responsibly. And here is the kicker question: What could possibly go wrong? Every time, it works.

It works even though the lessons of history are clear. Strong financial rules help create a strong economy that works for everyone, and when we weaken the rules, it sets the stage for another financial crisis—a crisis that, every time, hits America's working families the hardest.

Let's go back to the beginning of the 20th century. A lot of our financial regulations in the United States come from the Great Depression. Before then, Washington ignored the booms

and busts that rocked the country every few years. But after the unemployment rate topped 20 percent in the 1930s and the U.S. economy shrunk by about 30 percent, Washington—this Congress—finally got its act together to pass some laws.

Here is what they did. First, they looked at all of the places where people put their money—banks, home, markets—and then they built regulators for all of those different kinds of investments. Congress did something really smart. It put a law in place called the Glass-Steagall Act. It broke up the biggest banks, and it separated the banks that take deposits and make mortgages from high-risk institutions like investment banks.

This worked reasonably well for about half a century. There wasn't a single major financial crisis. But then, starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, bankers, looking for higher profits and bigger paychecks, set their sights on government rules. They wanted less regulation and more freedom to trick their customers, to trap their customers, and to cheat their customers.

It started in the savings and loan industry. These institutions, which specialized in home mortgages, started to become insolvent because of the rising inflation and flaws in their business model. So the bank lobbyists had a solution: Deregulate them. They said: Instead of just safe mortgages, why don't we let these institutions put out some riskier stuff in hopes that some of these gambles will pay off big. The Reagan administration agreed, but the plan failed. Over the next decade, taxpayers spent \$132 billion to bail out these institutions. That was in the 1980s.

But why stop there? Deregulating the thrifts, as disastrous as it was, was just small ball. Thrifts were allowed to gamble only with a chunk of their own money. The lobbyists wanted to tear down all of the barriers, throwing savings accounts and risky, complicated securities into one big institution and then letting that bank gamble with all of it.

They dreamt of a Wall Street where banks could take the money in grandma's checking account and use it to gamble in the markets. They wanted to tear down the wall Glass-Steagall had created between boring banking and high-risk trading.

In 1999, the conditions were perfect to rip up the rules. Why? The economy was cruising. Unemployment was down to 4.2 percent. The markets were on fire. The Dow, the S&P 500, and the NASDAQ smashed every record in their paths. In fact, the NASDAQ grew at 85.6 percent in 1999, the biggest annual jump for a major index in U.S. history. One respected finance professor gushed:

It's amazing. Every year we say it can't be another year of 20 percent-plus (gain)—and then every year it's a 20 percent-plus gain.

It was the prime time for the bank lobbyists to strike. They swarmed Cap-

itol Hill pushing, pulling, cajoling, running from the House to the Senate and back again, and most of this was happening behind closed doors. But on a clear, cold day in February of 1999, eight bankers and two lobbyists testified in front of the Senate Banking Committee, and the knives were out for Glass-Steagall. The euphemism people used then was "modernization." When lobbyists start talking about modernization and clarification, it is time to buy a parachute.

Let me tell you about KeyCorp, one of the banks that would be taken off the watch list in the bill we are going to be voting on in the coming days. Back in 1999, the CEO of that company testified that the "financial law modernization that strengthens our financial institutions in and of itself will enhance safety and soundness." Think about what that means. Behind the buzzwords, that CEO was making the amazing claim that if banks were just allowed to take more risks and make more short-term profits, it would actually make the financial system safer. In other words, if we just deregulate the banks, they will become safer.

He wasn't the only one to make a claim like that. The vice chairman of JPMorgan said: "There is a consensus shared by most financial firms and their customers, as well as policymakers, that these rules restrict competition, reduce consumer choice, and are not necessary to protect consumers or insured financial institutions." In other words, rules are the problem—if banks could just do whatever they wanted, everything would be great.

Guess what. The pitch worked. Nine months later, in late 1999, a bill to repeal key parts of Glass-Steagall and roll back other financial rules passed both Houses of Congress overwhelmingly. Ninety Senators voted yes. Senator after Senator, including quite a few who are still here today, came to the Senate floor and praised the bill for modernizing our financial rules and getting rid of unnecessary and outdated requirements.

But not everyone was fooled. Some Senators knew better. Senator Paul Wellstone from Minnesota warned that Congress "seem[s] determined to unlearn the lessons from our past mistakes . . . [and] is about to repeal [Glass-Steagall] without putting any comparable safeguard in its place."

Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota was especially prescient. He said:

I think we will look back in 10 years' time and say we should not have done this but we did because we forgot the lessons of the past, and that that which is true in the 1930's is true in 2010. . . . We now have decided in the name of modernization to forget the lessons of the past, of safety and of soundness.

But Congress ignored their warnings. For the bargain price of \$300 million in lobbyist bills, the big banks saw their wildest dreams come true. With the repeal of Glass-Steagall, too-big-to-fail megabanks were born. Citibank became Citigroup. J.P. Morgan became

JPMorgan Chase. The banks got bigger and bigger and bigger.

But the lobbyists weren't done yet. Over the next decade, they tried over and over to expand the loopholes that they had punched until both the regulators and the regulations gave way. By the middle of the decade, the conditions were right. Markets broke records. The unemployment rate was below 5 percent. It was time for the lobbyists to go at it again. Hand-tailored suits and Gucci loafers swarmed Capitol Hill. Meetings were scheduled. So were fundraisers. Their efforts again occasionally spilled out into the public hearing rooms.

This pitch might sound familiar. In 2006, the head of risk at Citigroup, on behalf of the Financial Services Roundtable, told the House Financial Services Committee: "The U.S. needs to modernize its capital regulations, and there are a variety of new approaches that all represent a significant improvement over the current system." In other words, the regulations are outdated.

Steve Bartlett, a former Congressman who was a lobbyist for the 50 biggest banks, told the Senate Banking Committee in 2005: "Outdated laws and regulations impose significant, and unnecessary, burdens on financial services firms, and these burdens not only make our firms less efficient, but also increase the cost of financial products and services to consumers." In other words, set the banks free, and let them do whatever they want. What could possibly go wrong?

In 2005, the head of the American Bankers Association told the committee: "The cost of unnecessary paperwork and red tape is a serious long-term problem that will continue to erode the ability of banks to serve our customers and support the economic growth of our communities." In other words, in the end, these rules hurt consumers. Let the banks do whatever they want to consumers.

Then, just as the lobbyists were gaining momentum, the economy they created crashed. It was 2008, and millions of families lost their homes, millions lost their savings, and millions lost their jobs. But the lobbyists didn't lose their jobs. They peddled myths about the economy and the financial system, and they kept right on working for the big banks. All during the efforts to pass financial regulations to get our economy out of the ditch, the bank lobbyists were there. They pulled in more than \$1 million a day lobbying against financial reform.

When the American people started to demand action in the wake of the 2008 crash, the reforms passed anyway. But the lobbyists didn't give up. They didn't go away. Before the ink was dry on Dodd-Frank, they jumped right back in and started lobbying to roll back the new rules.

So here we are again. It took years, but the economy is humming again. In 2016, the unemployment rate dipped

below 5 percent for the first time since before the 2008 crisis. In 2017, the Dow jumped 25 percent, and the NASDAQ grew by 28 percent. And you know what that means—it means the bank lobbyists have once again taken center stage, insisting that it is safe to deregulate their clients again, all in the name of economic growth and empowering consumers. It is the same argument as before.

Last spring, bank lobbyist Greg Baer said:

After nearly a decade of fundamental and continuing changes to financial regulation, now is an opportune time to review the efficacy of our current bank regulatory framework. My testimony will focus on reforms that could directly and immediately enhance economic growth.

In other words, turn the big banks loose, and let's see what they can do.

Harris Simmons, the CEO of Zions Bank, which will be kicked off the watch list under the bill that is now under consideration, recently testified that "the uncertainty surrounding [Dodd-Frank reforms] can cause banks to withdraw or limit certain kinds of lending." To put it another way: Get out of the way and let the big banks cheat their customers again. It is good for bank profits.

Here we go again. I get it. Our financial regulations need work. There are things we could do to reduce the load on community banks, and there are still big dangers to consumers that we should take up. But this bill isn't about the unfinished business of the last financial crisis; this bill is about laying the groundwork for the next financial crisis.

I will make a prediction. This bill will pass, and if the banks get their way, in the next 10 years or so, there will be another financial crisis. Of course, when the crash comes, the big banks will throw up their hands and say that it is not their fault, that nobody could have seen it coming. Then they will run to Congress and beg for bailout money, and—let's be blunt—they will probably get it. But just like in 2008, there will be no bailout for working families. Jobs will be lost, and lives will be destroyed. The American people, not the banks, will once again bear the burden.

Then, caught in a fog of amnesia, the lobbyists and regulators and elected officials in Washington will scratch their heads and wonder how in the world it could have possibly happened again. But the American people won't be confused about it at all. They never are. They are much smarter than the people around here give them credit for. They won't wonder why it happened; they will know why it happened. They will know it was because the people in Washington ignored working people in order to do the bidding of the guys in fancy suits and the handmade shoes who write the fat campaign checks. Look at the numbers. Seventy-eight percent of Americans think big banks have too much control over Members of

Congress. That includes 68 percent of people who voted for Donald Trump. Everyone knows that Congress sold them out last time, and everyone expects it to happen again this time.

As we prepare to vote on this bill, I ask my colleagues one more time, do the job you were sent here to do. Stand up for the people who sent us here. Stop doing the bidding of big bank lobbyists, and start working on the things that can make a difference in the lives of working people around this country. The American people need it. The American people deserve it. The American people will demand it. If you refuse to do it, don't be surprised when they hold you responsible.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO MARY ANN KELLEY

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise in this historic Chamber to offer my thanks, my respect, and to pay homage to an incredibly valued member of my staff who is about to retire from the U.S. Senate after decades of dedicated service.

A New Englander by birth and a Delawarian by choice, Mary Ann Kelley has served as my deputy scheduler now for 7 years and is due to retire tomorrow, March 9.

Mary Ann Kelley—or MAK, as she is affectionately called in my office—started a career with the U.S. Senate way back in December 1990 as a staff assistant for then-Senator Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr. Except for a break in service, Mary Ann served on Senator Biden's team until he resigned to become Vice President in 2009. She stayed on through the tenure of Senator Ted Kaufman and joined my scheduling team late in 2010.

In her having served now three U.S. Senators, Mary Ann brings a breadth of knowledge and experience to my front office and scheduling team. She helps to maintain my schedule, helps to organize and evaluate and to track hundreds of invitations and scheduling requests to coworkers and constituents. Mary Ann's professionalism and business acumen are unwavering and valued. She always maintains her composure despite the stress and sometimes craziness this unique position offers. My team in Delaware appreciates her ready wit, balanced judgment, and calming presence.

Krista Brady, my talented casework manager, said:

MAK adds that something extra Irish to the office. Every morning, she comes in wearing her snazziest outfit, drinking her cappuccino from Starbucks, and ready to tell a funny story.

Krista reminded me about Mary Ann's love for cats, her famous Halloween mask, her curry chicken, and,