

So as the Senate debates how to ensure financial institutions do not endanger the American economy the way they did during the financial crisis, we cannot forget our constituents' calls for new data protection rules. That is why I have filed my Data Broker Accountability and Transparency Act as an amendment to this legislation. I thank Senators BLUMENTHAL, SANDERS, and WHITEHOUSE for joining me.

My colleagues and I—Republican and Democratic alike—were outraged when we learned about the Equifax hack and how it hurts our constituents across the country, but what have we accomplished in the U.S. Senate since then? Nothing, and the threat is only growing.

We have an entire industry whose whole business model is predicated on profiting on Americans' most sensitive information. They are collecting it, storing it, selling it, and, in many instances, losing it in data hacks and breaches. Consumers don't even know who these companies are. They live in the shadows of our economy. Consumers rarely have any direct contact or business relationship with a data broker. Yet they know nearly everything about you. That is not just Social Security numbers, detailed credit histories, addresses, driver's license numbers. That is information on what you read, what music you listen to, your children, and your medical history.

In today's economy, you—the American consumer—are the commodity that is bought and sold in the open market. Right now, you have no rights. Data brokers are collecting, using, sharing Americans' personal information without your knowledge, without your consent.

Right now, American consumers are completely powerless. You can't say: Stop selling my information to any of these companies. That is unacceptable.

We need transparency; we need accountability. That is why I urge my colleagues to support my Data Broker Accountability and Transparency Act. My amendment would hold data brokers accountable.

First, my amendment allows consumers to access and correct the information that data brokers hold about them. Americans should be able to stop the spread of inaccurate information that could damage them personally and financially.

Second, my amendment provides consumers with the right to stop data brokers from using, sharing, or selling their personal information for marketing purposes.

Third, my amendment requires data brokers to implement comprehensive privacy and data security programs and to provide reasonable notice in the case of breaches. Equifax should have been required to have robust security to protect Americans' information. We must stop the next Equifax.

It has now been 6 months since the public became aware of that breach,

and Congress has yet to enact any major legislation in response. We are still in the data broker Wild West. American consumers are still powerless, and the next breach could be around the corner.

Here is the financial services bill that we are taking up. Here is a bill that is directly related to these banks that we are talking about. Here is an opportunity for us to begin to figure out a way of protecting consumers in this data breach area where their financial records, where their health records, where their families' records could be compromised.

What is the solution? We are moving through legislation that deals with the problems the bankers say they have, but we are not dealing with problems consumers say they have with these financial institutions. When do we take up that bill? When do we finally say to the largest companies: What are the protections? What are the safeguards that are going to be constructed so that people's personal information is not compromised, so the data brokers aren't able to create a world in which everyone's information is just part of their profit-making opportunity?

That is what we should be talking about. Let's have a big debate here. Let's ensure that each and every one of these issues is dealt with.

I urge my colleagues to support my amendment because we have to get to the heart of this Equifax issue. We have to actually deal with the world as it has changed. If the proponents of this bill say that the world has changed since the crash in 2008 and 2009, then the world has also changed with regard to the potential for the compromise of the information of every American. Let's have that debate, as well, in the same bill.

I urge that my amendment be put in order, and I urge that the Members of the Senate support it. It is time for us to give those protections to consumers, which they are crying out for. No individual consumer is crying out for this change in the banking bill, but they are crying out for protections in a system where they have no voice, no way to ensure that their own family's personal data is not compromised.

I yield back to the Chair.

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

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

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a pe-

riod of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, I met in my office with four students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, as well as one recent graduate. They are among the many students and graduates from Parkland, FL, who have been speaking out across the country, asking for commonsense gun safety reforms. They are having a real impact. They are changing the debate over guns in America.

Last week several of the Nation's largest gun retailers, including Dick's Sporting Goods and Walmart announced that they had listened to the Parkland students, and heard them. Dick's Sporting Goods announced it will no longer sell assault rifles or high capacity magazines at any of its stores. Their CEO also announced that the company would stop selling firearms to anyone under age 21. Walmart which had already stopped selling assault rifles, made the same decision to stop selling guns to people under 21, as did Kroger and L.L. Bean.

Making 21 the minimum age for buying any firearm is an idea that makes sense. It is already the law that a person must be 21 to buy a handgun. Why should the law be different for an assault rifle? In fact, President Trump initially came out in support of the idea of making 21 the age limit for all gun purchases, but then the NRA's lobbyists went to work on the President with a private lunch and an Oval Office visit.

We will see who the President and Republicans ultimately end up listening to on commonsense proposals like these: the Parkland students or the gun sales lobby.

It is incredible to see students and businesses across the country taking a leadership role, in addressing gun violence. They have decided it is time to act, and they are acting. We have seen the Stoneman Douglas students convince companies to make meaningful changes when it comes to gun sales practices, and they have convinced many more companies to end their relationships with the NRA. That is a major development.

Unfortunately, the gun sales lobby has not been a constructive voice in this debate over the epidemic of gun violence. Their rhetoric has been increasingly paranoid and hysterical. It is clear that their priority is to preserve their ability to make gun sales. That is the gun lobby's agenda, but it doesn't need to be our agenda.

I want to commend the students and businesses that are showing such leadership in working to make our communities safer. Now the question is, Will the Republicans who control Congress show any leadership as well?

If we let the gun sales lobby control this debate, we will never take the steps we need to keep our schools and neighborhoods safe from gun violence. Remember, the NRA doesn't like any proposal that might hurt gun sales. They don't want to close loopholes in our laws, instead, they would rather roll back gun laws already on the books. That is not the agenda America needs.

I stand with the 97 percent of Americans who support universal background checks for gun sales. I want to close the loopholes in our laws that make it easy for dangerous people to get their hands on guns.

I also stand with the significant majorities of Americans who want to take military-style assault Weapons, high-capacity magazines, and bump stocks off of our streets. These are weapons of war, and they have no place in our neighborhoods.

We cannot become numb to the shootings that happen in our communities, our churches, our movie theaters, our concerts, and our schools. All of us, especially lawmakers, have to step up and take actions that will reduce the epidemic of gun violence and save lives.

I hope my Republican colleagues will finally step up and help get this done.

#### SYRIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I wish to speak about the ongoing horrific violence in the nation of Syria, which seems to have hit yet new lows in terms of barbarity and Russian enabling. The senseless violence—in service of nothing more than enabling Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad to maintain ironfisted rule over a country he has personally driven to ruin—demands the world's attention.

Quite simply, President Trump, who lambasted President Obama's approach to Syria, has sat by as the regime continues to use chemical weapons, relentlessly bomb civilians, ignore the unanimous U.N. Security Council ceasefire, and allows Iran to build its radical foothold in Syria. One missile strike is not a long term policy. President Trump's silence as Russian President Putin not only continues to meddle in our democracy but also empowers and enables the Syrian butcher is simply inexplicable and diminishes American leadership.

Let me start with the horror that has unfolded in Eastern Ghouta in the last few weeks. This area has actually been under siege by Syrian Government forces since 2013, but last week, Assad's henchmen stepped up their attacks. For over 2 weeks, Syrian forces supported by Russian warplanes have relentlessly bombarded Eastern Ghouta in a campaign that has killed over 1,000 people, wounded almost 5,000, and left 400,000 civilians trapped without food or medicine.

The siege had already led to chronic food and medicine shortages, dev-

astating the population of Eastern Ghouta and leaving scores severely malnourished. The bombings have forced people to take shelter in their basements rather than risk death. Too frightened to venture outside to face the onslaught of mortar shells, barrel bombs, cluster bombs, and bunker-busting munitions, the civilian residents of Eastern Ghouta are being compelled to spend days without food or fresh air, suffocating in the heavily polluted air.

Despite the U.N. ceasefire, the number of dead climbs every day—from bombings, from ground assaults, and from hunger. Only yesterday, Assad's forces killed over 90 civilians and wounded over 300.

The number of casualties has overwhelmed rescuers and hospitals. Catastrophically, the Assad regime has chosen to re-employ one of its most heinous tactics and has bombed at least 28 hospitals and clinics. Doctors Without Borders said 15 of the 20 hospitals it supports have been destroyed or damaged, reducing access to emergency services just when they were most needed.

Doctors have run out of resources to treat patients. Doctors are being forced to make the most difficult choices and sometimes, tragically, leave critically wounded patients to die. A doctor in Eastern Ghouta said, "We have a horrible situation here. We're being targeted with all kinds of weapons non-stop. We lack everything, water, food, medical supplies, shelter. This is a disaster. Everyone is waiting to die."

I spoke to a deeply respected friend from Chicago the other day who knows this crisis all too well, Dr. Mohammed Sahloul, who leads the heroic Syrian American Medical Association. He and his brave colleagues regularly travel to Syria to help provide medical treatment to victims of the war. He told me horrific accounts of the latest bombing and disappointment at the world's seeming inaction amid such heinous cruelty.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres called Eastern Ghouta a "hell on Earth." United Nations human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein called the onslaught in Eastern Ghouta a "monstrous campaign of annihilation." He added, "When you are prepared to kill your own people so easily, lying is easy too. Claims by the government of Syria that it is taking every measure to protect its civilian population are frankly ridiculous."

Most troublingly, Assad's ruthless regime continues using chemical weapons to attack its own civilians despite Syria agreeing to eliminate its chemical weapons in 2013. We are in 2018 now and have seen the repeated use of chemicals to attack innocent people on the streets of Syria.

Among his various and numerous atrocities, Bashar al-Assad has made routine the use of internationally banned chemical weapons. He has deployed them against his own people

nearly 200 times over 7 years. He has used them against very young children and the elderly, people who are clearly not fighters on the battlefield. He has targeted civilians repeatedly with sarin gas, a weapon notably developed by another abominable regime: the Nazis.

In 2013, Russia worked with a global coalition, including the United States, to ostensibly destroy Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons, but the world watched in horror as Assad barbarically unleashed sarin gas on civilians in the town of Khan Shaykhun again in April 2017. Maybe you, too, saw the very disturbing reporting a week ago on "60 Minutes."

While the United States responded to that incident, Russia has allowed Assad to conduct many other chemical attacks. In fact, in Eastern Ghouta, Assad has continued to attack civilians—among them at least 21 children—with chemical weapons. Just yesterday, doctors there said that at least 29 patients were showing effects consistent with exposure to chlorine munitions.

Instead of trying to stop this savage behavior, Russia stands by its client-state. Russia continues to obfuscate and deny these horrific attacks, despite much evidence substantiating the use of chemical weapons.

In fact, Russia has seemingly condoned Assad's cruel use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians. The United Nations was investigating Assad's chemical attacks until late last year when Russia repeatedly blocked continuing the investigation. The U.N. investigation seemed to be getting too close to the truth for Russia's comfort, so it used its vote to prevent the facts from being laid bare.

Unfortunately, Russia's negative influence doesn't end there. For 3 days, Russia blocked a ceasefire from taking hold in Eastern Ghouta. For 3 days, Russia delayed much-needed food, medicine, and emergency aid to reach the distressed civilian population. For 3 days, the entirety of the U.N. Security Council, save Russia, agreed an immediate ceasefire was necessary.

Even though the Security Council finally agreed to a 30-day ceasefire in Syria, Assad flouted international order as his warplanes continued to carry out airstrikes targeting civilians in Eastern Ghouta. He also launched a massive ground assault against Eastern Ghouta.

Hundreds of people have been killed since the ceasefire was supposed to have begun. The Assad regime has prevented humanitarian relief from reaching those who are hurt or sick, and no civilians have been able to leave because of the constant bombardment.

The man who runs the regional command in charge of U.S. troops in Syria, General Joseph Votel, has said that Russia plays "the role of both arsonist and fireman—fueling tensions and then trying to resolve them in their favor." Instead of reasoning with its vassal-