

and a little bit emptier as a nation, missing her honor, dignity, and respectability.

NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. President, later today I have the honor of meeting with the Director of the CIA, Mike Pompeo, who has been nominated by the President of the United States to become America's chief diplomat, the U.S. Secretary of State. I am looking forward to catching up with the Director about several global challenges and his priorities as the next Secretary of State.

What confounds me as I stand here today is that many of our Democratic colleagues have made his nomination a partisan wedge issue. Diplomacy, which is what the State Department does, is supposed to be about bringing people together, not driving them apart. But sowing discord is what some partisans seem content on doing when it comes to Director Pompeo's nomination, and it is a shame.

With the growing number of threats around the world, with heightened tension in North Korea and Syria, it is clear that we need an intelligent, qualified person in that position. It is time to put partisan politics aside and to confirm this nomination. There is no good reason why we shouldn't be able to do that. After all, the editorial board at the Washington Post argued persuasively that Director Pompeo should be confirmed. Fourteen Democrats supported him when the Senate voted last year to approve his nomination to lead the CIA.

Back then, our colleague, the senior Senator from Virginia, said that he believed Pompeo would be an "effective leader of the CIA at a time when the Agency is facing many challenges."

The junior Senator from Virginia added that Pompeo "has a keen understanding of the CIA's role" and was "knowledgeable about our Nation's cyber threats."

Those seem like pretty nice compliments and pretty accurate assessments to me.

But now some Democrats are saying they oppose Pompeo's nomination for the State Department. On what grounds? Is the CIA any less important a job than the State Department? To be for Director Pompeo as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and against him for Secretary of State seems to be unreconcilable.

Some have attempted to justify their opposition saying that he is somehow anti-diplomacy, but that claim is frankly false.

We just heard last night of the news of Director Pompeo's trip to North Korea. Two Democratic Senators from Connecticut praised the groundwork that was being laid, saying they were "glad" that preparations were being made for upcoming negotiations on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and that this is the sort of diplomatic effort on the part of Pompeo that is undoubtedly welcome.

I agree with those comments. It is important to make sure that we ex-

haust all efforts to a diplomatic resolution on the Korean Peninsula, rather than see an armed conflict with so many innocent lives lost and so much bloodshed. So I applaud Director Pompeo and this administration for taking the diplomatic avenue so seriously and making that trip, laying the groundwork for the President's negotiation with Kim Jong Un.

That raises the question: How possibly could Director Pompeo, in light of this news, be the warmongering, anti-diplomatic caricature that some Democrats have painted him to be? It is just not true. The Director's trip is not the only thing that established his diplomatic credibility.

I have spoken about Director Pompeo's credentials on several occasions in the past. As we know, he graduated first in his class at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he was an engineer. He served in the U.S. Army, earning the rank of captain, and he served as a cavalry officer in various parts of the world.

When he went to law school, he graduated at the top of his class and practiced at a prestigious law firm. Then he went into business, founding an aerospace company, and later ran for the House of Representatives from his home State in Kansas.

Those that know Mike know that "brash," "impulsive," and "reckless" are not words you would ever use to describe him. He is not somebody looking to pick a fight with dangerous regimes or to flex military muscle unnecessarily.

Actually, Director Pompeo is careful, thoughtful, and deliberate. He listens, he studies, and he gets along with people. Above all, he has the sort of experience we need in our next Secretary of State.

It is true that he has military experience, but that doesn't predispose him to military conflict as the best way to resolve our disputes with other countries—to the contrary. And he has much more than just that experience.

He served honorably on the House Intelligence Committee, and he has now served at the CIA for more than 1 year. So he has that vital intelligence background.

As I said, he worked in law and business. So he understands the role of civil society and public institutions and building the durable rule of law in countries unlike our own.

I hope our colleagues will remember these qualities in the days ahead, and I hope Director Pompeo will be confirmed on the floor in short order. It would be a grave mistake for this body to fail to confirm the next Secretary of State, particularly leading up to the important negotiations with regard to the nuclear weapons capacity of the North Korean regime. The likelihood that it could be resolved short of armed conflict should encourage all of us to continue to support those diplomatic efforts and to support Director Pompeo as the next diplomat in chief.

TAX REFORM

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to speak again about tax day, which, of course, was yesterday. I know so many Texans are saying: Thank goodness it is over.

We heard a collective groan across the country as people jumbled together all the paperwork and mailed their returns or delivered them to the IRS.

The good news is that the worst is behind us. As the majority leader wrote recently, there is "a silver lining—simply put, it is 'out with the old and in with the new.'"

Yesterday is the last time American families will have to file under the unfair, convoluted, and outdated Tax Code that Congress and the President got rid of a few months ago.

Unfortunately, none of our Democratic colleagues supported the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act—none. All of them voted no in lockstep. Every single Democrat in the House and every single Democrat in the Senate voted to block tax cuts for working families. They voted against doubling the standard deduction. They voted against doubling the child tax credit. They voted to maintain the U.S. corporate rate as the highest business tax rate in the industrialized world—all to our detriment and all to contribute to slow economic growth and a lack of hope for so many people looking for work and hoping to pursue their dreams.

Well, some of our colleagues yesterday met on the stairs out in front on the Capitol, and they said that not only did they vote no when it came to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, but now they want to repeal those tax cuts. That is right. They came together unanimously and said: We want to raise your taxes, killing the nascent economic recovery we have seen, which has gotten people so excited and has caused consumer confidence to be at an all-time high.

We have seen what has happened to the stock market and to people's 401(k)s, pensions, and retirement savings. People have a spring in their step once more when it comes to their job prospects and bringing home more take-home pay.

Our colleagues across the aisle voted against a \$2,000 tax cut for a family of four making \$73,000. They simply have ignored the fact that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act doubled the standard deduction, making sure that for a married couple, their first \$24,000 of income earned was tax free. They ignored the fact that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act doubled the child tax credit from \$1,000 to \$2,000, allowing many more parents to claim it and helping working families.

Our Democratic colleagues who voted no ignore the fact that the law eliminates the individual mandate tax, which disproportionately hits low-income families. Worst of all, our colleagues who insist on voting no to

these reforms seem so driven by ideology and by a devotion to big government that they aren't actually listening to the American people.

Well, I have listened to my constituents, and every time I do, I learn something new. Every week I hear from Texans who explain how they are putting the new savings from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to good use.

One retired and disabled soldier named William Alderman says he lives on a fixed income and has seen it go up under the changes made to the Tax Code. He said he thinks the law will have "lasting impact," and he said "thank you." He said: "God bless Texas and America."

Another Texan, a retired Air Force colonel from Brownsville named David Teigen said the benefits sure felt like a lot more than just "crumbs" to him.

A third, Donnie Connell, from San Antonio, my hometown, said the tax law will result in close to \$4,000 worth of savings this year. Donnie is trying to make a better life for his family, and he called the reforms a "HUGE DEAL." When he said "HUGE DEAL," it was in all caps, I might add.

Our Democratic colleagues are so quick to dismiss or ignore normal, hard-working people like Donnie with the same old tired talking points and ideology because doing so is easier than actually doing the hard work of coming together on a bipartisan basis and passing legislation.

When they do this, they like to talk about corporations. According to their rationale, the 505 companies that have announced pay raises, bonuses, 401(k) match increases, cuts to utility rates, and other benefits aren't really helping the average worker; they are just somehow lining their own pockets. They seem to ignore that our old Tax Code ranked among the highest in the developed world and was an impediment to investment and the return of money earned abroad here to create new jobs and to build companies here so people could work and provide for their families and pursue their dreams. Instead, they say that stock buybacks, for example, which some companies have opted for, in part, reward corporate executives and well-off shareholders rather than workers.

The Senator from New York, the minority leader, has made those comments a number of times, which reflects a basic misunderstanding. Our colleague from Massachusetts has said that buybacks "create a sugar high for corporations." But none other than Warren Buffett—one of the most famous investors in the world and a Democrat—disagrees. He and others understand that it is oftentimes irresponsible for companies to sit on large amounts of cash. They need to put it to work for their shareholders, grow the business, improve stock values.

If companies buy back stock, shareholders can then go and invest the money in another company that might have had something better to do with

it, a company that has something greater to build or innovate and needs money to get the project off the ground. As one economist said, when it comes to buybacks, the money "doesn't go into a black hole. It goes into a financial market somewhere . . . [and then] a chain of events" leads to higher wages and higher productivity.

So as we hear and continue to spread the true stories about tax reform, let's remember men and women like Donnie Connell for whom the savings are literally a huge deal, and let's ignore the delusional, ideological arguments that have already been disproved. Let's keep finding ways to make the economy stronger and more dynamic, one characterized by more jobs, higher wages, and falling unemployment.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the Muniz nomination occur at 4:30 p.m. today.

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

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to urge my colleagues to vote against the nomination of Carlos Muniz to be the Department of Education's general counsel.

The Department of Education's primary responsibility is to help schools educate our students and prepare them to be successful in life. A good education can open doors of opportunity for children who may not have thought that their dreams were possible, and a good education can lift millions of families out of poverty and into the middle class. That is certainly what a good education did for me and for my family.

As many working families are struggling today, we should be working to make sure every child can attend a good public school in their own neighborhood. We need to do more to ensure that every student who wants to attend college can afford it, graduate, and find a good-paying job and is not saddled with a mountain of debt. It is critical that every student, no matter what age, learn in a safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment, and violence.

This should be at the core of our Nation—that everyone has the right to a high-quality education, no matter where they live or how they learn or how much money their parents make.

As general counsel to the Department of Education, Mr. Muniz would be responsible for providing legal advice and assistance to Secretary DeVos. Her first year in office has shown how much she needs it.

Secretary DeVos continues to push her extreme privatization agenda even though millions of students, parents, and teachers have stood up and rejected it.

Despite bipartisan agreement in Congress on our Nation's K-12 law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, Secretary DeVos is approving State plans that do not comply with all of ESSA's guardrails—guardrails that were agreed to

by Republicans and Democrats in Congress to help ensure that no student falls through the cracks.

Secretary DeVos has rolled back protections for students and student loan borrowers, making it easier for predatory, for-profit colleges to take advantage of students.

Time and again, she has failed to uphold civil rights protections for students. She has tried to scale back the Office for Civil Rights, opened the doors for schools to once again discriminate against transgender students, and rolled back guidance for schools on how to investigate campus sexual assault. Especially in this moment when more and more women are coming forward and sharing their stories of harassment and assault, there is no excuse for those in power to attempt to sweep their stories under the rug. By rolling back this guidance, Secretary DeVos allowed schools to put the burden back on survivors. By making it harder for them to trust they will be believed, I am concerned that fewer women will come forward.

Mr. President, it is clear that Secretary DeVos needs an independent general counsel who will stand up to her when laws are being bent or broken. I am afraid Mr. Muniz has failed to convince me that is the kind of general counsel he would be.

He worked for a for-profit college company that preyed upon students and cheated them out of their education and their savings. He has a record of putting politics before students. He worked for the Florida attorney general, who came under fire for accepting a political donation from President Trump at the very time she decided against investigating Trump University—a sham university that defrauded countless students by promising them everything and leaving them with nothing.

Although Mr. Muniz and the Florida attorney general didn't stand up for students who were misled and defrauded by President Trump, many other States sued. Just last week—8 years after Trump University closed its doors—the \$25 million settlement the President agreed to pay to his victims was finalized, meaning some of those cheated by the President will now start seeing relief. However, Mr. Muniz's involvement in the Trump University case gives me great concern that at the Department of Education, he will once again not stand up for student loan borrowers defrauded by other predatory for-profit colleges.

I am afraid Mr. Muniz at the Department of Education will only be more of the same. For those reasons, I will be voting against his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

NOMINATION OF JAMES BRIDENSTINE

Mr. President, while I am here, I want to briefly comment on another nominee who is being considered today