

opportunities. We knew the only way to guarantee access to good jobs, good wages, and good opportunities was to make sure businesses were prosperous enough to create and maintain them. So when it came time for tax reform, we set out to improve the playing field for American workers by improving the playing field for businesses, as well, and it is working.

Companies are putting tax reform to work. They are investing in new equipment, expanding their facilities, and growing their lines of business, all of which mean more jobs and opportunities for Americans.

Most importantly, companies are passing along the benefits of tax reform. Company after company has announced pay raises, bonuses, 401(k) match increases, and other benefits for their workers. Others are passing tax savings on to their customers in the form of things like utility rate cuts.

The tax reform law has been in place only for 4 months. As businesses continue to see the benefits of tax reform, we can expect to see the playing field for workers continue to improve.

Ultimately, by helping American businesses thrive, tax reform will help give more Americans access to the kinds of jobs, wages, and opportunities that not only will benefit them right now but also will give them access to security and prosperity for the long term.

#### NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. President, before I close, I would like to take a couple of minutes to discuss the nomination of Mike Pompeo to be Secretary of State.

I don't need to tell anyone how incredibly qualified he is for this job: first in his class at West Point; 5 years of Active-Duty service in the Army, achieving the rank of captain; editor of the Harvard Law Review; elected to Congress four times by Kansas's Fourth Congressional District, serving on the House Intelligence Committee; and, finally, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Clearly, he has proved his dedication as a public servant and is an outstanding candidate for Secretary of State.

His nomination should be sailing through the Senate, and normally it would be. Prior to this Presidency, we were on a pretty bipartisan track for Secretary of State confirmations. Members of both parties believed it was important that a President have a national security team to support him, and they voted accordingly. John Kerry was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 94 to 3. Hillary Clinton was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 94 to 2. Condoleezza Rice was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 85 to 13, and Colin Powell was confirmed as Secretary of State unanimously.

This doesn't mean that Republicans agreed with all of John Kerry's or Hillary Clinton's policies or that the Democrats agreed with all of Condoleezza Rice's or Colin Powell's

policies. But Members of both parties recognized that these nominees were qualified, and they believed that partisanship shouldn't play a role when it came to making sure the President had a national security team to support him.

Fast forward to today. Gone is the bipartisanship of the past. Today, Democrats are obstructing an entirely and eminently qualified candidate for Secretary of State for the sole reason that they don't like this President. They didn't get their way in the last election, and, in response, they have spent the last year or more obstructing one qualified nominee after another.

I get that the Democrats don't like President Trump, but when you are a Member of the U.S. Senate, you have to think beyond your own preferences and accept the fact that in a free country with free elections, sometimes you don't get your way.

Obstructing nominees has consequences. At the very least, delaying a President's ability to staff his administration diminishes his ability to serve the American people effectively, but that is not all. Obstructing certain nominees, such as a nominee for Secretary of State, can have consequences for our national security and diplomacy. An incomplete national security team is a detriment to the safety and security of our country.

Right now, the United States and our allies are currently facing a number of serious challenges from North Korea and an increasingly emboldened Iran to chemical attacks in Syria and the ever-present threat of terrorists. It is vital that the President have a fully equipped national security team to monitor and address these dangers. It is beyond irresponsible that Senate Democrats are compromising the President's ability to respond to threats simply because they prefer not to confirm anyone he has nominated.

Democrats should immediately drop their obstruction of Mike Pompeo and confirm him as Secretary of State, and they should stop obstructing other qualified national security nominees, such as Andrea Thompson, a native of my home State of South Dakota, who has been nominated as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs.

You would think Democrats would be content with their unprecedented obstruction of the President's nominees, but, unfortunately, there is another thing the Democrats are obstructing right now, and that is the Coast Guard reauthorization bill.

Once again, it is clear that Democrats are obstructing not because they have serious objections to the bill but because obstruction has become their default response to legislation in the Republican-led Congress.

Democrats claim that the Coast Guard reauthorization bill has not received sufficient input or debate, and that could not be further from the truth. A portion of the bill they are os-

tensibly concerned about is the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, or VIDA. It has been introduced in the last five Congresses, and more than one of those times it was introduced by Democrats.

The current version of the bill is the product of not just months but years of hearings, meetings, and negotiations. Despite the fact that this year's original version of VIDA had bipartisan support, we made a number of further concessions to address concerns that have been raised by Democratic Senators, but they just keep moving the goal posts. It has become pretty clear that Democrats' real objection is not to the bill itself but to working with Republicans or to seeing the President accomplish anything.

I hardly need to say the Coast Guard reauthorization bill is an important bill. It authorizes the Coast Guard's funding, as well as pay and benefits for Coast Guard personnel, who play a vital role in maintaining national security and law and order in the waters around the United States.

It would be nice if Democrats would consider dropping their partisan objections and working with Republicans to pass this essential piece of legislation and working with us to help get confirmed particularly critical national security nominees at a time when we face an array of threats across the entire planet.

Nominees like the Secretary of State, particularly well-qualified ones, are not to be trifled with. It is not a time to play politics when you are dealing with America's vital national security interests.

I hope that this Chamber, this body, will return to the tradition we have had in past administrations in which we have approved Secretaries of State, as I said earlier, by votes of 94 to 3, 94 to 2, 85 to 13, and unanimously. Those were the last four Secretaries of State. This has turned into a partisan game, if you will, at a time when our country really can't afford for us to play partisan games.

I hope when this vote comes up later this week, we will have a big bipartisan vote, consistent with our history and consistent with the fact that when you have a qualified nominee for an important position like this, this Senate comes together, takes very seriously its constitutional role in the confirmation process, and has that vote—hopefully, a big bipartisan vote in support of Mike Pompeo.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

#### NORTH KOREA

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, I have been pleased to hear about the progress in the planned negotiations with North Korea over their nuclear program. I was glad to hear of Director Pompeo's successful visit to North Korea, and I, as much as anyone in this body, wishes the administration success in these talks and negotiations. Given the history of broken promises, I have my

doubts as to whether the North Korean regime has any genuine interest or willingness to denuclearize, but even a freeze will be welcome.

However, I am concerned about the language used by the President today when discussing the North Korean regime. To say that Kim Jong Un has been “very open” or “very honorable,” as the President did, surpasses understanding. If this description of one of the world’s strongman dictators were a singular event, a one-off statement, it could perhaps be excused as an aberration, but, unfortunately, it is not. It is part of a larger pattern of excusing dictatorial behavior that we should not countenance.

We need not sacrifice the truth and reject objective reality in pursuit of our goals. We cannot pretend that the Kim Jong Un of today is somehow different from the authoritarian dictator who has ruled over one of the most violent and repressive regimes on Earth.

I am happy to hear that the North Korean Government is apparently engaging as an honest broker in the process of arranging these talks, but I believe that how the President of the United States describes world leaders matters. For the President to describe a leader who stands credibly accused of starving his own people, violently executing his political opponents, and murdering members of his own family as “very open” and “very honorable” is beyond comprehension. Furthermore, it undermines the moral authority we have long possessed on the world stage.

The President himself has previously declared Kim Jong Un as “obviously a madman who doesn’t mind starving or killing his own people.” The President has also repeatedly and correctly referred to the North Korean regime’s violent torture of Otto Warmbier as “horrible.” The pursuit of these negotiations does not require that we surrender the values we stand for as a nation.

We cannot pretend the atrocities of the Northern Korean regime are a thing of the past. We need to enter these negotiations with our eyes wide open. We must understand and recognize who it is we are sitting across the table from. Only then do I believe we will actually succeed in these negotiations and emerge from this planned summit with the result we all seek—a safer world.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### DARK MONEY

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, there is an old saying that “there is no such thing as a free lunch,” but what about other things? What about free

Spanish language driver’s education classes? What about free backpacks, notebooks, pencils, and school supplies in the month before school starts? What about free financial wellness workshops, free turkeys in the week before Thanksgiving?

These things are all given away at events hosted by the LIBRE Initiative—a self-described grassroots organization dedicated to a “free and open society.” The events were held in Latino communities throughout the country, including Las Vegas, Miami, and Orlando.

People attending these events were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Questions included:

“Are you more likely to vote for a Republican or a Democrat in the 2016 election?”

“Do you feel the government should increase or decrease Federal spending in order to improve the economy?”

“What is your name, email address, and telephone number?”

People actually had to hand over their personal data in exchange for the free stuff. So the stuff wasn’t really free after all—but close enough, right?

Well, in a career spent as a prosecutor, I have learned one thing: Always follow the money. If you follow the money just one step back, you learn that LIBRE is a shell organization funded by Charles and David Koch, two of the most powerful men in American politics. Charles and David Koch are the owners of Koch Industries, a massive energy company that manufactures, distributes, and refines petroleum. Koch Industries is one of the largest privately held companies in the Nation, with estimated annual revenues of over \$100 billion.

What does all this mean? It means the Koch brothers are two very rich men, and there is nothing wrong with that. What is wrong is the way the Koch brothers use their money to hijack our democracy for their own benefit.

The Koch brothers are self-described radicals who believe the government should play no role in Americans’ lives. The Koch brothers believe in a world with no Medicare, no Social Security, no Federal minimum wage, no public programs that support families when they fall on hard times, and no rules preventing Koch Industries from polluting our air, drinking water, or our public lands.

The Koch brothers hate environmental regulations because Koch Industries is one of the top 10 worst polluters in the United States. Fewer environmental regulations mean the Koch brothers can obtain bigger financial gains.

To keep their empire afloat, the Koch brothers are not just polluting our environment, they are polluting our political system, and they are polluting our airways with false advertising.

The Kochs want Americans to believe climate change is a conspiracy, despite the global scientific consensus that cli-

mate change is caused by burning fossil fuels. Why would they want to cast doubt on scientific fact? Because the Koch brothers sell and burn fossil fuels for a living, and they believe protecting our environment is bad for their bottom line.

To protect their bottom line, the Kochs funnel money through a network of nonprofit organizations, foundations, and shell companies. These companies lobby the government, produce fake research reports, and run ad campaigns to manipulate and deceive the American people.

Buying a democracy does not come cheap, but the Koch brothers are not stingy. In 2010, the year Citizens United opened the floodgates for big money in politics, the Kochs spent \$125 million to support Republican candidates who pledged to roll back environmental and consumer protections.

Since the 2010 elections, their influence has grown. They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars supporting candidates who spread lies that climate change is a conspiracy, that immigrants cause crime, and that more money in the Koch brothers’ pocket means more money in yours.

Now, the Koch brothers have big plans for the upcoming 2018 election. They have announced they will spend \$400 million in the upcoming election cycle—their largest midterm election investment yet. Much of that money will be spent directly targeting Latinos through advertisements, events, and workshops.

The Koch brothers think they can buy the Latino vote, just like they bought the votes of the House Freedom Caucus and so many other Republican politicians, but despite what their ads say, the Koch brothers are not advocates for the Latino community. They are advocates for more money in their own pockets, nothing more.

The Koch brothers have supported some of the most anti-immigrant politicians in America, including LOUIE GOHMERT, Mike Pompeo, STEVE KING, Russell Pearce, and Kris Kobach. These are the men responsible for policies like Trump’s Muslim ban and Arizona’s anti-immigrant law, SB 1070.

The Koch brothers support politicians who want to end government funding for Planned Parenthood. If they get their way, Latinas would be hurt the most. More than 23 percent of Planned Parenthood patients are Latinas.

Latinas are more likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer than women in any other racial or ethnic group. Planned Parenthood gives them access to annual screenings so they can stay healthy and cancer-free.

The Koch brothers support school choice, which they say gives Latino families more freedom in how they educate their kids, but school choice vouchers take money out of the public school system, causing many Latino kids whose parents can’t afford private schools to fall behind.