

States. That is what the President of France told us today.

Have the Democrats already forgotten the atrocities we saw in Syria a few weeks ago? It was France and Great Britain that joined the President of the United States in launching airstrikes against Bashar Al-Assad's chemical weapons facilities.

We need to be able to maintain the relationships that allow this kind of action to occur. We need people on the job who can both encourage our allies and deter our enemies. The Senate Democrats have to decide what is more important to them—protecting America's national security or appeasing the extreme liberal, far leftwing of their party.

I understand if there are Senators who have principled reasons for objecting to this nominee or any nominee. They can vote no but not continue to hold up or slow down the process as they have done for a year and a half. I think, if a Senator is against a nominee, then come to the floor; state the objection; cite the evidence; vote no. Yet that is not what many Democrats here are doing with their obstruction of one nominee after another, and it is not what they have done with their obstructions of hundreds of nominees. For them, it doesn't seem, at least to me, to be a principled stand. It seems to be a reckless political stunt.

I listened to my colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee the other evening when we voted on this nomination. I listened to the Democrats speak on the floor and speak to the press. Frankly, I have not heard a single good reason to delay the Senate's consideration of Mike Pompeo to be Secretary of State. The Democrats need to stop the games, stop the delays, allow us to move immediately to vote on his nomination, and get President Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, on the job.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 317

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, Senator McCASKILL and I rise to have an opportunity to pass a bill and for the Senate to do some work on a bill that has been around for several years and just hasn't been able to go over the finish line. We would like to see that finish today.

It is a bipartisan bill with a very straightforward concept. Right now, if any agency head or any sub-Cabinet individual or any individual within the government wants to see what another agency is doing, they have to go to the Office of Management and Budget. They would do a study—and get it back to them—to find out if the program they are doing exists somewhere else.

If any Member of this body or of the House wants to find out about an agency and such straightforward things as how many employees they have, what programs they are doing, if they meas-

ure those programs, how are those programs measured—if we want to find out those very basic things, we have to go to the GAO office to make a request, and 18 months later, we will get an answer back on that specific thing.

This is something that every agency either already has or should have but that the American people can't see, the Congress can't see, and, quite frankly, the individuals within the agencies also cannot see.

This is a straightforward concept. We call it the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act, and it is something Senator McCASKILL and I have worked very hard on. It is something that passed out of the Homeland Security Committee unanimously. This is a bipartisan bill. In fact, to show you how bipartisan it is, this passed in the House of Representatives last session 413 to 0. Not a single House Member voted against this proposal, but it wasn't able to pass in the Senate. So Senator McCASKILL and I brought it up again this year. It came unanimously out of committee; it also has been through the House of Representatives. In January of 2017, it passed unanimously in the House of Representatives again. This is not a controversial piece of legislation.

What is interesting is that Senator McCASKILL and I did a lot of work with President Obama's Office of Management and Budget to make sure there were no concerns. They had some concerns, so we made some changes, and President Obama's Office of Management and Budget signed off on this and said it would be a helpful document.

We have now worked with President Trump's Office of Management and Budget, which also signed off on this proposal and said that this would work.

We went to the Government Accountability Office, the entity we asked to help us find duplication, waste, and inefficiency in government, and in a hearing we asked Gene Dodaro, the head of GAO, a simple question: Would it be a help to have the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act? You have the ability to see all agencies. Would this be a help to you? His exact response:

I would urge the Congress to complete passage of that bill—

meaning the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act—

and send it to the president for signature. I think that it would make a huge difference in identifying overlap, duplication, fragmentation in the federal government and provide a better accountability tool to the Congress and the agencies. It's severely lacking.

That is from the head of the Government Accountability Office, the one we have asked to help us find these things. He is saying that he needs this tool. We need this tool. The agencies need this tool.

President Obama's team signed off on this. President Trump's team has signed off on this. It has passed unanimously out of the House of Representatives.

We bring it to the floor today to ask unanimous consent to move this across the floor of the Senate today, to be able to get in place what President Obama asked for, what President Trump has asked for, what the Government Accountability Office has asked for, what all Members of the House of Representatives have asked for, and what Senator McCASKILL and I are asking for.

With that, I yield to Senator McCASKILL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, I come today to join my colleague from Oklahoma to ask unanimous consent that we take up and pass S. 317, the Taxpayers Right-to-Know Act.

I want to thank Senator LANKFORD for his continued hard work on this bill. Senator LANKFORD has been working on this bill since his days in the House, and I worked hard to move this bill with his predecessor, Senator Tom Coburn, to try to get this through the Senate before he left the Senate. Hopefully, we can get it across the finish line, if not today, in the near future.

American taxpayers deserve a government that can tell them how their money is being spent. This is all this bill is trying to do. It is not complicated. It is trying to get important information to the people who are paying the bills. Don't they have a right to know where all the money is going?

It improves a publicly accessible online database with information about Federal programs, including the funding information for the program and the activities it comprises; the authorizing statutes and relevant rules and regs; the individuals a program serves; the employees who work to administer it; and copies of recent evaluations or assessments provided by the agency, inspectors general, or the Government Accountability Office.

The truth is, much of this information, including the program inventory itself, is already required by the Government Performance and Results Act, or GPRA. It passed this body by unanimous consent in 2010. But the current program inventory under GPRA is a mess. It is virtually useless to help lawmakers understand whether these programs are actually working as intended or whether they are a payroll without a purpose.

This bill adds a few additional information requirements to the program inventory and makes it much easier to compare apples to apples, which is what we need to do when we are making funding decisions.

Senator LANKFORD and I have agreed to a number of changes to this bill, raised not only by President Obama's administration but also President Trump's administration and by leaders in this body. There were some concerns expressed to us that OMB could use the information to punish agencies by holding up rules and holding up budget requests. I have news for everybody.

They can already do that; they have the ability. But just because they can do it now, we have agreed to include a clause which says that nothing in this bill gives OMB any additional authority whatsoever, other than what is needed to comply with the requirements of this bill. I can't imagine anything clearer than that.

We have added caveats to make it easier for programs and agencies to comply with the requirements of this bill.

I have to tell you, this is what drives the American people crazy. Different from private business, somebody around here could have a good idea and we can legislate a new program, but going back and determining whether that program is actually delivering on the goals that were stated and believed in at the time the legislation was passed—we are really not very good at that. That is what this bill is about.

It will give us the tools to require that these programs and agencies at least have information as to whether they are working—how much money they are spending, what they are trying to do. Why are we hiding behind a maddening bureaucracy when we can simplify things with the technology that is available today? Frankly, if we can't defend these programs and justify how we are spending taxpayer money, we should be shutting them down.

I urge my colleagues to commit to and support this good government transparency bill. I am worried that there is an objection. I am disappointed there will be an objection from the leader of my own party. That is disappointing to me, but it doesn't change my commitment that this is the right thing to do.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 43, S. 317; that the committee-reported amendment be withdrawn; that the Lankford substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I certainly have a great deal of respect for my friends from Missouri and Oklahoma and their desire to increase transparency in government. I share that goal. But, respectfully, the legislation they are proposing, I believe, would undermine and potentially threaten important programs administered by the Federal Government.

The idea of requiring the government to publish an inventory of Federal programs is not something I object to. As my friend from Missouri has stated, it is already required under the law, but it is such a cumbersome thing to do that for 7 years they have not published an inventory, not because it is

lacking the provisions in the bill proposed by my colleagues but because it is virtually impossible to do in the way that you would do it in other far more different and simple things—in a factory that makes widgets.

This bill would go further and make it even more difficult to publish the inventory they already haven't been able to publish. Neither the Director of OMB under President Obama nor the Director under President Trump has complied with the existing law.

I further have serious objections with the reporting requirements. How can an agency, for instance—and this would happen on a thousand occasions under this law—quantify the number of individuals who benefit from the Community Development Block Grant Program? If one neighborhood is revitalized, maybe it benefits the neighboring neighborhoods. What if they put that number in, and the OMB Director says: Oh, no. That is all wrong. There is no way to do that.

How about this: Is there a threshold to the number of people that is too many to administer a program that helps disabled Americans get appropriate schooling or access to healthcare? These types of questions could fill volumes and volumes. There is no good answer to them, there is no clear answer to them, and this law will not make it any easier to discern which programs are working and which programs are not.

I have a great deal of worry, particularly, to be honest, with Director Mulvaney. If you saw the budgets that Director Mulvaney has submitted to this Congress—he has eliminated just about every potential program. He is a scourge. He was one of the 10 most conservative Members of the House when he was there. He eliminated programs necessary in my State to keep the Department of Defense going, to help our nuclear weapons stay strong. He zeroed them out; he didn't just cut them. Can you imagine if he got his hands on this? He would use this bill not for the purposes my colleagues intend but to basically hold back money, punish, and in other ways delay very necessary programs that 90 to 95 percent of this Congress agrees to. I am concerned that this legislation, left to the implementation and oversight of a man so hostile to government services up and down the line, whose budgets have been dramatically and repeatedly rejected by Democrats and Republicans alike in the House and the Senate, would be used for ill, not good. The potential downside to this legislation far exceeds the potential upside, dramatically.

I cannot in good conscience support a bill that would give Mr. Mulvaney more tools to slash Federal programs that almost every American would agree serve the public good.

In conclusion, I support the goal of this bill, which is to provide more transparency to taxpayers, but I believe it will not. It will confuse things, delay things, provide more layers of

bureaucracy, not less, and can well be used by someone who believes in slashing programs of all kinds to delay them, fail to implement them, and not deliver the services that so many Americans need. I strongly object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Missouri.

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, Senator SCHUMER is just flat wrong. He is just wrong about this bill. There is nothing in this bill that gives the OMB Director any additional power. There is nothing in this bill that gives him any additional tools to delay or cut programs. In fact, we specifically put that language in at the request of the minority floor leader, that this would give the OMB Director no additional tools.

Frankly, I remember when we were having the discussions under the Obama administration. Many of my Republican colleagues were worried that this would be a way for the Obama administration to somehow have more power than we want them to have.

The bottom line is, we have the power in the legislative body to decide which programs get funded. We are the people who appropriate government funds. Shouldn't the taxpayers and Members of Congress have an easily accessible way to get good information about a program?

By the way, no one is saying that anybody has to draw certain conclusions from the facts that would be on this website. We are only asking that the facts be put on the website. It is not nefarious. There is no plot here. I don't want to hurt CDBG, and neither do all of the House Members who voted for this. Not one Democratic House Member objected to this bill.

So I have to respectfully say that Senator SCHUMER is wrong about this legislation. He is wrong about what it would do. It is the right thing for good government. It is the right thing for transparency. I am going to keep working at it until hopefully we can either convince every Member to let this go by unanimous consent or until we get an opportunity to get a vote on it on the floor, where I am confident it would win by an overwhelming number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. TOOMEY). The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I could not more wholeheartedly agree with my colleague from Missouri.

What is surprising to me is that Senator SCHUMER's objection to the taxpayers right-to-know bill was that the taxpayers would actually find out information that he doesn't want them to find out. That is the surprising part.

I am grateful to be able to get his answer because over the last 6 months, our staff—Senator McCASKILL's and my staff—has worked with his staff every month. We have made 27 changes and 6 revisions over the last 6 months. In the last month, we have gotten radio silence—nothing from Senator SCHUMER's staff. So we finally brought it to

the floor and said “What is the problem?” because we can’t seem to figure out what the problem is. We learn today that the problem is that he doesn’t want the program inventory to be public because if the American people and the Congress and the Office of Management and Budget see the programs, they might actually do things with efficiency. That seems surprising to me, but if you read the transcript, that is what he just said. The fear is that they will actually find out what the Federal Government does in the programs.

Surely that is not his objection. Surely no one in this body would say: I hope the American people and the Office of Management and Budget never find out what the Federal Government does.

Here is what this bill does. The reason we could not have a good listing—Senator SCHUMER mentioned that there is no way to do a list right now—is because there is no definition for a program. The Federal Government has struggled with that simple definition, so this bill fixes that. The reason that inventory doesn’t exist gets solved with this. So literally Senator SCHUMER’s objection as to why we shouldn’t do this is nonsensical.

The second issue with this is the fear of OMB and Mick Mulvaney actually trying to slash programs. OMB and Mick Mulvaney have no authority to take down a program. Congress does that, and Senator SCHUMER knows that better than anyone in this body. While OMB can make recommendations, Congress has to actually vote to act on those recommendations. He can’t just slash programs. He can recommend it. He can say: Here is an issue of inefficiency. It is the exact same as the Obama administration could have done, the exact same as any future administration could do, but Congress must act on that.

It seems exceptionally shortsighted to say: I don’t want the American people to know what the government is doing, because of the current administration and someone I don’t like.

In a few years, there will be a different administration. That may be in 7 years, or that may be in 4 years, but in a few years, there will be a different administration, but this problem will still remain. Agencies can’t see what other agencies are doing, this Congress can’t see what the agencies are doing, and the American people cannot see what the agencies are doing.

I would say that for the benefit of the taxpayers—not the benefit of Washington bureaucracies but for the benefit of the taxpayers—we should allow this information to go public. I hope we can continue to work with Senator SCHUMER’s office, after making 27 changes that his staff recommended, to finish this document.

Yesterday, Senator SCHUMER was caught in the hallway and was asked what the problem is in the Senate, and his response to a reporter was that the

Senate needs more comity. I would agree.

The House approved this unanimously. Our committee approved this unanimously. It has come to the floor and has but one person who believes that the American people should not have access to the information on the programs they pay for.

I would love to see more comity in this body and for us to work this out.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, an opioid epidemic is sweeping the country. More than 60,000 Americans are dying from opioid overdoses every year—more than the number of Americans who died in all 20 years of the Vietnam war. What a staggering fact that is, but behind each number is a tragedy for a family who loses their loved one.

Today, I want to tell the story of the Hacala family from Rogers, AR. It is a story of love, persistence, courage, and, I hope, a story that will save other families from the tragedy they felt.

Betty and Steve Hacala are joining us in the Gallery today. I met Betty and Steve 3 weeks ago at a roundtable on the opioid epidemic in Little Rock with Attorney General Leslie Rutledge, State and local law enforcement, and the families of opioid victims. The news is full of tragic deaths from heroin, fentanyl, and prescription drugs. I met families that day whose children died from those well-known drugs, but I learned from the Hacalas about another killer: unwashed poppy seeds.

Their son, Stephen Junior, died in his sleep from an overdose 2 years ago. Stephen was only 24 years old and was a recent graduate of the University of Arkansas. He loved to play guitar, and he was very accomplished at it. He was the joy of his parents’ life, and he was the joy of his sisters Christina and Lauren’s lives. His sudden death came as a shock to them, but they got another shock when an autopsy determined that Stephen died of morphine intoxication. There were no drugs in his apartment—no pill bottles, no needles, nothing. What had been found was a 5-pound bag of unwashed poppy seeds. Stephen had ordered the seeds on Amazon. The Arkansas crime lab soon determined that the poppy seeds were the source of the morphine that killed Stephen.

Stephen’s death resulted in part because of a dangerous gap in our Nation’s drug laws. It has been well known for ages that poppies are dangerous, both addictive and toxic. That is why it is illegal to grow or own almost any part of the poppy—the straw, the pod, the latex. There is an exception, of course, for poppy seeds, which many people enjoy on bagels, muffins, cakes, and other pastries. The seed itself isn’t addictive, but unwashed seeds tend to still have bits of the plant on them, which can be washed off and used to create a powerful narcotic.

To give a sense of just how deadly poppy seed tea can be, a lethal dose of morphine is about 200 milligrams, but researchers at Sam Houston State University, commissioned by the Hacalas, concluded that there were about 6,000 milligrams of morphine in that 5-pound bag of seeds that Stephen bought. That is over 30 times the lethal dose. Stephen had no way of knowing just how toxic these seeds were.

While there are plenty of legitimate uses for washed poppy seeds, there are no legitimate uses for unwashed seeds. Yet drug dealers and unscrupulous merchants are abusing the legal status of washed seeds to profit and to push unwashed seeds, which are widely available through online retailers. And when you read the user comments, you can easily find instructions for how to brew poppy seed tea and a description of its narcotic effects.

So there is no question of these unwashed seeds being used for grandma’s poppy seed cake; it is plain they are being used to smuggle the banned drug into our homes, and the manufacturers and distributors should know that. And Betty and Steve made sure they did. It is hard to imagine the grief they feel. It would have been easy to despair, but they did not. They want to save other families from their fate, to be sure Stephen’s death would have meaning. They researched the issue, commissioning that report from Sam Houston State and studying the market for unwashed poppy seeds. They also became advocates, meeting with community leaders and elected officials. As I said, I only learned about the danger of unwashed poppy seeds by meeting the Hacalas.

After that meeting, I put in a call to the leadership of Walmart and Amazon, which at the time both allowed unwashed poppy seeds to be sold on their websites. They listened to our case and quickly agreed to stop selling poppy seeds that are labeled as unwashed. This is important. The two behemoths of online commerce agreeing to take down those seeds was a victory and a testament to what normal citizens like Steve and Betty can accomplish.

This is more than a labeling problem. In fact, some of the most potent and deadly seeds, which we know about thanks to the work of Steve and Betty, are not labeled as unwashed and are still available for purchase. Therefore, I will work in the Senate and with the Drug Enforcement Agency to ban unwashed seeds entirely. But today I do want to take a moment to thank Amazon and Walmart for taking an important first step for our country, for our State, and for the Hacalas and families like theirs.

It is always hard to lose a loved one, and a child is the hardest loss of all. I suspect nothing can assuage that kind of grief. But because of the Hacalas’ courage and determination, we can hope that a few more families will be spared it. That is an act of true love for Stephen and for their fellow Americans.