

Choice Act. For the past 3 years, the Veterans Choice Program has connected millions of American heroes with the care and resources they need and so richly deserve. It removed arbitrary barriers that blocked veterans from convenient care, and it sent a clear message to those who have suffered because of a dysfunctional system: We have your back.

But much more work remained. The Veterans Choice Program has allowed over 23,000 Kentucky veterans to seek care in their own communities just last year, but some veterans are still left out. I recently heard from one Kentucky Navy veteran who lives 36 miles from the nearest VA provider. He served aboard an aircraft carrier, the USS *Forrestal*, and sustained a hand injury that still requires regular care.

Under current law, because he lives 36 miles and not 41 miles from that facility, he can't receive covered treatment from a nearby provider who is right in his home community. He has to make a round trip several times a year to receive care. I know virtually all my colleagues have heard stories just like that one, which made it clear that Congress's work was far from finished.

So Chairman ISAKSON and his colleagues took the lead to develop this new legislation, which borrows from 15 different Senate-introduced bills. The victories it contains are numerous. The VA MISSION Act removes those arbitrary time and distance requirements that limit eligibility for outside care. It replaces those one-size-fits-all policies with a conversation between veterans and their own doctors about what works best. This will empower more veterans to access the care they need, when and where they need it.

It also allows VA professionals to offer telemedicine and partner with community care providers, creating a more comprehensive network to keep veterans from falling through the cracks.

It consolidates seven separate community care programs into one streamlined path, and it expands support for military families by broadening the VA comprehensive assistance for family caregivers to include veterans of all generations.

These are just some of the reasons why this bipartisan, bicameral bill has earned the support of 38 veterans advocacy organizations. In a joint letter they call it a "historic opportunity to improve the lives of veterans, their families, and caregivers."

President Trump agrees. So does a large bipartisan majority in the House. After we vote this afternoon, I hope we can say the Senate does as well. Let's pass this worthy legislation and give our veterans more of the support they have earned.

#### NOMINATIONS OF BRIAN MONTGOMERY AND JELENA MCWILLIAMS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, later today we will vote on two more qualified nominees for important positions in the Trump administration.

First comes Brian Montgomery, the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and head of the Federal Housing Administration. His formidable background includes previous service as Federal Housing Commissioner from 2005 to 2009 and as the Acting Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. It is no wonder that our colleagues on the Banking Committee reported his nomination favorably with a bipartisan voice vote. I am glad we can vote to confirm him today without any further delay.

After Mr. Montgomery, we will vote to advance the nomination of Jelena McWilliams, whom the President has chosen to chair the FDIC Board of Directors. Ms. McWilliams' resume spans the government and the private sector. As a lawyer, policy expert, and executive, she has studied financial regulations from all angles. She understands the FDIC's role in safeguarding Americans' holdings, overseeing the banking sector, and reforming inefficient policies that create obstacles for families and job creators.

Ms. McWilliams is especially attentive to the difficulties facing smaller community banks. In her testimony before the Banking Committee, she explained how government regulations inflict oversized compliance costs that can be too much for Main Street lenders to bear.

She was also examined by our colleagues on the Banking Committee and was also reported out by a bipartisan voice vote. I encourage all my colleagues to join me in voting to advance her nomination later today.

#### REGULATORY REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, finally, speaking of community banks, yesterday marked a big step forward for local lenders across the Nation that have been crushed by the regulatory burden of Dodd-Frank. Yesterday afternoon, our colleagues in the House passed the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act, which the Senate had passed earlier this year. Now it will head to President Trump's desk for his signature.

This is the culmination of extensive bipartisan work, led by Senator CRAPO and his colleagues on the Banking Committee, to give smaller community lenders relief from Obama-era overregulation.

I frequently discuss how our Democratic colleagues' top-down policy agenda worked well for a select few but left much of the rest of the Nation be-

hind. This issue is a perfect illustration of that. Our Democratic colleagues produced a hastily written rule book for Wall Street and then forced it on the rest of America, including community banks and credit unions in my State of Kentucky and across the Nation.

These local institutions are vital economic contributors. Their unique ability to build relationships and local connections are why community banks handle a majority of all U.S. small business loans and almost 80 percent of agricultural loans. That is why research suggests that closure of a single physical bank in a low-income neighborhood can reduce lending to nearby businesses by almost 40 percent.

Community banks and communities that depend on them needed relief from Dodd-Frank. They needed sensible reform that streamlined that inefficient, imprecise, one-size-fits-all regulatory approach. Thanks to Chairman CRAPO, our Banking Committee colleagues, Chairman HENSARLING, and our colleagues in the House, that is exactly what this Congress and this President are poised to deliver.

This legislation is a major bipartisan achievement. I am pleased that we are adding it to last year's historic tax reform, our record use of the Congressional Review Act to roll back overregulation, and all the other policy accomplishments that are helping to reignite American prosperity.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

#### WORKPLACE HARASSMENT LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, some good news. As the majority leader noted, Senators KLOBUCHAR and BLUNT have agreed on legislation to overhaul the way Congress handles workplace claims to protect staff and others from harassment. It certainly needed an overhaul. Shamefully, the current system—soon, hopefully, the old system—didn't do enough to protect victims and hold perpetrators of workplace harassment accountable.

Among the other crucial reforms, the Blunt-Klobuchar legislation would do away with mandatory waiting periods that too often discouraged complaints and let them languish. It would also make important changes to ensure that Members of the House and Senate are held personally accountable and

liable if they have committed harassment.

So I want to commend Senators KLOBUCHAR and BLUNT, who worked with many Members, including Senators GILLIBRAND, MURRAY, MCCASKILL, FEINSTEIN, HARRIS, and CORTEZ MASTO, for putting this together. I also thank my colleague, the majority leader. He and I were involved and are both co-sponsors of this legislation. It is an example, again, of the growing sprouts of bipartisanship coming forward in this body. I hope we can pass it quickly, with overwhelming, if not unanimous, support.

#### RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on another matter, this morning, with increasing desperation, President Trump tweeted several inaccuracies about the special counsel's investigation. No one should take the bait. I doubt very few who are looking at this in a non-partisan way will.

The recent demands from President Trump and his allies are just another part of a shameful campaign of harassment, intimidation, and obstruction of the Russia probe. It is all too clear that President Trump and his allies want to change the subject away from the duly constituted investigation into Russia meddling in the 2016 election and toward another fabricated scandal.

It began with conspiracies cooked up by Representative NUNES from "deep state" leaks to unmasking requests, claims of phone taps at Trump Tower, Uranium One, NUNES's midnight run to the White House, and the infamous Nunes memo. Now House conservatives, with the aid of the White House, seem to have successfully badgered DOJ officials into giving them a briefing on sources and methods of an FBI investigation. That is unprecedented and so very wrong.

Everyone knows what they are doing. They are hunting desperately for any scrap of information or innuendo that might help them sully the investigation or provide them a sneak peek at any evidence the FBI may have against the Trump campaign. If they have to distort and spread falsehoods about what is revealed in any meeting, they will, and for the President of the United States to pressure the Justice Department to reveal details and documents pertaining to an active investigation of the President's campaign for the purpose of denigrating it is a gross and unprecedented abuse of power, unlike any we have seen in a very long time. That is why so many people don't trust this President.

The only thing more outrageous than this meeting occurring at all is the fact that it is partisan. It is crystal clear that Representative NUNES intends to interfere with the investigation. He is not a down-the-middle investigator looking for truth. Everyone has seen that. NUNES gave up any pretense of objectivity long ago in that ridiculous,

late-night charade to the White House. Shamefully, someone I respect and someone I like, Speaker RYAN, is allowing this to happen. It will forever be a blot on his record. He can't be so afraid of the hard right and the President that he would allow this kind of "banana republic" behavior to go forward, and that is what NUNES is doing.

Regrettably, a few of my Senate colleagues seem to be allowing it to happen as well. Yesterday, I saw that a few of my friends on the other side sent a letter requesting to attend the meeting and supporting it but making no mention of the fact that not a single Democrat was invited.

My Republican friends know we have a process for dealing with the highly sensitive information of this type. It is called the Gang of 8. It is bipartisan. It has worked well. Any meeting between the Justice Department and Capitol Hill about such information should only be attended by Members of the Gang of 8.

So this morning, Leader PELOSI and I are sending a letter to Attorney General Rosenstein and Director Wray to request they reconsider holding the meeting at all and, if they move forward, to do so in a bipartisan fashion with the Gang of 8. If the meeting goes forward as planned right now—only partisan, only the worst actors on the House side in the room—no one should trust anything they say coming out of that meeting. It will be a sham. It will be a sham.

In our letter, we remind Attorney General Rosenstein and Director Wray they have a higher responsibility. I know they are being pushed around by the White House and by the White House's puppets like Congressman NUNES, but they must resist for the grand tradition of impartial justice under the law that has been in the veins of this country, in the bones of this country since 1789. To let this happen is disgraceful, and the blame really falls on the President and his puppets like, unfortunately, Chairman NUNES and some of the others who seem to be going along with him.

One other thing I might say though that I think should give Americans some solace is, I do not believe for one second that Special Counsel Mueller will be deterred. All this sideshow, all this attempt to discredit him and his investigation with all kinds of frivolous, silly, and often false statements and activities will not deter Mueller. The American people have the utmost confidence in him. He is a strong man. He is a quiet man. He happens to be a Republican appointed by the President's own appointees—hardly some nefarious representative who came out of nowhere from the deep state.

Mueller is going to go right ahead and see this investigation through to its natural conclusion. He will follow the facts where they lead. Americans will have confidence that if he finds something, it is real and, if he doesn't, he is not whitewashing a thing. That is

how he has gone about the investigation so far. It has resulted in dozens of indictments, several guilty pleas of top Trump campaign officials. When the President derogates Mueller and the investigation, he doesn't speak of any facts or knowledge; it is just wild allegations of something thrashing about, maybe because he realizes there might be something there. Who knows?

Special Counsel Mueller is a serious, quiet, diligent man, a lifelong Republican, a dedicated marine, universally respected. The American people can be assured that his investigation will not be blown off course by this hurricane of rightwing lies and intimidation coming from the President and his minions.

One final point on this topic, with several of his recent claims, it is clear President Trump lacks self-awareness. President Trump continues to peddle the myth that a deep state bias against his Presidency is driving the Russia probe, despite the fact that an active FBI investigation into his campaign was kept secret during his election while his opponent's was made public. If there was a deep state trying to hurt someone, they did a lot more to hurt Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump during the campaign. Everyone knows that. If the deep state were truly out to get President Trump, they would have made the active FBI investigation into his campaign's shady dealings with Russia a matter for the public record while he was running. This same lack of awareness—maybe hypocrisy—is apparent when the President reportedly uses an unsecured cell phone for some of his communications. Can you believe that after all the hay Donald Trump and his allies made about Secretary Clinton's handling of sensitive information, that the President—once in office—uses an unsecured cell phone, despite the fact that so many around him have told him that might be dangerous? It is bad for our national security, and his double standard is nothing short of outrageous.

#### GAS PRICES

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, gas prices. Few things matter more to the average consumer than the price of a gallon of gasoline. When gas prices go through the roof, it eats away at a family's income, leaving less to cover the cost of anything else—groceries, medicine, tuition, a nice summer vacation, which families cherish. Recent data suggests that gas prices are about to climb even higher this summer, and experts suggest that actions and inactions on the part of the Trump administration are a major piece of that story.

According to energy analysts and experts, President Trump's decision to pull out of the Iran deal led to higher oil prices. OPEC has decided to cut production, also raising prices. Even though President Trump tweeted that OPEC's decision "will not be accepted," the American people are still