of merger settlements. A question for modern enforcement is whether some proposed mergers are simply too big to fix. Agencies can make better enforcement decisions if they understand what has worked in the past.

So my bill gives the agencies the tools to assess whether merger consent decrees have in fact been successful. Have all those promises we hear at the hearings or we see in writing or we read about in the business pages really come to fruition?

In addition, we need a better understanding of the effects of market consolidation on our economy. That is why we need to study the effects of mergers on wages, employment, innovation, and new business formation. We also must give our antitrust agencies and courts the legal tools necessary to protect competition.

That is why my second bill, the Consolidation Prevention and Competition Promotion Act, would restore the Clayton Act's original purpose of promoting competition by updating our legal standards so our legal standards are as sophisticated as the companies that are proposing these mergers and the kinds of mergers they are proposing.

My bill clarifies that we can prevent mergers that reduce choice, foreclose competition through vertical consolidation, stifle innovation, or create monopsony. OK, that is a great word you would hear in law school classrooms, but what does it mean? Well, it means where a buyer has the power to reduce wages or prices.

It also creates a more stringent legal standard to stop harmful consolidation and shifts the burden for megamergers so the parties involved in the deal have to prove the merger does not harm competition. So what we are talking about here is when a big company buys another and then has that power to make it so that the other competitors aren't really going to be able to compete with the company that they bought, because this huge company might have the ability to bring down prices or do things temporarily to the point that they get other people out of the market or they hurt the others to the extent that you then don't have real competition, and that is what they are doing.

Let me be clear. Big by itself is not necessarily bad, and large mergers do not always harm consumers. My home State of Minnesota now has 19 Fortune 500 companies, and we all benefit from the fact that the largest and most successful companies in the world are American companies.

If we want the success to continue, our new businesses must have the same opportunities to grow as the businesses that came before them. Target, one of my favorite companies based in my State, started as a dry goods store in a small pedestrian mall that is now a big one in Minnesota, way, way back. That is a true story. And 3M, a big company out of my State, started as a sandpaper company. OK, so we have to make sure these small companies continue to grow and are able to compete, but that is not going to happen if we shove them out.

Our new businesses must have those same opportunities. Promoting competition and preventing excessive industry consolidation is the way we encourage this country's next big idea. Take Trader Joe's, JetBlue, and Starbucks. These companies started small, but they were able to get a foothold in the market and succeed because our antitrust laws prevented large, established competitors from limiting their growth. As a result, the American people get better products and services.

These bills will simply ensure that the next American business success story is possible. They will allow entrepreneurs and innovators to succeed in open, competitive markets.

We can do this, and we should do this. It doesn't take a miracle. It just takes people acknowledging what has made our economy strong in America. Antitrust law and policy are not always front and center in our debates, but they should be. The proposals in these bills will improve the lives of businesses and people across the country.

Protecting competition speaks to the basic principles of opportunity and fairness. It speaks to the simple notion that companies with the best ideas and the most innovative products will have a chance to rise to the top based on their own merits, and the reality is that these principles are at risk. We are currently experiencing a dramatic increase in both the number and size of mergers. As our markets and technologies evolve, our agencies and courts are less able to address this increased concentration and the really big guys like it that way.

That is why we have to stand up in this Chamber for the American people. We cannot wait any longer. We need vigorous antitrust enforcement. We need to improve the tools and the resources that those who are trying, at least, to put a modicum of enforcement in place are able to exercise. Our economy depends on it.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

SECURE ELECTIONS

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, the right to vote is one of the most precious rights we have here in America. How we protect it is so cherished, and it is also cherished by peoples all over the world who don't get a chance to exercise that right. Our constitutional foundation is built on a process of free, fair, and unfettered elections.

Well, what happened in this country 2 years ago put a crack in that foundation, and it started to sow the seeds of doubt that, if gone unchecked, could undermine our entire democracy. After painstaking analyses by the intelligence community, which are in complete agreement—unanimous in the IC—we know that Russia interfered in our 2016 election. We know that Russia continues to meddle in the elections of not only our country now but in other countries around the world. We saw that in the elections in Europe last year. Fortunately, what they tried in France backfired on them, and they didn't get their candidate to win. We also know that if we don't act now, they are likely going to continue this interference in the elections here in this country that are coming up in just a few months.

The threat that we face today from Russia's meddling in our elections and attempting to undermine our democracy is really one of the greatest threats we face. Congress recognizes this threat, and we have taken action to protect that vote. But none of it matters if respective States will not work with us and take this threat seriously.

So last March we passed a bill that authorized $380 million to help State elections officials strengthen their elections security and update their elections equipment. Now, of the total of $380 million for the country, $19 million of it was set aside for my State, the State of Florida. While at least a dozen other States have applied for and received funding to help them protect their systems from Russian intrusion, my State of Florida hasn't even applied for one single dollar of the $19 million set aside for Florida—not one.

In fact, the government of Florida through Florida's secretary of State said recently that it is not planning to apply for any funding to improve security during the upcoming November election. Obviously, when you consider the risk and what Russia did, which the intelligence community all agree was done to us in the last election, why in the world would the State of Florida not apply for any of the $19 million set aside for our State? We know that Russia had intruded into the election mechanism and records of 21 States, and the State of Florida was one of those States.

Although we don't know what kind of interference the Russians are going to try in the upcoming November elections, we do know that Russian President Vladimir Putin—having interfered in 2016 and causing so much chaos and, therefore, attacking the very foundation of our constitutional democracy—is likely to do it again. So why wouldn't the government of the State of Florida apply for $19 million of funds set aside for Florida to upgrade and protect our election system?

We know we are not the only country that has been attacked and, according to the U.S. intelligence community, he obviously is going to continue this type of behavior. So we better get ready.

That is why we have such a heavy responsibility to defend America from these types of attacks and to defend our process of free, fair, and unfettered elections. We need to rebuild trust in our elections, and at the same time we

need to ensure that every citizen who wishes to exercise their right to vote is able to do so. It also can be counted, and it can be counted as they intended it to count.

Remember this goes back to 1965. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to protect the right of every citizen to vote. But in a 5-to-4 Supreme Court decision, it declared that part of that law was outdated, and it removed much needed voter protections that we have come to rely on for minorities, and we have come to rely on them for the last half century.

Part of this Supreme Court decision struck down part of the law as it applied to protecting minorities in certain counties in the State of Florida. The Justices voted to strike down that important part of the Voting Rights Act on a 5-to-4 decision. They said that it was outdated because we no longer have the blatant voter suppression tactics we once did years and decades ago.

I disagree. We have seen a lot of voter suppression. Since the 2010 election, we have seen a number of States, including my State of Florida, approve voting restrictions targeted directly at reducing turnout among young, low-income, and minority voters. Why? Because they traditionally support one particular party.

In 2011, for example, the Florida legislature, State officials, and the Governor of Florida reduced the number of early voting days in Florida, including canceling the Sunday before the Tuesday election as an early-voting date. It is not a coincidence that there was use of early-voting days, particularly on weekends—particularly on that Sunday before the Tuesday election, where people become sensitive and recognize that there is about to be an election day. We have found that particularly minority voters in Florida—African Americans, as well as Hispanics—would take advantage of voting when they did not have to go to work. You have heard the term ''Souls to the Polls.'' So often, after church on Sunday, many church members would go to the polls.

They made voting more difficult for people who had moved to a different county. It became more difficult, even though we have a very mobile population moving within a State. They also made it more difficult for young people, particularly college students, who changed their address because they had moved and wanted to vote in the town where the university was, but their identification often was their driver's license, which showed their parents' residence. Again, this made it more difficult instead of making it easier to vote.

The State of Florida subjected voter registration groups like the League of Women Voters, which had been registering voters for three-quarters of a century—suddenly, they were subjected to penalties and fines if they didn't return the signatures in a short period of time, which was impossible if they got the signatures over a weekend. And they would nitpick with penalties and fines on some small mistake when they were trying to help someone register to vote. Happily, the League of Women Voters went to Federal court, and the Federal judge threw that law out as unconstitutional. But that decision was right before the election, and lo and behold, the League of Women Voters had lost a year and a half of voter registration.

You won't believe this. In 2014, an elections official in Miami-Dade—which was, coincidentally, one of the more Democratic counties in the State—closed restrooms to voters who were waiting in line at the polling sites. As a matter of fact, there was so much chaos in one previous election—the election of 2012—that lines were upward of 7 hours long.

I will never forget the woman who was a century old—100 years. Everybody kept bringing her a chair and bringing her water. Well, some of those waiting in lines didn't have the opportunity to go to the restroom, despite waiting to vote for hours and hours.

In that same election cycle, 2014, the State's top elections official told a local election supervisor not to allow voters to submit absentee ballots at remote drop-off sites, ordering that elections official that there could be only one site. That supervisor of elections, by the way, told the State of Florida to go take a hike—that they had a way of securing the ballots by dropping them in several different sites that were formerly approved.

Then the State of Florida denied a request from the city of Gainesville to use a University of Florida campus building for early voting, a move seen by some as a direct assault on student voting. Can you believe that? The State of Florida government, through the Secretary of the State, is going to order the University of Florida not to allow the student center on campus to be a place of convenience for students to cast an early vote. That order has stood. It has stood, and instead of making it easier for people to vote, it has made it harder. All too often, we have let these things go.

This Senator is not letting it go because the League of Women Voters in Florida has now taken the government of the State of Florida to Federal court on behalf of students at the University of Florida, as well as Florida State, saying: You are arbitrarily saying that we cannot vote in a convenient place on campus, in a government-owned public building on campus. You cannot order that we cannot use that in anticipation of elections this coming November.

Too often we find ourselves divided on these issues of party politics, but that shouldn't be the case. There should be no disagreement when it comes to protecting the right to vote and making it easier, not harder, for people to vote. Why? Because we ought to be Americans first, not partisans first. We should be Americans first, and the State of Florida should get its act in order to let the people vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

VA MISSION BILL

Mr. ISAKSON. Madam President, I am delighted to stand today, shoulder to shoulder with all my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committees in the House and the Senate, to thank the Senate for a very strong vote on cloture yesterday to take us to a point today where we will pass the VA MISSION Act, which is this legislative body fulfilling a promise to those who fought and sacrificed for each of us to be here today—our families and loved ones as well.

For years, there have been problems in the VA in terms of healthcare. You read the headlines. I read them, too, and our constituents read them. In Arizona, we had veterans who died waiting to get a routine appointment. We had scheduling errors. People were getting bonuses for scheduling things they had falsified. We had a lot of things that were disappointing to all of us. We worked hard in the Veterans Affairs Committee in the House and Senate to address these tough issues head-on and fix them so that the VA would be the best functioning health delivery system it could possibly be for the people who were willing to risk their lives for each of us when they joined the military.

I think it is appropriate that we are doing this the week before Memorial Day. Next Monday, we will celebrate all of those who, in all the wars that preceded the fight we have today, represented our country, volunteered unselfishly, fought, and in some cases died for America's peace, freedom, liberty, and the perpetuation of our democracy.

One promise we made to them was that they would have good quality healthcare, and it would be successful. Four years ago, with the leadership of JOHN MCCAIN, we started the movement toward Veterans Choice. We passed a good bill with a 40-mile rule and a 30-day rule. The 40-mile rule said that if you live within 40 miles of a VA clinic or service, you can go to a closer clinic in the private sector, as long as it is approved by the VA. The 30-day rule said that if you couldn't get an appointment for a routine medical service in 30 days, you could get an appointment in the private sector, and the VA would approve it. But the labyrinth of the approval process for that 30-day appointment or that 40-mile access made it almost impossible for the veteran, in many cases, to get access that is as timely as we would like it to be.

It was a good start. It was an improvement in our process. It addressed the problem—but not well enough. We learned enough as a test bed to know that veterans liked Choice, as long as it was not so cumbersome that they couldn't use it. The VA liked Choice, as