

things have changed. But we can't change until we pass a budget bill. That, too, is facing a January 19 deadline. Again, it will require 60 votes.

Here are two major issues—the caps on spending and the budget for our government, which need to be passed by January 19 on a bipartisan basis. It is time to come together and face not only those two overarching issues but the long litany of issues that Senator SCHUMER, the Democratic leader, raised in his opening remarks.

There are so many other elements—the Children's Health Insurance Program, affecting tens of thousands of kids in my State of Illinois. They told me when I was home: Senator, we are running out of money to provide basic medical care for kids across America. Why haven't you done your job to reauthorize this program, as well as the program for community care clinics? These clinics are critically important for healthcare for thousands of families in my State and across the Nation.

There is one more issue that I am going to raise, as I have so many times, standing in this particular place on the floor, and that is the Dream Act. The DREAM Act is a bill I introduced 16 years ago to give young people brought to the United States as infants and toddlers and children—they have grown up in this country, have no serious criminal issue they have been involved in, and have graduated from our schools—a chance for a future in America, the only country they have ever known. They are the Dreamers.

President Obama gave them a chance with an Executive order called DACA. He said: You can come forward, submit a \$500 filing fee, go through a criminal background check, and we may give you—it is our decision—2 years of temporary protection to stay in this country. You can work in this country, stay here without fear of deportation on a 2-year basis. So 780,000 young people stepped forward and did that and were approved. Now they are working across America, and 900 of them serve in the U.S. military. They are undocumented by legal standards, but they have sworn their loyalty to this country and are willing to die for this country. What more could we ask of a young person to prove their loyalty to that flag and to this Nation? Nine hundred of them are now protected by DACA.

Then President Trump announced on September 5 of last year that he was going to eliminate that program, eliminate that protection as of March 5 of this year. The clock is ticking; the days on the calendar are turning. There are 900 in our military; 20,000 are teachers across America in grade schools, elementary schools, and high schools—at all levels—and 20,000 of them protected by DACA will lose their ability to teach starting on March 5 of this year because of President Trump's decision and his announcement.

He challenged us. He said: Look, I don't like this Executive order by the previous President; now pass a law. Pass a law and do something about it.

He asked us to do that months ago, and we have done nothing—nothing. I believe that by January 19, we need to take this up as one of the critical issues on our agenda. It is absolutely essential.

Let me add as well that this President has been critical of immigration. I couldn't disagree with him more. He has taken an approach toward immigration that I believe denies the very basis and foundation of this great Nation.

I have said it before, and I say it with pride: I stand here on the floor of the U.S. Senate representing the great State of Illinois, the son of an immigrant to this country. My mother was brought here at the age of 2—she was a Dreamer in her era—and she grew up in America, raised a family, and had a son who was sworn in to the U.S. Senate. She lived long enough to see that. That is my story. That is my family's story. That is America's story. Sometimes I wonder if the President has heard that story or paid attention to it.

Immigration has been at the heart of who we are as Americans. The diversity of this great country, when it has come together in citizenship, has been a force to be reckoned with around the world throughout history. I still believe that as much this day as I have ever believed it.

I may not be able to convince the President, but President Obama and others did plead with him to think about these young people, these Dreamers, those protected by DACA. Do you know what President Trump said about the Dreamers? Do you know what he said in one of his famous—sometimes infamous—tweets? He said we should “show great heart.” “Show great heart,” President Trump said, to these young people.

That is why I am here today making this statement on the floor—it is not a long speech; I have spoken many times in the past—to plead with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, in this closely divided Senate, to get this job done before January 19—not just for the 780,000 who took advantage of President Obama's Executive order but for those who were eligible and afraid. There were many thousands who were eligible for this program but afraid to sign up for it, to turn themselves in to the government, and they held back. They are eligible. There is nothing to disqualify them otherwise. Let's give them the same opportunity to be part of the future of this great Nation. That is what I believe we can do and should do.

There are 49 Democrats and 51 Republicans—carefully divided. Can enough of us meet in that aisle to create a real majority, a bipartisan majority, to solve this? I am convinced we can, as Senator SCHUMER said earlier. Our Acting President pro tempore has weighed in on it, and I thank him for his efforts, his personal efforts, on this issue. We have had long meetings. Sometimes we agreed, sometimes we

didn't agree, but that is the nature of the Senate, the nature of compromise, and the nature of a process that the American people are begging us, Democrats and Republicans, to engage in, in a positive way by January 19 of this month.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, before the Democratic whip leaves the Chamber, I want to thank him for his leadership, his perspicacity, his determination on the issue of the Dreamers.

It is this Senator's hope that come January 19, when so many issues that were outlined by the Democratic leader all come to a head and have to be decided in order for the Government of the United States to stay open, that one of the issues that will be addressed will be allowing the Dreamers to stay in this country legally, the only country they have ever known. So many of us are grateful for Senator DURBIN's leadership on this issue.

We hope that in the spirit of unity, which has escaped this Capitol of the United States—that suddenly there will be a spirit of unity to do the right thing in a bipartisan way and that we will be joined by our colleagues on the other side of the aisle—now down to 51, as Senator DURBIN has pointed out. This should not be a partisan issue; this should be an issue of right or wrong for the Dreamers to be able to stay in the country that they know as their home.

I thank Senator DURBIN.

NET NEUTRALITY

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I would like to speak about net neutrality. If you don't know what that means, you really do when prompted because it means that when you turn on your phone, you go on the internet and you decide what you want to see, and what you want to see—or hear in the case of video—you have the right to have that access and to have it as speedily as any other content that is offered on the internet.

Entrepreneurs who are working out of the garage of their family home and who have a new idea and suddenly want to get it on the internet—because they are financially impaired since they are just starting out, they should have an opportunity, just as the big boys do, to get their ideas on the internet.

Within the obvious boundaries of what is appropriate in language, et cetera, you have a right to get the content that you want and to get that content unimpeded on these tablets we carry around in our pockets. That right to get that content is threatened, and it is threatened because the Federal Communications Commission, on a partisan vote of 3 to 2, has completely overturned the previous rules that had been set on a partisan vote the other way of 3 to 2.

At the end of the day, what it means is that those of us in this Chamber, led

off first by the Commerce Committee, are going to need a legislative solution, but in the meantime, chaos has been thrown into the system. Now, as a result of the previous year's rules having been completely reversed, they are going to be all tangled up in Federal court, and we are going to go on and on and have this fight.

What I want to call to the attention of the Senate today is that in the process of the new rulemaking that resulted in this 3-to-2 vote that has upended everything—the process itself was flawed.

Now, mind you, on net neutrality, the public has no ambiguity on this, as reported by the Wall Street Journal, as reported by MSNBC.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Wall Street Journal article from December 13, 2017, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[December 13, 2017]

WSJ—FAKE COMMENTS HIT RULE MAKING—PHONY SUBMISSIONS TARGET NET NEUTRALITY
(By James V. Grimaldi and Paul Overberg)

A comment posted on the Federal Communications Commission's public docket endorses a Trump-administration plan to repeal a "net neutrality" policy requiring internet providers to treat all web traffic the same.

Calling the old Obama-era policy an "exploitation of the open Internet," the comment was posted on June 2 by Donna Duthie of Lake Bluff, Ill.

It's a fake. Ms. Duthie died 12 years ago.

The Wall Street Journal has uncovered thousands of other fraudulent comments on regulatory dockets at federal agencies, some using what appear to be stolen identities posted by computers programmed to pile comments onto the dockets.

Reports earlier this year of fraudulent comments on the FCC docket prompted the Journal to investigate the phenomenon there and at other federal agencies. After sending surveys to nearly 1 million people—predominantly from the FCC docket—the Journal found a much wider problem than previously reported, including nearly 7,800 people who told the Journal comments posted on federal dockets in their names were fakes.

The Journal found instances of fakes that favored antiregulation stances but also comments mirroring consumer-groups' pro-regulation talking points, posted without permission of people whose names were on them.

Such distortions, often unknown even to the agencies involved, cut against an important element of democracy, the public's ability to participate in federal rule-making. The public-comment process, mandated by law, can influence outcomes of regulations affecting millions.

It is a federal felony to knowingly make false, fictitious or fraudulent statements to a U.S. agency.

The scope of the fake comments is evident on the FCC website in 818,000 identical postings backing its new internet policy. The agency is expected on Thursday to roll back President Barack Obama's 2015 rules, which telecommunication companies have called onerous. Consumer groups and Internet giants such as Alphabet Inc.'s Google and Facebook Inc. back the Obama rules and have fought efforts by FCC Chairman Ajit Pai to nix them.

In a random sample of 2,757 people whose emails were used to post those 818,000 comments, 72% said they had nothing to do with them, according to a survey the Journal conducted with research firm Mercury Analytics.

"It makes me feel like our democracy is broken," said Jack Hirsch, chief executive of software startup Butter.ai, who learned from the Journal his name was on a fake submission supporting the Trump-administration position, which he opposes, saying it would harm his San Francisco firm.

Agencies generally accept public comments via email, mail or hand delivery. Some let people post directly onto their websites. Some require registration first or collect comments and then publicly post them later.

The Journal heard from people reporting fraudulent postings under their names and email addresses at the FCC, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and Securities and Exchange Commission.

One 369-word comment supporting the Obama-era net-neutrality rules was posted on the FCC website more than 300,000 times. One of those was attributed to Gloria Burney, 87, a retired speech therapist in Los Angeles. She isn't in favor of repealing those rules, she said, "but I never wrote that."

A comment from "Elzor The Blarghmaster" at 9632 Elm Road, Maywood, Ill., was among the 818,000 identical FCC comments backing the Trump policy. No such address could be found, said Jimmie Thompson, a U.S. Postal Service carrier in Maywood.

Comments filed with the SEC on the proposed sale of the Chicago Stock Exchange include one submitted by "Jason Blake, commentator, The Wall Street Journal." The Journal has had no employee by that name, Journal spokesman Steve Severinghaus said.

The SEC said it removed the comment. Asked what it does to verify commenters' identities, the SEC said letters not attributable to known people or entities "are assessed during the course of the rule-making process."

CFPB spokesman John Czwartacki said: "Director [Mick] Mulvaney is concerned about any inauthentic data that comes to the Bureau. We intend to look into this matter further." An agency official said the bureau doesn't verify each comment and doesn't require commenters to submit the type of information that might assist in authenticating their comments.

FERC spokeswoman Mary O'Driscoll, asked what the agency does to verify commenters' identities, said: "If someone believes that they have been misrepresented in comments filed with us, they should contact us to let us know."

FCC spokesman Brian Hart said questionable comments on its net-neutrality rule included some "submitted in the name of Superman and Batman, among others. These comments, however, are generally not substantive so thus have no impact on a rule-making." Asked what the FCC does to verify identities, he said: "We err on the side of keeping the public record open and do not have the resources to investigate every comment that is filed."

Under the Administrative Procedure Act, agencies must take comments under consideration but needn't pay heed to them. The impact often comes afterward, when the regulated parties appeal to the next administration, the courts or Congress, which can alter a rule or slow its implementation. Failure to consider comments has become a factor in litigation, with judges sometimes forcing an agency to address comments it ignored.

"Astroturf lobbying"—typically when an interest group gins up support from individ-

uals and characterizes it as a grass-roots movement—has been around Washington for decades.

Agencies were already swamped with comments from these mass emailings of duplicate comments, which aren't considered fraud if groups submitting them have authorization from individuals named. The CFPB last year had such a hard time managing the 1.4 million comments on its payday-lending rule that it fired one contractor and hired a new one to process them, according to internal emails released under the Freedom of Information Act.

As with many agencies, the CFPB opts not to put many of the duplicative comments online. It posted 200,000 "unique" comments out of the 1.4 million on its payday-lending proposal.

But postings the Journal uncovered went beyond being merely duplicative. They included comments from stolen email addresses, defunct email accounts and people who unwittingly gave permission for their comments to be posted. Hundreds of identities on fake comments were found in an online catalog of hacks and breaches.

While many fakes were anti-regulatory, the Journal also found pro-regulatory comments on the FCC and FERC websites where people said they didn't post them. In most of those cases, the people surveyed said they agreed with the comments, indicating that while they didn't authorize them, a group or individual might have had their names in a list of like-minded people, possibly from the organization posting it. Some of these people said they were angry that someone who had access to their email address would post it, even though they agreed.

The largest number of comments the Journal confirmed as phony were to the FCC, one of few agencies to routinely post email addresses with comments. Its net-neutrality rule has generated 23 million comments.

Suspicions of fakery in net-neutrality comments emerged in May, when thousands of emails poured into the FCC after HBO's "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" urged viewers to support the Obama policy. They were followed by thousands backing repeal.

Chicago programmer Chris Sinchok said he spotted a sharp increase in comments that began: "The unprecedented regulatory power the Obama administration imposed on the internet is smothering innovation."

He found a near-constant rate—1,000 every 10 minutes—punctuated by periods of zero comments, as if web robots were turning on and off. He determined many were from hacked accounts.

After Mr. Sinchok and a pro-net-neutrality group, Fight for the Future, blogged that they found indications thousands of FCC comments might be fakes using stolen identities, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman in May began a criminal investigation.

The Journal examined those "unprecedented regulatory power" comments. Duplicates of it exceeded any other comment, according to Quid Inc., a San Francisco tech firm that analyzes massive amounts of content and studied the data at the Journal's request.

The comment has been posted on the FCC website more than 818,000 times. The Journal sent surveys to 531,000 email accounts associated with that comment. More than 7,000 bounced back, the accounts defunct. Of the 2,757 who responded, 1,994, or 72%, said the comment was falsely submitted. The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 1.86% points.

The survey's results are "a very significant indication of fraud," Mercury Analytics CEO Ron Howard said. "Generating tens and

sometimes hundreds of thousands of fake posts on public comment websites for the purpose of swaying public opinion and impacting the opinions of political decision makers is wide-scale," he said, "not limited to a party, not limited to an issue."

Though a majority of those who responded agreed with the comments attributed to them, many were alarmed their identities had been misappropriated.

"How the hell is this possible ??????" Jessica Lints of Blossvale, N.Y., wrote the Journal. "And if these people are so damn concerned about this issue that I know nothing about why are they not using their own names?" Mrs. Lints, an assistant Boy Scout scoutmaster, said she is careful about not expressing political opinions.

The Journal also examined 2.8 million of the 23 million comments in four clusters and sent surveys to 956,000 of those addresses—including the 531,000 sent to the "unprecedented regulatory power" commenters—seeking to verify the people made the comments.

Based on the responses, three batches expressing anti-regulatory viewpoints were 63%, 72% and 80% bogus comments. The fourth set, in favor of the old rules, was 32% bogus.

Mr. Hart, the FCC spokesman, said the "most suspicious activity has been by those supporting Internet regulation." He said the FCC received more than 7.5 million comments consisting of the same short-form letter supporting the current rules, "all generated by a single fake e-mail generator website." He said the FCC received more than 400,000 comments supporting the old rules "from the same address in Russia."

A review of the FCC comments by data-analytics firm Emprata determined that 36% of the docket, 7.75 million comments, were attributable to FakeMailGenerator.com, a site that generates one-time emails and can't receive emails. The analysis was commissioned by a group of telecommunications firms that support the Trump-administration proposal.

These contained nearly identical comments, virtually all opposing the proposal, Emprata said. Emprata CEO Paul Salaszyk said "our analysis was conducted in an independent fashion." Efforts to locate FakeMailGenerator.com representatives weren't successful.

Reports of the fake FCC comments have led some lawmakers to demand probes. After Fight for the Future said it found about 24 people saying they hadn't posted the "unprecedented regulatory power" comment, Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. of New Jersey asked the Justice Department to investigate those comments as criminal acts.

The Justice Department hasn't responded to the request, Mr. Pallone's spokesman said. Justice spokeswoman Lauren Ehrsam confirmed the letter was received, declining to comment further. Mr. Pallone and 10 other members last week wrote the Government Accountability Office seeking an investigation. The GAO said it already had plans next year to begin examining the FCC's information-security controls, including over internet comments.

It is difficult to determine who is behind phony comments. The Journal found clues in data embedded in online documents, which showed more than 4,000 fake comments had been submitted to the CFPB through IssueHound, a Richmond, Va., firm. It charges interest groups to use its software and create websites to gather hundreds and thousands of like-minded people to write unique comments or send pre-written statements to lawmakers and regulators. Its website says it "randomly selects related paragraphs and generates unique letters."

Jay Thomas Smith, an IssueHound spokesman, said clients "use our program because it affords greater flexibility for letter-writers, more accurately expressing the writer's views on an issue," adding that the software "requires human input." He declined to comment on CFPB-rule work.

IssueHound played a role in anomalies the Journal found on the CFPB's site seeking comment on its proposal to tighten payday-lending rules, set to take effect July 2019.

Quid reviewed the 200,000 "unique" comments the CFPB posted on its payday-lending proposal. They weren't entirely unique. More than 100 sentences opposing the payday rule each appeared within more than 350 different comments.

This sentence was embedded in 492 comments: "I sometimes wondered how I would be able to pay for my high power bill, especially in the hot summer and cold winters."

The Journal emailed about 13,000 surveys to those posting comments to the CFPB site. About 120 completed surveys. Four out of 10 said they didn't send the comment associated with them. These comments opposed the new regulations.

Ashley Marie Mireles, 26, said she didn't write the comment posted on the CFPB's website under her name but had clues how it got there. Her former employer, payday lender California Check Cashing Stores, told branch personnel in Clovis, Calif., to fill out an online survey after too few customers did, she said. In the survey, she said she received a payday loan for "car bills." She had borrowed \$50 to patch a tire.

On July 8, 2016, a 217-word comment with Ms. Mireles's name and email was sent to the CFPB, reading, in part: "I had no idea the bill would be as expensive as it was after I took my car to the shop. To help me pay for everything, I went to get a cash loan." Untrue, she said. Her family owns an auto shop where she doesn't pay.

Bridgette Roman, spokeswoman for California Check Cashing, denied Ms. Mireles' account, saying customers were offered a computer that walked them through creation of "a customized comment" on the rule and were told it would be submitted to the CFPB. "The former employee was mistaken or confused."

Ms. Mireles's comment showed it originated from IssueHound and TelltheCFPB.com, a site used by a payday-lending trade group.

The trade group, Community Financial Services Association of America, used IssueHound and TelltheCFPB.com to send comments on the payday-lending rule, said Dennis Shaul, the group's CEO. Told of the Journal findings, he said: "We cannot begin to speculate as to why that is." He said he had asked member lenders not to use coercion or gimmicks in the campaign and that they generated tens of thousands of handwritten notes. "I'm very disappointed to hear this, and it is not at all the outcome we expected."

IssueHound's Mr. Smith said: "There is little more I can say about the letters as we simply license the platform."

The late Ms. Duthie's phony comment was among copy-and-paste-style comments that dominate the FCC docket.

One under Ms. Duthie's name was submitted with the email address of her ex-husband, Peter Duthie. It began: "FCC: Hi, I'd like to comment on Internet Freedom." That sentence, including two spaces after the colon, opened 974 comments.

Mr. Duthie said he didn't submit it. He did file, he said, a comment opposing the Trump-administration plans.

Mr. NELSON. This article points out that net neutrality is widely popular.

Eighty-three percent of the American public supports net neutrality. The other 17 percent—some of them say they don't. I don't know how they don't. But it is a pretty overwhelming majority—83 percent. But even among Republicans in the surveys that have been done, 76 percent of self-identified Republicans say they support net neutrality.

Here is the flaw in the process the FCC used. Twenty-four million comments came in from supposedly "Americans" that were filed either for or against the rulemaking. There is a problem in this record that was built because 2 million of those comments featured stolen identities. It was not a real person; it was somebody else's identity. Some of those identities were people who have long since died. Half a million comments were from Russian addresses. Fifty thousand consumer complaints were inexplicably missing from the record.

Let's take the part about Russian addresses. Is this beginning to tell us something that we know—that there was Russian interference in the last election? We also know from our intelligence community that there was Russian entrance into the voting records of some 20 States. Now we are seeing the Russian influence enter into the making of law—in this case, the rulemaking—trying to influence comments, whether they were comments for the rulemaking or against the rulemaking. It is another indication that Russia indeed is intending on distorting and influencing the daily operations at the microscopic level—not at the level of an election of a President but at the microscopic level of influencing the development of rules to carry out laws—in this case, a rule that the American people feel quite strongly about. Eighty-three percent are in favor of net neutrality—the opposite of what the Republican majority on the FCC has enacted.

Now we have at least 19 State attorneys general who have raised concerns. They even wrote to the Federal Communications Commission asking that the agency hold off on its vote to eliminate the net neutrality rules, which the Republican Chairman and the FCC majority promptly ignored. The FCC is refusing to even work with law enforcement to get to the bottom of this issue.

Shouldn't the fact that there are Russian bots and people, directed by the Kremlin, trying to influence our government processes—shouldn't that be something we ought to be working on with law enforcement?

Well, I am going to continue to raise this issue over and over, whether it is this agency's—the FCC's—rulemaking or other agencies' rulemaking, which is chronicled in this Wall Street Journal article that has been printed in the RECORD. This is deadly serious business because this is our democracy.

We have to have the ability to operate in good faith that information that we are getting is accurate information.

When we see this kind of evidence, we know there is a flaw in the system, and that flaw might actually have its source in a person named Vladimir Putin.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. Without objection, it is so ordered.

OFFSHORE DRILLING REGULATION

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, on December 28, just 3 days after Christmas, the Department of the Interior and this administration sent the oil industry a belated Christmas present. They published a proposal to release offshore drilling companies from sensible rules designed to prevent a tragedy like the one we experienced back in 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oilspill, when 11 people lost their lives and almost 5 million barrels of oil were spilled as a result of a defective device called a blowout preventer. There were 5 million barrels of oil sloshing around in the Gulf of Mexico, much of which is still out there down at depths of 5,000 feet, where the actual well pipe came out a mile underneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico.

Of course, we know the economic damage that did all up and down the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion was some 50 or 60 miles off of Louisiana, but the winds shifted and started blowing the oil to the east. It got as far east as Pensacola Beach, and those sugary white sands were covered up with black oil. The Associated Press and UPI photographs went around the world. The winds continued, and it went as far as the white sands of Destin. Tar balls floated as far east as the white sand beaches of Panama City Beach, and then the winds shifted and brought it back the other way. People all over the world, seeing the photographs, thought oil was on all the beaches of the gulf coast of Florida, and they did not come. The tourists did not come.

Now, I haven't even spoken about the economic and environmental degradation that occurred throughout the entire gulf and the fishing industries. Of course, the administration has proposed to now do drilling off the east coast of the United States, including off the coast of the State of the Presiding Officer. A number of us have come together who don't think that matches with our tourism industry. It certainly doesn't match with regard to our fishing industries, but it also does not match with the U.S. Department of Defense's training and testing mission.

If we look at the gulf coast off of Florida, the only place it is off limits in law is the largest testing and train-

ing area for the U.S. military in the world, but if you go up and down the Atlantic coast of the Eastern Seaboard, you will see training range after training range, and you get as far south as the Central East Coast of Florida and, lo and behold, is that area of protection for not only the U.S. Department of Defense but for NASA and other agencies. That is where we are rocketing our satellites into orbit, of which the first stages have to have a place to land. That is where, when we had the space shuttle—and soon we will be rocketing American astronauts to the International Space Station on American rockets. Many of the first stages will fall into the Atlantic Ocean below, just like the solid rocket boosters did on the space shuttle when it launched.

So there are reasons not to have drilling platforms out there, but let's come back to the Deepwater Horizon oilspill. What happened was deep below the seabed, miles farther into the Earth's crust, pressure had built up and an explosion had occurred. The safety mechanism is right where the pipe comes out of the seabed and goes up 5 miles to the surface to deliver oil.

The safety mechanism is a blowout preventer, which is like a huge set of pincers which comes through and cuts off the pipe. If that blowout preventer preventing the blowout of the well is defective—as it was in the BP oilspill, where 5 million barrels of oil spewed out 5 miles below the surface of the gulf into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and rendered the havoc and economic damage it did.

In the turmoil and trauma that ensued, there was obviously a need in the Department of the Interior, in the Bureau of Safety, called BSEE, to change the rules to give additional safety mechanisms to make sure this wouldn't happen again. Lo and behold, there is now a change, and we are starting to see the first attempts at weakening those rules.

Sometimes the issue of regulatory reform feels abstract or arbitrary. This is technical stuff, and it is dry, but the safety standards created after the Deepwater Horizon oilspill are not dull and boring. They are life or death. They were written specifically to make sure families, like those 11 who lost their loved ones, wouldn't have to be notified again that there was a preventable death.

What are these new rules about? They are coming in on the blowout preventer, which is the system to control the flow of oil or to seal an oil well. A blowout preventer is what stands between the enormous pressure that builds up in the oil well pipe and the ocean around it. Its purpose is exactly what the name sounds like. It is to prevent the oil from blowing out into the sea uncontrollably.

It took several months to finally get that well capped 5,000 feet below the surface of the water. These are massive pieces of equipment. The blowout preventer for Deepwater Horizon stood 57

feet tall and weighed over 400 tons. That is how big that thing is. Then there is a piece of the blowout preventer system called a shear ram—a device with two blades that seals off a well in an emergency, and that is what failed to fully close in the BP oilspill.

What the Interior Department in this administration is trying to do is undo the updated standards for shear rams and blowout preventers, and it is trying to get rid of a required third party to certify the safety mechanisms.

Obviously, after what we suffered, it is common sense to have those safety mechanisms, and it means that for a third party to ensure the safety mechanisms by certifying that they are in place—it means that somebody other than the oil company needs to make sure their safety equipment is in place and functioning properly.

These rules require better training for workers, real-time monitoring of deepwater drilling operations, timely reporting of major problems with the equipment, and consistent testing and inspections to increase safety. These rules were also the product of a thorough and transparent discussion by scientists, engineers, industry representatives, agency officials, and the public.

It took 6 years after the spill for the well control rule to be finalized. The Trump Interior Department wants to pull a bait and switch, reversing the safety measures and giving the public a mere 30 days to review a highly technical rule. It took 6 years to develop this rule ensuring the safety devices, and now they have a rule to undo it, and they are going to give 30 days for comments. That is nothing more than a free pass to the oil and gas industry at the expense of everyone else, including folks who work on those rigs, who are going to have to suffer if there is another blowout. There are a lot of other things—communities, marine life, your State's economy, my State's economy, the Gulf States' economies. It is totally misguided and reckless.

Over the past year, President Trump has issued Executive orders cut straight from Big Oil's playbook. He has directed agencies to gut rules designed to protect the environment and the safety of workers if the rules interfered with an oil company's bottom line. That is what this one does. It saves them some \$900 million. He directed Secretary Zinke to reconsider the well control rule, which was finalized in 2016. That rule stemmed directly from what we had learned in the investigation of the 2010 BP spill.

By the way, the agency that issued this proposed rollback is called the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. It is separate now from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management—the agency that schedules lease sales in the Outer Continental Shelf.

Before the 2010 spill, the folks who worked with the oil industry to auction acreage in the gulf were the same people who were in charge of inspecting the rigs later for compliance with the