

hoped I wasn't going to talk about—called the “Unsung Hero Award.”

That is Beth. By the end of a long career that touched so many lives, I can't let her go without giving her the recognition she reserves.

Beth Thames, thank you for what you have done for our State. Thank you for what you have done for our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Idaho.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 1677

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I come here today to talk about an issue that has been talked about quite a bit here on the floor today, and that is the situation in Syria. I know there has been a lot of debate today about what is happening there and what happened today in Syria.

But I bring to the floor today something that I think should get the unanimous consent of everyone. The House passed this resolution some time ago. It was by voice vote—no recorded “no” votes. It was essentially a unanimous consent bill.

When I am through with this, I am hoping everyone here will agree with me that this is the right thing to do and something that will actually address the situation that is taking place in Syria.

This bill declares that it is U.S. policy to use all diplomatic and economic means to compel the government of Bashar al-Assad to stop the slaughter of the Syrian people and work toward a democratic government. The use of sanctions are a critical tool of U.S. foreign policy, and that is what we are talking about here today—the implementation of additional sanctions. They often allow the United States to have a strong impact on a country and serve the U.S. national security interests without having to implement military measures and put U.S. troops in harm's way.

I believe—and most of us believe—that H.R. 1677 helps meet those interests. How does it work? Here is how it works. First of all, it imposes fresh sanctions on entities conducting business with the Assad regime and its military and intelligence agencies. A number of regime-controlled industries—including in the airline, telecommunications, and energy sectors—will also be targeted.

It aims to encourage negotiations by allowing the President to waive sanctions if the parties are engaged in meaningful negotiations and the violence against civilians has ceased.

The bill also authorizes the Secretary of State to support entities that are collecting and preserving evidence for the eventual prosecution of those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria from March 2011 to the present and requires the President to report to Congress on the

identity of those who are responsible for or complicit with gross violations of human rights of the Syrian people.

There is no doubt that we are going to get to that point. It is not going to happen tomorrow, and it is not going to happen the next day, but no one on Earth can do the kinds of things that Assad has done to his own people.

We all know that there have been poisonous substances used and weapons of mass destruction used by Assad against his people. Eventually, those who are responsible are going to have to face the music for that, and they are going to have to be prosecuted for that.

This bill helps to preserve the evidence and the identity of those who are involved in that. As I noted, the House passed this some time ago, and virtually without resistance. On November 30, the administration issued a White House statement supporting H.R. 1677. The administration said:

The bill would add to a robust set of tools at the Administration's disposal to help bring to an end the heartbreaking ongoing tragedy in Syria and to hold Syrian officials accountable for the slaughter of civilians and other atrocities. This bill will help provide additional leverage to achieve the United States government's objective to de-escalate the military conflict and support the United Nations-led peace process and a transition to a government in Syria that honors the will of the Syrian people, respects the rule of law and human rights, and peacefully co-exists with its neighbors in the region.

The bill effectively targets the Assad regime and its supporters with additional financial sanctions and some crippling economic tools. We have all seen some very recent examples of how well our sanctions have worked because of the United States' position in the banking industry and, indeed, in the world economic structure.

In order for us to get the Iranians out of Syria and help bring a permanent defeat of ISIS, we must pursue a politically negotiated solution that will have a major change in the current Syrian regime structure. The Syrian people are a noble people. Their culture has been an organization that has existed since Biblical times. These are a noble people, a good people as a population, and they do not deserve this. From a humanitarian perspective, this legislation expresses the long overdue outrage for the 500,000 Syrians killed by the Syrian dictator, Iranian forces, and their allies.

Dictators are evil. Whether they are religious or secular, royals or oligarchs, they are evil.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 620, H.R. 1677; that the committee-reported amendment be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, today President Trump announced that we have won the war against ISIS in Syria. Our troops are coming home. Thank you, Mr. President.

The Syrian civil war is largely over, but Syria is a mess and desperately needs reconstruction. These sanctions will delay—and possibly prevent—the reconstruction of Syria and the beginning of a healing time. Now is the time for diplomacy.

There are many actors—including Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States, and others—but this is the time for diplomacy, not for new sanctions. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, to respond briefly, with all due respect to my friend and colleague, the Senator from Kentucky, I respectfully urge that this is exactly what is needed to encourage the diplomacy that he wants, that I want, that all of us want.

As far as discouraging that, this resolution actually gives the President the authority to grant waivers when and if they finally get to the diplomatic track.

So with all due respect, I disagree with that. I understand he has the right to object to this. It is unfortunate. We had the 435 members of the House hotline this here. There are 99 Members here who signed off on this legislation. It is very unfortunate.

The Syrian people do not deserve the treatment they are getting from Assad, and this resolution is aimed directly at stopping it.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### JOHNSON-O'MALLEY SUPPLEMENTAL INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM MODERNIZATION ACT

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I ask the Chair lay before the Senate the House message to accompany S. 943.

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 943) entitled “An Act to direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct an accurate comprehensive student count for the purposes of calculating formula allocations for programs under the Johnson-O'Malley Act, and for other purposes.”, do pass with an amendment.

#### MOTION TO CONCUR

Mr. LANKFORD. I move to concur in the House amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is pending.

Mr. LANKFORD. I know of no further debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question is on agreeing to the motion to concur.

The motion was agreed to.

Mr. LANKFORD. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The Senator from Oklahoma.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 4887

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, the Federal Government awards more than \$600 billion in grant awards—\$600 billion. We actually do more in grant awards than we do in contracting. Our current system is riddled with outdated reporting mechanisms that burden grant recipients and inhibit oversight from Agencies in Congress.

The bill, H.R. 4887, which is called the GREAT Act—Grant Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency Act—tries to put some sense into this process. This is a process that has worked with all of the grant requesting Agencies. Whether they be universities, whether they be entities for research, they have all gone through this for the past couple of years, actually. They have given a tremendous amount of input because they struggle in actually requesting the grants and in getting through all of the chaos of those grants.

The OMB and other entities are not getting the data information to the American people, so there is no transparency in that process. For the past couple of years, we have worked very hard to establish a good process of getting transparency and also of helping the grant-requesting entities get a more efficient process.

The GREAT Act would require, within 1 year, OMB and the leading grant Agency to establish a governmentwide data standard for information related to Federal awards. Within 2 years, guidance must be issued for grant-making Agencies on how to apply those standards and implement them into the existing reporting practices. Within 3 years, Agencies must ensure that all grants and cooperative agreements use the new data standard for future information requests. This is exceptionally important to get through the process so that we are not squandering \$600 billion in grants.

Let me tell you what this process has gone through.

In February, H.R. 4887 passed unanimously out of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Then it went to the House Calendar, and it passed unanimously on September 26. Every Democrat and every Republican in the House voted for this. Subsequently, Senator ENZI and I passed our amended Senate companion to H.R. 4887. It passed unanimously out of the

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in September.

The bill being considered today is reflective of bipartisan support from both the House and the Senate. This bill, H.R. 4887, cleared the Republican hot-line weeks ago. Every single Republican has already cleared this. They want the transparency in the grant process and want a better grant process for all of the grant requesters. It is not yet clear on the Democratic side.

My simple request doesn't just come from me. This request comes from the Grant Professionals Association, the National Grants Management Association, the Association of Government Accountants, the American Library Association, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition. Leading universities around the country have just asked to improve this grant-making process. Every single Democrat in the House has affirmed this, and every Republican in the House and every Republican in the Senate has already cleared it. We are just asking for this bill to move forward and to be passed.

I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 4887 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask that the Johnson 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 Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, these are not Mick Mulvaney's decisions to make—or whatever job Mick Mulvaney happens to be in this week. These are not Alex Azar's decisions to make. Congress needs to do its job. On behalf of the minority leader, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I am a little confused when every grant-making and requesting organizations—all of the universities around the country—are requesting this. Every single Democrat in the House has already affirmed this. There does not seem to be a great fear of Mick Mulvaney at the OMB since, by the time this will be implemented, it will be 2022. So it is a little bit confusing to me why getting more transparency in grants and helping grant requesting organizations would be controversial.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

#### HEALTHCARE

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise to speak about some of our colleagues who are leaving the Senate. Be-

fore I do that, I want to address what happened late on the Friday night—I think 9 days before Christmas—when a Texas judge basically threw out the Affordable Care Act.

This latest decision comes more than 6 years after the Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Justice Roberts, already upheld the law's constitutionality. That opinion also found that parts of the law can be severed from the rest of the legislation. It comes after the administration has stated emphatically that it would not defend the law.

So, basically, instead of going in there and helping out to save healthcare for millions of Americans and protect them from being thrown off their insurance if they have pre-existing conditions—instead of going into that burning building—the administration has said to basically stand down and throw lighter fluid on the fire. That is exactly what has happened. If this ruling takes effect, the consequences will be devastating.

To start, protections for people with preexisting conditions would be gone. About half of all Americans have preexisting conditions. This isn't just about rare diseases. This is also about asthma and diabetes. The ability to keep your kids on your insurance plans until they are 26 years old will be gone. The work we have done to close the Medicare doughnut hole coverage gap, which makes it easier for our seniors to afford pharmaceuticals and to lower prescription drug prices, will be gone. The provisions that help people to buy insurance on the healthcare exchanges will be gone. Minnesotans will see a loss of \$364 million in premium tax credits, and, roughly, 272,000 people in my State will lose coverage.

We can't allow this to happen. The judge must issue a stay immediately until the appeals are completed so that these protections can stay in place and this decision can be overturned.

It is time to stop trying to start from scratch. The American people spoke in this last election across the country. Do they want improvements to the Affordable Care Act, like making pharmaceuticals less expensive and doing something about premiums? Yes, they do, but they don't want to start from scratch.

We have already seen what kind of healthcare proposals we get when we start from scratch—the ones that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have put forward. The legislation that we saw earlier this Congress would have hurt people by kicking millions off of Medicaid, by letting insurance companies charge people more when they get sick, and by jacking up healthcare costs. Every major group that you trust when it comes to your health—the largest groups of doctors, nurses, seniors, hospitals, people with cancer, Alzheimer's, heart disease, and diabetes—has said it was the worst repeal bill yet. We cannot spend the next 2 years going backward and fighting