

He signed up for all these things—\$2 trillion, 80 percent Federal—and the list was long of things that we were going to do together.

We went into detail in that meeting 3 weeks ago with the President about some of the aspects of it. For example, the President said—and I think he has been quoted before—that he does not approve of public-private partnership programs. He argues there is too much litigation. That is all right with me and for most of the people in the room. We didn't have to have that if the President didn't want to include it. So there was back and forth in this conversation.

There was one element missing, and I remember RICHARD NEAL—who is the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, the critically important committee, the counterpart of Senate Finance—said to the President: Now, Mr. President, we have to pay for it. Two trillion dollars—how are we going to do that?

And the President said: Wait. I am not going to say that at this meeting. I know you want me to blink first as to how we are going to pay for it. I am not going to get into that.

There had been some proposals from Democrats of tax increases for wealthy people and corporations and such, but the President said: I won't get into that today. Let's meet 3 weeks from now and talk about how we are going to do this, how we are going to pay for the \$2 trillion.

So many of us sat down, Democrats—I hope Republicans, as well—and started thinking in positive terms about what this would mean for the economy. We can create tens of thousands of good-paying jobs across the United States, rebuild our infrastructure, and be ready to compete with countries like China and others that believe they are building faster and better than we are.

The meeting was scheduled for today. We started this morning with a briefing. The Democrats sat together in Speaker PELOSI's office, about 20 of us, and went through it and talked about what our presentation would be to the President and some ideas that we had to move forward.

We accepted the President's invitation. We went to the White House, gathered in the waiting room there, and then we were invited into the Cabinet Room. We walked into the Cabinet Room, took our assigned seats, looked across the table, and there was the Secretary of the Treasury, people from the Office of Management and Budget. The President's daughter was there. There was quite a gathering of people getting ready for this high-powered meeting.

We waited, and we waited, and then the door opened, and the President walked in. Without greeting anyone or sitting down he said: We are not going to have this meeting. We are not going to have this meeting because Congress continues to investigate me. I think we have had enough investigations, and

until the investigations end, there will be no infrastructure bill.

His statement went quite a bit beyond that, but I think that was a fair summary of his conclusion. He turned around and walked out.

So the meeting that he had called, the meeting we responded to so that we could come up with an infrastructure program, ended right on the spot.

The President then went out into what is known as the Rose Garden next to the White House and held a press conference with posters and signs saying: As long as Congress is investigating me, we won't be discussing issues like infrastructure.

That is an unfortunate development—unfortunate for America, first, because this President and this Congress, regardless of party, have a responsibility to the American people to do the basics to make sure that we provide what Americans need, what cities need, what businesses need, what families need to grow the economy and create good-paying jobs.

The President walked away from that this morning. So here we are at a point in history. I am not sure which way to turn. You see, every President would like to make this claim: I am not going to do business with Congress if you investigate me. But the bottom line is, every President is investigated. Their administration is investigated. That is what we do. That is what the U.S. Congress does. That is what happens in a democracy. No President can say: I am pulling down the shades, and I am closing the doors. You can't look at me, and you can't look at what we are doing, either in activities as individuals or as agencies.

No. There is accountability in our government. This Congress, the Senate, the House—we appropriate the funds for the executive branch, and we investigate them as we appropriate the money. How are you spending the taxpayers' dollars? Are you wasting them? Is there corruption involved in it? We ask those questions not just of this President but of every President. That is the nature of democracy, of accountability, and this President can't get off the hook. He may be weary of investigations—and I can tell you that President Obama was weary of investigations, too, and President Bush before him—but that is the nature of accountability in a democracy. For this President to say: No more. It is out of bounds for us to be investigated, and I won't do anything necessary for the economy and future of this country as long as the investigation continues—that is a sad day in the history of this country. I hope cooler heads will prevail, but I am not sure they will.

We have so much we need to do. Look at this empty Chamber here. My speech in this Chamber each day is basically what you are going to hear if you are a visitor to Washington, DC. You are not going to hear a debate on legislation. Wouldn't you like for this Chamber to be filled with Republicans and Demo-

crats who are debating a bill right now on the high cost of prescription drugs? I would. And we certainly have the power and responsibility to manage that issue, but we don't do it. We have done virtually nothing in this Chamber for this entire year.

Senator MCCONNELL has one goal: fill up Federal judicial vacancies with lifetime appointees as fast and as often as possible. We have seen men and women come before us, clearly unqualified to be judges, who are being given lifetime appointments. Why? It is part of a plan—a political plan to fill the courts with judges friendly to the Republican point of view. And so we do nothing else. Nothing else.

I have been here a few years, in the Senate and the House. There is an issue called disaster aid. I have seen 100 different variations. There will be some horrendous weather event—a fire, a drought, a flood—and we have responded time and again wherever it occurred. Without concern as to whether it was a red State or a blue State, we have come together as an American family and said: We will give you a helping hand.

We have a disaster bill that has been pending here for weeks, if not months. We can't even reach an agreement on how to send disaster aid to areas that have been hit by flooding and tornados, and it is an indication of what the problem is right here. The Senate is not being the Senate. It is not legislating. And now the President announced this morning that he has gone fishing. He is not going to be around to discuss issues like the infrastructure of this country.

What can we do about it? Well, you can appeal to your Members of Congress and tell them you are fed up with it, and I hope you do. That is what a democracy is about. But you can also make sure that you participate and vote in the next election. Ultimately, in a democracy, the American people have the last word at the polling place on election day. If you are satisfied with an empty Chamber doing nothing, ignoring infrastructure, delaying disaster aid, if you think that is a good thing for this country, I suppose you know how you should vote. But if you are fed up with it and looking for change, I hope people across this country will see what happened today as a call to arms—maybe, importantly, a call to the polls.

IRAN

Mr. President, yesterday there was a briefing for Members of the Senate, Democrats and Republicans. It was a closed-door briefing in an area of the Capitol the public has no access to. In that briefing room, they close the doors; they take away your telephone; and they ask if you have any other electronic devices to make sure that when you walk in that room, you can hear things, classified information, sometimes top-secret information, which is not available to most Americans and should not be. It is sensitive.

It is important. It relates to our national security. We don't meet there a lot—maybe once a month at most—and when we meet, we are together as Democrats and Republicans for a briefing.

The briefing yesterday was from the Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo, and the Acting Secretary of Defense. They came in and talked to us about the situation in Iran. I can't disclose the specifics—I am duty bound not to—but I can speak in general terms about what was said and what I think it means to the rest of America.

I listened in disbelief yesterday to the administration's briefing justifying a confrontation with Iran. While I was listening, I thought to myself, before America plunges into another Middle Eastern war, we ought to take stock and remember how we got into the two wars in that part of the world—two wars, one of which is still raging, that left American soldiers subject to injury and death every day and cost American taxpayers billions of dollars.

When we got into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we were led to believe that suddenly there were urgent events spiraling out of control in the Middle East that could only be stopped by U.S. military intervention. Some of my colleagues still in Congress today were here during that debate. On the floor of the Senate, we voted on the question of the invasion of Iraq. I remember it because it was about 4 weeks before the election. The vote was taken around midnight, and most Members, as they voted, left. I stayed because I wanted to hear the final vote.

There were 23 of us who voted against the invasion of Iraq: 1 Republican—Senator Chafee—and 22 Democrats. I can recall that some of my colleagues who voted against that invasion of Iraq lingered in the well. One of them was Paul Wellstone of Minnesota. Wellstone was up for reelection—a tough reelection in his home State. The popular sentiment was on the side of the invasion of Iraq. Wellstone voted against it.

I went up to him, and I said: "Paul, I hope this doesn't cost you the election."

He said to me: "It is all right if it does. This is who I am. This is what I believe, and the people who elected me expect nothing less."

Sadly, Paul Wellstone died in a plane crash before that election a few weeks later. I still remember him right there in the well, talking to him about that vote.

At the time, we had been told by Vice President Cheney and others that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, which threatened not only friends and allies, like Israel, but could threaten the United States of America.

Former Pentagon adviser Richard Perle argued before the invasion of Iraq that the Iraqis were going to pay for the war from their oil wealth. They would pay for this—whatever it would cost the American taxpayers—and he

said there was no doubt that they would.

President George W. Bush claimed the war was his last choice, and then he provocatively tried to link al-Qaida—the terrorists responsible for 9/11—with Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq—a specious claim that has never been proven and was restated by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld even tried to claim that a war in Iraq would last—listen to this—"five days or [maybe] maybe five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that," said our Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. We are now in the 18th year of that war.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Vice President Cheney said that when the Americans arrive in Iraq, we would be welcomed as liberators. Wolfowitz went on to say—he estimated that this call for hundreds of thousands of American troops to fight there was way off the mark.

Five days or 5 weeks or 5 months?

Well, the war started not long after these claims. It included deploying more than 150,000 American troops over and over and over again, and it has lasted for 18 years. No weapons of mass destruction were ever found. We were not greeted as liberators. The Iraqi oil interest did not pay for the cost of the war; the American taxpayers and families did. Sadly, more than 4,500 Americans gave their lives in that war, and 32,000 were wounded, some gravely wounded.

One of those wounded veterans is my colleague in the Senate, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH. She was in the National Guard as a helicopter pilot. Twelve years ago, when she was flying over Iraq, a rocket-propelled grenade came into the cockpit and exploded. As the helicopter came to a crash on the ground, Tammy lost both of her legs and was at that point in danger of losing her arm, which she didn't, thank goodness. Today, she serves as my colleague in the Senate.

In one of the many cruel ironies in what I believe to be one of the worst foreign policy disasters in American history, the unintended consequence of our invasion of Iraq was to give the nation of Iran a strategic victory by virtually turning Iraq into a client state.

Make no mistake—our war and invasion of Iraq emboldened and empowered Iran. How do some of the current occupants of the White House driving policy against Iran feel about the Iraq war disaster? Well, in 2015, National Security Advisor John Bolton said: "I still think the decision to overthrow Saddam was correct." He made that statement 1 month after writing a New York Times op-ed—this is John Bolton, the President's National Security Advisor—an op-ed entitled: "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran."

Now match this painful lesson in history with the current President having surpassed 10,000 false or misleading claims so far in a little over 2 years in

office—more than 10,000 false claims in less than 3 years. So you will understand my skepticism in trusting this administration of the President's to tell us the truth about the next war they are planning in the Middle East. In fact, within a single week, President Trump tweeted that he had hoped not to go to war with Iran and then went on to tweet that he would lead the fight "that will be the official end of Iran." You can't keep up with this President and his tweets.

Does this not trouble or give pause to any Republican colleague whose constituents might be called to serve in the third Middle Eastern war that the United States is participating in?

Let me also remind my colleagues that before any one of us can vote on the Senate floor, we walk down this aisle, over to this corner, and wait for the Vice President of the United States to ask us to take the oath of office, to swear to uphold the Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution of this country makes it expressly clear that the decision to go to war cannot be made solely by a President; it is to be made by the American people through their elected representatives in Congress, in the House and in the Senate. Before there is any war, the American people should have the last word, according to our Constitution.

What I find most stunning about the administration's march to war in Iran is that its actions have really contributed to the current tension and confrontation we have in Iran. President Obama worked for years to come up with an agreement and to bring together an alliance to make certain that Iran could never develop a nuclear weapon.

Listen to the participants in this alliance: of course, the United Kingdom, our longtime ally; France; the European Union; the United States; Germany; Russia and China. They are all part of this agreement to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. The Republicans opposed it to a person, but the President was able to implement it.

That agreement called for constant inspection by United Nation's agencies—nuclear agencies—to make certain that Iran lived up to the terms of the treaty and did not develop nuclear weapons. It worked. The inspectors came and told us, time and again, there were no locked doors, there was no denial of entry, no denial of access. They were able to look behind closed doors and came to the conclusion that Iran was complying with the treaty and not developing nuclear weapons.

Then President Trump announced he was walking away from this agreement, walking away from this requirement under the treaty for neutral inspectors to crawl all over Iran and make sure they were living up to the terms of the agreement. That was the beginning of the Trump policy on Iran that leads us to where we are today.

President Trump has been pursuing a provocative and incomprehensible policy of regime change in Iran, trying at one moment to flatter and meet with President Rouhani to negotiate and then the next moment threatening to obliterate Iran from the planet. President Trump withdrew from that nuclear agreement and tried to starve Iran of the agreed benefits it was to receive from that deal.

Let me be clear, there is no doubt that Iran is responsible for dangerous conduct around the world, which I will never approve of, but an Iran with nuclear weapons is dramatically more dangerous than one without. The President doesn't understand that basic fact. Why not push back against Iran without withdrawing from the nuclear agreement? Why give them the pretext for belligerence and undermine our credibility with the global powers that joined us in that nuclear agreement?

The tragic end result of this President's incoherent policy in Iran is that our allies are united against us, and Iran may restart nuclear activities within the next few weeks. President Trump's policy at the direction of Mr. Bolton seems to have only increased regional tensions, incentivized Iran to restart its nuclear weapons program, and fomented a pretext for another Middle Eastern war.

This Congress, too often a rubberstamp for this President's worst behavior, must do more in the next few weeks and months to stop this effort based on the briefing we received yesterday. Wars are so easy to get into and so difficult to get out of. When I hear our advisers, in general terms, talking about short wars, I think about Iraq, and I think about Afghanistan and the fact that, 18 years later, with gravestones all across the United States, we are still paying the price for decisions that were made so long ago. Let us think twice before we engage in direct military confrontation with any country and, certainly, with Iran.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 1602 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I don't have a speech prepared. I just want to share a few thoughts with my colleagues. What I am about to say I intend to say gently and constructively, and that is this: We need to do more. We need to do more. By "we," I mean the U.S. Congress.

We have completed almost 25 percent of the time allotted to this current Congress. And what have we done? Other than nominations, which are important—and I will come back to that—we have done nothing—zero, zilch, nada.

Let me talk about my friends in the House of Representatives first. I have great respect for them. I wish I had served in the House. I would have loved to have had that experience. So far, our friends in the House—at least the leadership—have done two things. No. 1, they have passed bills they know have not a hope in Hades of passing the U.S. Senate. We call those bills messaging bills, as you know. They are not designed for the next generation. They are designed for the next election. They don't do anything to make the American people any more secure or improve the quality of their lives, and we all know that.

The second thing that my friends in the House leadership have done—and I say this with all the respect I can muster—is to harass the President.

Again, I say this gently, and I say this, hopefully, constructively to my friends in the House leadership: The House leadership needs to urinate or get off the pot. The House leadership needs to indict the President of the United States, impeach him, and let us hold a trial—he will not be convicted—or they need to go ahead and hold in contempt every single member of the Trump administration so we can move those issues into our court system and get back to doing the people's business.

Now, if they decide to go the court route, I would caution my friends to be very, very careful because once it enters the court system, it becomes a zero-sum game. One or two things are going to happen. Either the administration will win, in which case the oversight authority of the U.S. Congress will be undermined, or the House leadership will win, in which case no American with a brain above a single-cell organism is going to want to run for President of the United States, because Congress will be able to find out everything about your life, even the most intimate details, whether it is relevant to your job or not and whether it happened when you were President or not.

What I hope happens is that my friends in the House leadership and the administration sit down and talk—not talk like 8-year-olds in the back of a minivan fighting but talk constructively about how their behavior could impact important institutions in this country—and work it out.

I thank the Attorney General for making overtures to the House leadership to try to find common ground.

Now, let me talk about the Senate. We need to do more. I am not saying we haven't done anything. We have confirmed some very important nominees to the Trump administration. It is long overdue. They are fine men and women. We have confirmed some very fine men and women to the Federal Judiciary, and I believe they will make this country safer and will make this country better. I am very proud of that effort. So let me say it again. I am not saying we have done nothing. I am saying we need to do more.

There are issues where our Democratic friends and my Republican friends have more in common than we don't. We need to bring the bills to the floor of the Senate. Everyone has their own list, and everyone in the Senate knows what I am talking about, whether they will say it or not.

What is one of the things that moms and dads worry about when they lie down at night and can't sleep? The cost of prescription drugs. There is bipartisan support for prescription drug reform.

I just read a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association. They studied the U.S. healthcare delivery system and the healthcare delivery systems of all other wealthy countries. So it is apples to apples. In America, we pay about \$1,500 for every man, woman, or child every year for pharmaceutical drugs. In the average rich country, other countries pay \$750.

I am not criticizing our pharmaceutical drug companies. What they do is marvelous. We live longer. They save money. They keep us out of hospitals. But why is everybody else paying \$750 and our people are paying \$1,500? There are things we can do that will help make the pharmaceutical industry better but also help consumers. Do you know what we are doing about it? Nothing. We need to bring a bill to the floor.

I could give you another example. We all know there needs to be reform of our National Emergency Act. We know that. It is not about President Trump. It is about institutions, checks and balances, and Madisonian separation of powers.

We could do something together to get rid of spam robocalls. I get about 12 a day.

ROB PORTMAN has a great bill that would end government shutdowns. We have more in common on that than we don't.

We need a supplemental disaster bill. We have Americans who are hurting. In my State, after Katrina, we were flat on our backs. If it hadn't been for the American taxpayer, we would have never risen to our knees, much less to our feet. We have other Americans and friends in Puerto Rico who need help. We ought to be able to work it out.

I could keep going. Everybody has their own list.

I don't care whether we move a bill through committee or whether we bring a bill directly to the floor of the Senate—I am in labor, not management; that is above my pay grade—but we need to try. We need to try.

I understand it is an election cycle. I get that. I say to the Presiding Officer, I am a politician. You know that. But we are always in an election cycle. When are we not in an election cycle? And I understand some of my colleagues with a lot more experience than I have—and I listen carefully to them, and I try to listen carefully to them—are thinking right now: Kennedy, that is just not the way it is done here.